Mobility and Medicine in Calcutta's Chinatowns, 1920-1960

by

Rishav Chatterjee

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Thesis Committee:

Arafaat Valiani, Chair

Ina Asim, Member

Julie Weise, Member

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Rishav Chatterjee

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This thesis examines the migratory and medical history of the Chinese community that moved to the city of Calcutta between the 1920s and the 1960s. By focusing on the quantification of Chinese bodies, Chinese dietetics, and the network of mobile Chinese dentists in Calcutta and the districts of Bengal, I explore how, over the course of three decades, the Chinese in Calcutta adopted Chinese medical traditions and engaged with biomedicine in creative and strategic ways. Drawing on oral histories, archival materials, and British writings on Calcutta's Chinatown, I argue that the Chinese community not only carved out distinct occupational spaces, as historiography has noted, but also established distinct medical spaces. The emergence of these spaces was marked by a high degree of mobility and complex interactions with western biomedicine, the policing apparatuses of both the colonial and post-colonial state, and other Indian communities.

Keywords: Chinatown, Calcutta, Chinese-Indian community, Migration, Biomedicine, Race, Dietetics, Dentists.

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"No man is an island,
Entire of itself;
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main."
- John Donne

Like Donne suggests, this thesis is, above all, a culmination of a long collaborative project. It is not a product of solitary labor on my part. As much as the idea of an expert going into the archives, searching for truths, and then coherently compiling them might seem alluring, the reality is far from it. As I finish my thesis, a flurry of names, incidents, and memories occupy my mind, each of which has been crucial to this thesis in one way or the other. In the following paragraphs, I will try my best to account for the roles they played in shaping, molding, and sustaining me and this project from its inception to its conclusion. Any success that this project might fetch belongs to all who were involved in it. The shortcomings, however, are mine alone.

I want to begin by thanking my advisor, Dr. Arafaat Valiani, for his support and guidance throughout this project. When I started my thesis, I was apprehensive about my sources, theories, and concepts, and whether they would hold up to scholarly scrutiny. Through our time together in the course 'Postcolonial Science' and the Field Readings seminar, Dr. Valiani helped me situate my thesis within broader conversations among historians and anthropologists engaged in a growing body of critical scholarship. As I worked through multiple drafts of this thesis, his feedback was instrumental in highlighting where my arguments needed further development, where deeper engagement with secondary scholarship was necessary, and where a more critical interpretation of sources was required. Beyond intellectual engagement, Dr. Valiani's active role in helping me move and adjust to the United States was a crucial form of support that helped me immensely.

Dr. Julie Weise and her course ‘Migration and Mobility’ helped me think about the phenomenon of people, practices, and cultures in motion in critical ways that were unfamiliar to me. Through our discussions, I was introduced to more nuanced ways of interpreting mobility as well as immobility in history. Her valuable advice was also crucial in helping me get my first book review published. My conversations with Dr. Ina Asim enabled me to sharpen my focus on Chinese culinary practices and the many medical meanings that might be associated with such practices. Her critical reading of the second chapter and her patience in listening to me talk through my intentions for it contributed to the development of this thesis in meaningful ways. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Valiani, Dr. Weise, and Dr. Asim for generously giving their time and for being on my thesis committee.

My time as a graduate student at the University of Oregon has been formative in the development of this thesis in many ways. It provided me with an intellectually stimulating cohort that read my work, critiqued it, and in the process became friends and colleagues. I will miss the companionship of Ravinder, Griffin, Audrey, Lara, and Jake. I could share my experiences as an immigrant with Ravinder and Lara, who were always kind enough to check up on me. Griffin, Audrey, and Jake familiarized me with the city of Eugene and became close friends whose advice and presence greatly aided me in my academic and social journey here. Lastly, it would be a disservice to my time at the University of Oregon not to acknowledge the many ways Dr. Julie Hessler has supported my academic journey. She backed this project at every stage—through tangible means such as conference funding and summer fellowships, and invaluable intellectual guidance on my chapters and the overall direction of the thesis. I look back fondly on our time working together on the course ‘Food in World History’. During those ten weeks, I found myself teaching, grading, and eagerly taking notes on Yuan Mei’s cookbook, all of which helped further refine my writing and thinking.

In Kolkata, the authorities of the West Bengal State Archives at Shakespeare Sarani, especially Smt. Rina Rani Roy, or as we called her, “Rani Maashi”, was crucial in guiding me through the arduous bureaucratic loops of the archive. She was extremely patient when I went to her multiple times a day, asking for different files. Seeing that I was in Kolkata for only a few months, she was extremely cooperative with me, waiting for me to finish at the last minute before five in the evening, before turning off the computers and locking the archives. I am also forever indebted to the members of the Chinese community in Kolkata, especially Tony Lo, James Lee, Dr. Mao Chi Wei, Kam Ching, and Michael, for dedicating the time to talk to me for hours, in the middle of their work days, and being very honest with their experiences. I still remember when Michael and his wife invited me for lunch, seeing that I was out in the heat for hours. I admire James Lee and the candid nature with which he talked to me while giving me a tour of the Sei Vu complex. Tony Lo was definitely the funniest and most charming man I interviewed. This thesis is in many ways a testament to their spirits and an honest effort to preserve their voices. I hope that I can keep on returning to Blackburn Lane and Tangra to meet them.

My family has been the biggest supporter in all of my endeavors and eccentricities since college. Their memory keeps me intellectually alive and grounded. They offered their understanding and solidarity in this journey in quiet yet deeply felt ways. They believed in me even when I struggled to believe in myself. That quiet, unwavering faith kept me grounded, accountable, and motivated throughout this journey. Thank you Maa, Baba, and Aniya. I do it all for you.

Lastly, the site of this thesis might be in Kolkata, but the roots of it are located in Delhi. This idea would not have come to fruition today in the form of this thesis if not for the conversations and engagements with friends and professors back in Ramjas College and the University of Delhi. Teachers like Mukul Mangalik and Pooja Thakur deepened my love for

history and contributed greatly to my pedagogy. I am both grateful and remorseful that I was able to come in contact with them during my time in Delhi. I am grateful because I got to see them engage passionately with students in classes, corridors, lawns, demonstrations, and seminars. I am remorseful and at times infuriated because I witnessed the systematic ways in which their efforts in building an equal classroom in a deeply unequal society were dismantled by the university.

The relationships that I forged in Delhi, namely with Deep, Richik, Rayan, Suyog, Mehal, Udisha, Diyasha, and Rhea, have been instrumental in this project in direct and indirect ways. They were always in cahoots with me, not only in our adventures together but also in ideation. In many ways, shared moments and conversations with them helped me mold a kernel of an idea into a thesis. I still remember Deep and I being awake during the wee hours of the morning, fueled by coffee, re-reading, and refining our materials during our application process. Diyasha's guardian-like advice, from Delhi to her apartment in Ohio, often helped me take stock of my personal and professional life when I needed it the most. In Kolkata, Richik and I debriefed over my findings in the archives every weekend. I have not seen another student of STEM being so invested in his time and attention to surveillance reports from the 1930s. Rhea's dedication to waking up at the oddest of hours to keep up with my day and empathize with me provided me with strategic and purposeful distractions that allowed me to get back to writing or reading with replenished intellectual ammunition. All of them, at some point or the other, were audiences to various ideas and themes that have been discussed in this thesis. This wouldn't have been possible without you guys.

DEDICATION

To friends, family, teachers

and

The city of Calcutta.

INTRODUCTION

On a hot and humid July day in Calcutta, I took the metro to Central Metro Station, the nearest station to the old Chinatown in the Bowbazar area.[1] The neighborhood, along with its houses, shops, and streets in the areas surrounding Blackburn Lane and Chattawalla Gully, does not visually resemble the Chinatowns of New York City, San Francisco, London, Singapore, or other global counterparts. The Chinese population in Calcutta has steadily declined since the Sino-Indian War, and a recent estimate in 2023 suggested that approximately two thousand individuals of Chinese origin remain in the city. Thus, Chinese-owned churches, restaurants, sauce shops, and other establishments are few in number and do not distinguish themselves as 'Chinese' to outsiders. There is no presence of traditional Chinese architecture, such as red lanterns or ornate gateways, nor are the streets littered with Chinese characters, signage, gods and goddesses, or proverbs. One might expect to stumble upon old dilapidated Chinese churches such as that of Toong-On or Sea-IP, or old Chinese eateries like Tung Nam or Sei-Vu after crossing multiple small shops, butchering stations, and local fast food stalls in a fairly congested and chaotic neighborhood with unregulated traffic and the crowds of various daily wage laborers. Thus, to the unaware wanderer in Blackburn Lane and Chattawalla Gully, vestiges of Chinese presence in the city remain hidden until they are actively sought out.

[1] At this juncture, I find it necessary to describe the sights, sounds and smells that I encountered, fully aware that in doing so, I risk employing tropes and language similar to those used by other 'outsiders' to this neighborhood, namely British officials writing about their observation of Calcutta's Chinatowns such as Bradley Shelland, Augustus Somerville, and Chaloner Alabaster. However, I aim to proceed with caution, striving for a nuanced and holistic representation of my observations. I refer to myself as an 'outsider' in this context because this neighborhood is perhaps one of the few areas in the city where ethnic Bengalis like myself may be regarded as outsiders. For the purposes of this thesis, I will refer to the city as Calcutta, its name prior to 2001, rather than Kolkata, which has been its name since that year. This choice is made to avoid confusion and also because the majority of the sources utilized in this study are from the chronological range of the 1920s to the 1950s, a period that is also reflected in the interview and the memories of the interviewee.

After I made my way through this noisy and chaotic neighborhood in the middle of a hectic workday in Calcutta, I found my path through the lanes and by lanes to end up at 17 Blackburn Lane to reach Sei-Vu. This popular Chinese-owned eatery had undergone renovations recently and immediately looked comparatively brighter with its fresh new coat of paint in comparison to other buildings and godowns in the lane. The Sei-Vu building had glowing red walls interspersed with bright green windows. It had two stories and a Chinese church attached to it. Presently, the restaurant is located on the first floor. I grabbed a late afternoon lunch to familiarize myself with the local setup and the people. Later, I made my outsider status more apparent by turning to the man behind the register in the hope that he might introduce me to someone who could share insights into the history of the place. It was at this moment that I met James Lee, a man of short stature and medium build with thinning hair. James and I conversed for four hours that day, during which he proceeded to tell me his personal history, the story of Sei-Vu, and the larger Chinese settlement in Calcutta.

James Lee is one of the owners of the famous restaurant in Blackburn Lane by the name of Sei Vu. He is in his fifties, and his father migrated from South China during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). His father was a wealthy landowner in China, but after he came to India, he learned carpentry and became a carpenter like many other Chinese who had settled in Calcutta. James first took me through the history of Sei-Vu and the building. Sei Vu is a part of a building that was constructed in the 1890s, but the Sei-Vu club was built in 1908 for all of fifteen hundred rupees. This club/association of overseas Chinese today has several branches in Singapore and other places. Originally, the building was a boarding house for Chinese immigrants. The bachelors would occupy the dormitory-like space on the first floor (where the restaurant is situated now), while the rooms upstairs were reserved for family. James even recalls seeing men smoking opium on the first floor when he was young, but since he was a child, he was not allowed to enter.

We continued conversing, and I asked James about his memories of the times when his family members, friends, and others in the neighborhood fell sick or contracted diseases. James then pointed towards one of his fingers and said that when he was young, his finger got cut, and he remembers his family not using biomedicine or allopathic medicine. He recalled a mixture of ginseng roots being applied to his fingers, which later cured him. By this time, it looked like James was getting a bit more comfortable with me. He asked me if I had time, and I instantly said yes. He then led me out of Sei-Vu to go to the temple area of the building. He showed me around and took me to the Huigang area, the central socializing space in the Chinese compound, to chat more. He asked if he could smoke a cigarette, and I indicated I had no issues. I could feel that he was attempting to sift through his memories with heightened effort. He said that this mixture was mainly used for cuts and bone fractures. This root mixture was added to traditional Chinese liquor and applied to the concerned area. He compared it to the commercially available pain reliever balm but only more effective. In addition to this, he also mentioned a solution made from red petals - *Hung Hua Yao,* which was applied to bones to strengthen them. *Bai Hua Yao* was a similar solution, but it was made from white petals, which were traditionally used for stomach cramps and headaches. James recalled that it was usually used to bring in a lot of perspiration, which would have also relieved any fever that one might have. On asking him how he and others like him were able to source these solutions, he said that there used to be locally run medicine dispensaries in the neighborhoods - ones that ran without any licenses, compounders, or degrees. The most famous of these dispensaries was run by a woman who passed away, but her dispensary used to be very popular among locals in the neighborhood. According to James, there is also a shop called Sing Chong just beside Pou Chong, which still sells these medicines. He also said that he and others asked people visiting China to bring medicines on their way back.

After expressing interest in my research, James began to recall various home remedies that were commonly practiced. He recounted an instance in which he experienced severe shoulder pain, which he attributed to gas traveling from his gut to his shoulders. Rather than seeking treatment at a clinic, as he initially considered, his neighbor advised against it and instead applied a traditional remedy. Using a long cylindrical piece of *beth* (a small thin branch of a tree), the neighbor oiled it and massaged James's shoulder, providing him with immediate relief. James also noted that most families prioritized maintaining a relatively clean diet to minimize the need for visits to local clinics, which were often expensive. To achieve this, they primarily relied on steamed, poached, or boiled dishes, incorporating minimal spices and irritants. Additionally, barley water was commonly consumed to aid digestion. He recalled encouraging the cooks in his restaurant to adopt similar dietary habits; however, they largely disregarded his advice. Ironically, when one of them later fell ill and consulted a doctor, the physician recommended the same dietary adjustments, prompting the cook to follow the advice without hesitation.

I also asked James about a certain Dr. Mao and his dentistry practice, which I came by on my way to Sei-Vu, and he said that Dr. Mao is still a very prominent doctor in the community. James went on to say that Dr. Mao was the first person in his family to get a proper license and degree before starting his practice. Dr.Mao's father, before him, was also a dentist but did not have a degree. James then went on to say that among Chinese dentists, a caste-like structure exists whereby a dentist's offspring is expected to learn the craft and eventually become a dentist. This does not seem to have changed since Dr. Mao's son is currently a prominent surgeon in Australia.

After my four-hour conversation with James, it became evident that, in times of illness, the Chinese community in Calcutta employed a range of therapeutic approaches, including home remedies, herbal treatments, and biomedicine. According to James,

consulting a doctor was typically reserved for instances of severe fever; only under such circumstances would a family consider seeking biomedical intervention. It appears that for a Chinese family settled in Caclutta during the 1960s, visiting a doctor was regarded as a last resort. Instead, they prioritized the use of home remedies and lifestyle regulation as preventive measures against illness.

James's conversation provides but a few rich vignettes for the central question of my thesis–What does it mean to be 'healthy' in a transnational community with a rich history of migration and settlement? The Chinese community in Calcutta, from the 1920s to the 1960s, found themselves to be at the intersection of multiple medical traditions such as Traditional Chinese Medicine, western biomedicine, as well as Indian indigenous medical traditions like that of Ayurveda. As migrants in the city of Calcutta, the Chinese both followed their traditions and continuously adapted them as per the changing historical conditions. The process of adaptation evolved across different decades, with successive generations of Chinese migrants in Calcutta exhibiting varying degrees of adherence to traditional Chinese medicine as they engaged with and assimilated aspects of western biomedical practices. As a result, the Chinese community in Calcutta, over three decades, developed creative and strategic approaches to engaging with, assimilating into, or, in some instances, subverting dominant medical traditions. From operating unregulated medical pharmacies in Blackburn Lane to developing distinctive culinary practices for health maintenance and establishing a network of highly mobile dental practitioners across Calcutta, the Chinese community made significant contributions to the city's alternative medical cultures.

Lost Voices in a Limited Scholarship

Among the many migrant communities that gave meaning to the city of Calcutta, the Chinese were the ones who provided a lot in terms of tangible wealth and intangible culture. One cannot imagine the city of Calcutta without hand-pulled rickshaws, Indo-Chinese food, and leather tanneries–all of which were made possible due to Chinese settlement in Calcutta. For a substantial period during the 18th century, the sugar supply in Calcutta was controlled by the Chinese. The first film to be banned in independent India was a film titled *"Neel Akasher Neeche"* (Under the Blue Sky). Directed by Mrinal Sen, it was a film about a Chinese hawker by the name of Wang Lu. It was banned because the portrayal of a Chinese character under unequal socio-political conditions became contentious after the political climate following the Sino-Indian War of 1962. India's premier foreign intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), was established due to the failure of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) to gather information about the Chinese socio-political movement during the Sino-Indian War. Thus, from their initial arrival in 1778, the Chinese community in Calcutta and, later, in India occupied a paradoxical position—both historically significant and yet frequently overlooked.

Despite their contributions, the role of Chinese migrants in shaping the alternative medical cultures in Calcutta remains under-examined in the limited scholarship dealing with Chinese migrants in Calcutta. Aspects explored in this thesis, such as the quantification of bodies, merging health with food, and mobile Chinese dentists interacting with biomedicine, find cursory mention in this literature, often analyzed through non-medical lenses of caste, culture, society, and economic activities. Zhang Xing and Tansen Sen's co-written article "The Chinese in South Asia" traces the patterns of Chinese immigration to India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. They provide a detailed overview of the Chinese immigrant experiences in these countries and look for patterns of continuity in their economic activities as well as the

various social and cultural institutions that they established.[2] In their analysis, the Chinese dentists from Hubei have not been overlooked. However, Xing and Sen analyze the activities of these wandering dentists through the lens of economic activities. They trace their emergence in various South Asian countries after the Second World War. Focusing on the Chinese dentists in India, they identify two major turning points in their profession–1947 and 1962. After Indian independence in 1947, the government established a set of new laws for dentists, which required them to procure certification from hospitals. This affected Chinese dentists who did not have proper training or medical facilities. However, according to Sen and Xing, the "biggest blow" to Hubeinese dentists came after the Sino-Indian War of 1962. They believe "the restrictions placed on the movement of the Chinese in India forced the roaming teeth setters to pick a place to settle down. Most of them decided to choose Calcutta, and others chose Lucknow, Jamshedpur, Gorakhpur, Vishakhapatnam, Shillong, and Imphal."[3]

Jennifer Liang's work titled "Migration Patterns and Occupational Specialisations of Kolkata Chinese: An Insider's History" is yet another overview of the origins and evolution of Chinese settlements in Calcutta, but much more detailed and informative owing to the multiple interviews she conducted with the members of the community as part of her fieldwork. She identifies three major waves of migration that took place in the nineteenth century, the early twentieth century, and the post-Second World War period.[4] Her section on "The teeth setters from Hubei" tries to situate the Hubei dentists in Calcutta not only through their economic activities but also on account of their mobility. Much of this became evident because of her interviews with Dr. Mao Chi Wei. She says, "The Hubeinese teeth setters

[2] Tansen Sen and Zhang Xing, "The Chinese in South Asia," in *Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Diaspora*, ed. Chee-Beng Tan, Routledge Handbooks (London ; New York: Routledge, 2013).
[3] Sen and Xing, 210.
[4] Jennifer Liang, "Migration Patterns and Occupational Specialisations of Kolkata Chinese: An Insider's History," *China Report* 43, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 397–410, https://doi.org/10.1177/000944550704300402.

continued this practice of wandering after they arrived in India, a reason why they are found residing in remote and far-flung places in India. Mao's family is an example of these wandering Hubeinese dentists. The family traveled all over India, including Delhi and Mumbai."[5] She also concludes that it was the aftermath of 1962 that finally forced the Hubei dentists to settle down, improve their skills, and increase their prosperity since they no longer had to travel.

While immensely informative, Sen and Xing structure their narrative around a clear trajectory of emergence, boom, and decline. Since the analysis is also an economic one, details regarding the nature of the Hubei dentists' medical practices and makeshift clinics are also not present. Liang's analysis also overlooks how the wandering Chinese dentists contributed to alternative therapeutic practices in Calcutta. She also does not account for the forces that led to the later professionalization of these practitioners. I argue through my chapter on Chinese dentists that in each decade, the Chinese dentists faced new challenges and adapted to them by being highly mobile and later merging their practical knowledge with the more formal training that they were made to pick up. I also suggest that the decade following the passage of The Dentists Act was marked not only by the professionalization of Chinese dentists but also by their gradual Indianization, as they shared medical spaces and adopted similar practices alongside their Indian counterparts. This allows me to show how the very profession of dentistry among Hubei Chinese was able to continuously morph and reconfigure itself to engage with the socio-nationalist conditions of each decade.

Similarly, Ellen Oxfeld's book, *Blood, Sweat, and Mahjong*, mentions how food was used as a tool for establishing ethnic boundaries between Bengali locals and Chinese migrants. Her work mixes anthropological fieldwork, sociology, and historical analysis to assess the relationship between family and enterprise among Hakka tanners in Calcutta. She

[5] Liang, "Migration Patterns and Occupational Specialisations of Kolkata Chinese," 408.

argues that Hakka tanners were "pariah capitalists" who were relatively prosperous but politically powerless. In her discussion of the conflicts and interactions of Chinese and Bengali diets, she says,

> In India, diet is an especially significant marker of caste, ethnic, and/or religious affiliation. Chinese are set apart from both Hindus, who generally abstain from beef, and Muslims, who abstain from pork. Where diet is such a critical concern and symbol, it is not surprising that it is one of the most frequently mentioned items when ethnic groups discuss and define one another. The apparent willingness of the Chinese to eat almost anything was often cited by Bengalis as proof of their peculiarity.[6]

Her analysis of diet being a significant marker of distinction between Bengalis and Chinese does hold true to a certain degree. Indeed, Chinese eateries did operate in ethnically segregated neighborhoods, and their food practices were viewed as "dirty" and "impure" by Hindus and Muslims who avoid beef and pork, respectively. However, it does not explain the reason behind the popularity of Chinese restaurants among Hindus and Muslims in Calcutta. It also does not sufficiently explain why the Hakka Chinese would eventually transform their tanneries into thriving restaurants frequented by people from diverse caste backgrounds. What is overlooked in this analysis is the multiple rationales for being suspicious of Chinese culinary practices in the first place. In my chapter on food and dietetics in Calcutta's Chinatowns, I demonstrate that the Chinese community in Calcutta exhibited a strong commitment to establishing clandestine food supply networks. These efforts, which often conflicted with traditional Hindu and Muslim sensibilities, were driven by the necessity of maintaining bodily balance and overall health. While food served as a significant marker of ethnic identity for the Chinese community, I suggest that it also played a pivotal role in establishing an alternative therapeutic approach. As I describe in my second chapter, this

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[6] Ellen Oxfeld, *Blood, Sweat, and Mahjong: Family and Enterprise in an Overseas Chinese Community*, Anthropology of Contemporary Issues (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 49.

approach integrated traditional Chinese culinary practices focused on healthy eating with the phenomenological realities of life in Calcutta, aiming to prevent and cure diseases.

Apart from this, the works of Ramakrishna Chatterji and Zhang Xing help to provide a general context of the history of Chinese migration in India.[7] Both works begin with the arrival of Tong Atchew in Calcutta in 1778 and subsequently chart the historical trajectory of Chinese settlement in the city. In the course of their accounts, they examine the professional niches occupied by different Chinese ethnic communities, alongside the establishment of various cultural institutions, including temples and *huigangs* (the covered veranda around a courtyard used for socializing between the prayer halls of temple complexes). The studies conclude by analyzing the consequences of the Sino-Indian War for the Chinese community in Calcutta, particularly the dislocation and resettlement of many community members in the West. Ramakrishna Chatterji's "The Chinese Community in Calcutta" relies on a reading of articles, newspapers, magazines, and census reports to show the rise and fall in the Chinese population in Calcutta from 1876 to the 1960s. Zhang Xing's article titled "The Bowbazar Chinatown" provides a critical evaluation of what she calls the "the golden period" of Chinatowns in Calcutta characterized by "new schools, businesses, and associations".[8] This scholarship is important in that it enables me to historically situate the various developments that took place in Calcutta's Chinatown from the 1920s to the 1960s.

The relatively small body of scholarship on Chinese migration to Calcutta tends to follow, at times, a route of a linear narrative of progression beginning with the arrival of Tong Atchew in 1778, setting up a thriving Chinatown in the following decades, which attracted migrants up until the Second World War. The singular moment of crisis in this long history is the Sino-Indian War of 1962 and the deportation that followed afterward. Each of

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[7] See Ramakrishna Chatterjee, "The Chinese Community of Calcutta: Their Early Settlement and Migration.," in *India and China in the Colonial World*, ed. Madhavi Thampi, 1st edition (London: Routledge, 2017); Zhang Xing, "The Bowbazar Chinatown," *India International Centre Quarterly* 36, no. 3/4 (2009): 396–413.
[8] Xing, "The Bowbazar Chinatown," 405.

these periods of historical experience within the community provides enough details about the various economic activities of different Chinese ethnic groups in Calcutta however, they are subsections and additions within articles dealing with the larger stories of Chinese migration and deportation. While this scholarship is significant to establishing a historiography on the experiences of the Chinese in Bengal, I strive to build on it by contributing an analysis of how their history of migration to Calcutta, as well as their high degrees of mobility within India, affected how they confronted diseases, defined health, and went about curing themselves through creative and strategic methods. This thesis fills a gap in the historiography of Chinese migrants in Calcutta by foregrounding the manners in which community members developed a dynamic system of alternative therapeutics to navigate dominant medical practices. By doing so, I aim to provide novel and more complex explanations for why Chinese dentists traveled across the districts of Bengal, why and where they chose to settle after India's independence, and why Chinese culinary practices were subjected to suspicion. In all this, the thesis contributes a perspective that complicates and expands upon how these issues have been discussed in existing scholarship.

Conducting Research in a Fragmented Archive

It has been forty-five years since the publication of Bernard S. Cohn's "History and Anthropology: The State of Play", where he charts out the disciplinary similarities between "Historyland" and "Anthropologyland" and paves the path towards a more nuanced anthropological history. He believes that historians and anthropologists are both engaged in a process of constructing "otherness" in time and space, respectively. In combining the subject matter and epistemologies common to both fields, Cohn believes "that history can become

more historical by being anthropological, that anthropology can become more anthropological by becoming more historical."[9]

In many ways, Cohn is interested in the study of fragments which involves studying marginalized and dispossessed groups in societies that escape the purview of conventional sources. After bringing to notice this problem, Cohn also provides several strategies and analytical tools for historians interested in the study of excluded groups to deal with the issues of a complicated archive. He suggests developing newer sources such as oral histories, songs, folklore, rituals, celebrations, and other records to understand the characteristic features and life patterns of these groups. He also cautions against entirely negating conventional sources to culturally isolate and reify these groups when he says, "The dispossessed have to be put into the same contextual and analytical framework as the elites and ruling groups who are engaged in the maintenance and representation of social order."[10] Indeed, in archives maintained by the elite for elite interests, where marginal voices and lives are represented for the sake of maintaining surveillance and order, one must pay attention to the relationship between the elites and the excluded to get a sense of the entire range of processes that leads to the construction and modifications of social categories.

Under conditions of colonialism, the colonizer, as well as the colonized, are engaged in a constant act of representing and responding to each other. The colonizer imparts foreign logic, models, symbols, and knowledge, while the colonized either responds, adapts, or restructures their worlds under the context of domination and powerlessness. In this vein, Cohn argues,

> To study Australian aborigines, or American Indians, or Indian villagers without locating them in relation to the colonial structures which were or are the central social fact of their

[9] Bernard S. Cohn, "History and Anthropology: The State of Play," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22, no. 2 (1980): 216.
[10] Cohn, "History and Anthropology: The State of Play," 215.

> lives without paying attention to the traders, the missionaries and administrators, and to the whole process by which the indigenous peoples become incorporated in various fashions into the capitalist and socialist economies-is to trivialize the experience of the natives.[11]

Engaging with such histories requires transcending rigid chronologies and fixed spatial boundaries, which often assume the homogenization of social and cultural systems that may not be fully integrated. Obsession with dates and sites denies the space of cultural transformations that go against the grain of the assumed coherent pattern of a chronological period. This is not to suggest that a sense of time and place is absent from such historical anthropologies, but that the questions asked by the anthropological historian produce the time and space of their study. According to Cohn, "One studies these in a particular place and over time, but the study is about the construction of cultural categories and the process of that construction, not about place and time."[12] To conduct such dynamic research, the concerned historian should have engagements outside the archives as well to look for the past not just in archives but in people, buildings, language, and material cultures to understand the processes of construction of culture categories that Cohn endorses.

Since Cohn's intervention, there has been much discussion about combining the practices of history and anthropology, as well as the problematic nature of archives in South Asia. Gyanendra Pandey in his "In Defence of the Fragment" talks about the aberration and absence that characterizes the history of violence in the historiography of modern India. He pays attention to the "fragments" of Indian society–minority cultures and practices–that are expected to fall in line with the "mainstream", that is, the Hindu Brahminical national culture, which itself is a very small section of Indian society. Attention to these fragments is purposeful according to Pandey because "it resists the drive for a shallow homogenisation

[11] Cohn, "History and Anthropology: The State of Play," 218.
[12] Cohn, "History and Anthropology: The State of Play," 220.

and struggles for other potentially richer definition of 'nationalism' and future political community."[13]

More recently, Ruby Lal in her "The Lure of the Archive" synthesizes the methodologies from three books to critically probe the issues of silence and invisibility of the archives and what it means for historians who are interested in subjects that are lost or are interlopers in these archives.[14] She builds on the Foucauldian frameworks of the "sayable" in *The Archaeology of Knowledge and Discourse on Language,* where the archive is not a body but a practice that enables the survival and regular modification of statements. She argues that "the official archive will continue to erase certain kinds of subjects and magnify others in the name of its 'civilizing mission'".[15] This allows her to probe into the very logic of appearance and disappearance in the archives and inquire what specific characteristics about the colonized subject makes the colonial archive record them.

According to Arunabh Ghosh, Tansen Sen, and Adhira Mangalagiri, "For a long time, historical scholarship on China and India has been dominated by two self-limiting approaches: intellectual history and foreign policy/geopolitics."[16] Indeed, for the longest time, the vast bulk of China-India studies have focused on Buddhist exchanges during the colonial period following the Opium Wars. This changed during the first half of the twentieth century when Pan-Asianism influenced the writings on India-China relations. Finally, the pre-and post-1962 period witnessed numerous border studies providing linear and causal explanations of the war. Only recently has there been recognized the need to adopt a unique methodology that is both interdisciplinary as well transcends fixed temporalities and

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[13] Gyanendra Pandey, "In Defence of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today," *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, no. 11/12 (1991): 559.
[14] Ruby Lal, "The Lure of the Archive: New Perspectives from South Asia," ed. Anjali Arondekar, Michael Fisher, and Rochona Majumdar, *Feminist Studies* 37, no. 1 (2011): 93–110.
[15] Lal, "The Lure of the Archive: New Perspectives from South Asia," 97.
[16] See Arunabh Ghosh, Tansen Sen, and Adhira Mangalagiri, "China and India in the Age of Decolonization: An Introduction to the Nehru Papers Project, 1947–1964," *China and Asia* 3, no. 2 (2022): 177-182.

geographies. This "Intra-Asian" method, sometimes referred to as the "China-India" method, has been advocated by a growing number of scholars such as Tansen Sen, Prasenjit Duara, as well as Kuan-Hsing Chen. This methodology advocates to understand China-India connections, comparisons, and contradictions through non-western (although not anti-western) and non-nation-state focused analytical perspectives.[17]

Chinese people, their practices, and their traditions often do not enter traditional archives which are maintained for state interests. This is why the "China-India" methodology becomes important for this thesis. I have also paid attention to the processes of "convergent compressions" as articulated by Duara, who believes that "Circulatory processes, ideas, and forms may develop in Society A and travel to Societies B and C where they are reshaped and travel elsewhere in those forms. They may sometimes even return to Society A, though they may be recognized as something else".[18] My study goes beyond the confines of nation-states and strictly linear chronologies to show how Chinese medical practices were historically understood and embodied in the city of Calcutta. It is also interdisciplinary, combining the interpretation of both archival sources and the memories of the individuals I interviewed for my study.

This thesis is similarly interested in fragmentary subjects and practices. The official sources on the Chinese in Calcutta only allow me to go so far in answering the questions this thesis is interested in. The sources by themselves are clunky and compiled around certain chronological periods and often do not flow linearly. However, much like Cohn's observations, the questions I am interested in have produced a rudimentary time and place for my study but the study itself is not restricted to these temporal and spatial silos. My thesis is in many ways centered around Calcutta but also other districts of Bengal where Chinese

[17] For an overview of the field of China-India see Tansen Sen, "China–India Studies: Emergence, Development, and State of the Field," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 80 no.2 (2021): 363–387.
[18] See Prasenjit Duara and Elizabeth J. Perry, eds., *Beyond Regimes: China and India Compared*, 1st ed., vol. 19 (Harvard University Asia Center, 2018), 464-65.

presence was felt. My chronology roughly spans from the 1920s to the 1960s but is also influenced by writings and developments that took place in 1778 and the 1860s.

The earliest official source on the Chinese presence in Calcutta begins with a letter exchange between Governor General Warren Hastings and a Chinese trader by the name of Tong Atchew in 1778. [19] Since then, the *Calcutta Gazette*, an English newspaper in Bengal, published a number of advertisements about various facets of Chinese life in Calcutta from 1784.[20] At the same time, individuals like H. Beverly and F.J.T. Maguire, in their census records, enumerated Chinese populations in Calcutta that were making their presence felt in increasing numbers. After this, we find an English lady by the name of Emily Eden describing her interactions with Chinese individuals in Calcutta through her letters in 1836.[21] Shortly after this, a British official by the name of Chaloner Alabaster published the earliest report on the Chinese colony in Calcutta in 1858.[22] These are the bulk of sources that I have used for this thesis, which pertains to the early nineteenth century. While they do not belong to the period under examination of this thesis, they provide much of the context of what follows in the twentieth century.

The trail of official evidence on Chinese migrants in Calcutta is few and in most cases absent up until the 1920s, when two British individuals by the name of Bradley Shelland and Augustus Somerville produced writings similar to Chaloner Alabaster in 1924 and 1929, respectively.[23] It was only in the 1930s that the Intelligence Bureau (IB) started paying close

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[19] Recorded in Basanta Kumar Bose, "A Bygone Chinese Colony in Bengal," *Bengal Past and Present* 47, no. 120 (1934): 22.
[20] Found in W.S. Seton-Karr, *Selections from Calcutta Gazettes of the Years 1784, 1785, 1786, 1787, and 1788: Showing the Political and Social Condition of the English in India Eighty Years Ago* (O.T. Cutter, Military Orphan Press, 1864), https://books.google.co.in/books?id=f0gOAAAAQAAJ.
[21] Found in E. Eden and E. Eden, *Letters from India*, Letters from India (Richard Bentley and son, 1872), https://books.google.co.in/books?id=S2oOAAAAQAAJ.
[22] Chaloner Alabaster, "The Chinese Colony in Calcutta," *Calcutta Review* 31, no. 62 (1858): 368–89.
[23] See Bradley Shelland, "Calcutta's Chinatown," *Cornhill Magazine* 57, no. September (1924): 277–85; Augustus Somerville, *Crime and Religious Beliefs in India* (Asian Publication Services, 1996).

attention to "Chinese Foreigners" and "Chinese Nationals".[24] They parcelled Chinese migrants arriving in Calcutta after the Second Sino-Japanese War into these two categories and produced multiple lookout notices, history sheets with information, confidential reports, letter interceptions, and interrogation transcripts of apprehended Chinese individuals. The suspicion over Chinese presence in Calcutta in the form of spies only increased in the context of the Second World War and the Japanese invasion of Burma. During this time, the allied soldiers stationed in Calcutta were also provided with a series of comic strips that entailed graphic instructions on how to distinguish Chinese from Japanese spies.[25] The bulk of these official archives from the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries enable an analysis of the evolving representations of Chinese culinary and medical practices within these writings and records. They also show how Chinese bodies were quantified through a keen attention to their physical features. These themes are addressed and situated as individual chapters comprising this thesis.

In addition to these official archives, I have also traveled and spent considerable time in the Chinatowns of Calcutta to curate an unofficial archive. I was a non-participant observer of contemporary Chinese life in Calcutta and, as a way to collect oral histories from within the community, I conducted oral interviews lasting several hours with eight members of the Chinese community in Calcutta. One of these individuals is not of Chinese origin but provided his memories of interacting with Chinese migrants. The subjects of these interviews are varied in age and profession. Among them are dental professionals, restaurateurs, temple officials, workers, and entrepreneurs, ranging in age from thirty to eighty years. The focus of such anthropological, historical, and ethnographic endeavors on my part is to etch out details about the Chinese daily lives in Calcutta and how it has changed over time.

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[24]Collections found in *Foreigners*, Shakespeare Sarani, Kolkata: West Bengal State Archives.
[25]Milton Caniff, *A Pocket Guide to China.*, 64 p. (Washington: War and Navy Depts, 1943), https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008522517.

Methodologically, oral histories provide a number of challenges such as selective recollection, cultural biases, as well as a general confusion with chronology. The people I have interviewed often recalled instances in their lives or their parent's lives that occurred decades ago and they might have unconsciously exaggerated their memories or confused them chronologically. However, I have tried to treat oral histories in independent sections within the chapters and have corroborated them with archival materials wherever possible. Most importantly, such oral histories allow me to connect the archives to the locality to include facets of Chinese mobility and medical lives that are absent from the archives.

Setting the Scene: One City, Multiple Chinatowns.

Shortly after it was declared to be the capital of colonial India, Calcutta became an important port between Britain and China. Tea, silk, cotton, indigo, and opium were some of the major items that were exchanged in this established colonial trade network. The earliest evidence of Chinese presence in Kolkata comes from the letters of Yang Dazhao, whose nickname was Tong Atchew.[26] The records inform us that in 1778, Governor General Warren Hastings granted "650 bighas in area in the district of 24 Parganas which was situated nearly 6 miles south-west of Budge-Budge at the yearly rent of Rs. 45 /- ."[27] Atchew used this land, approximately four hundred acres in a district of Bengal near the river Budge Budge, to set up a sugar mill with the help of indentured labor that he later brought with him. The land granted to Tong Atchew would later come to be known as Achipur in his honor.

[26] See Xing, "The Bowbazar Chinatown"; Sen and Xing, "The Chinese in South Asia." Both these article claim that the real name of the "legenderary first Chinese settler in South Asia" was a man named Yang Dazhao who was also known as Tong Atchew.
[27] This letter can be found in Bose, "A Bygone Chinese Colony in Bengal."

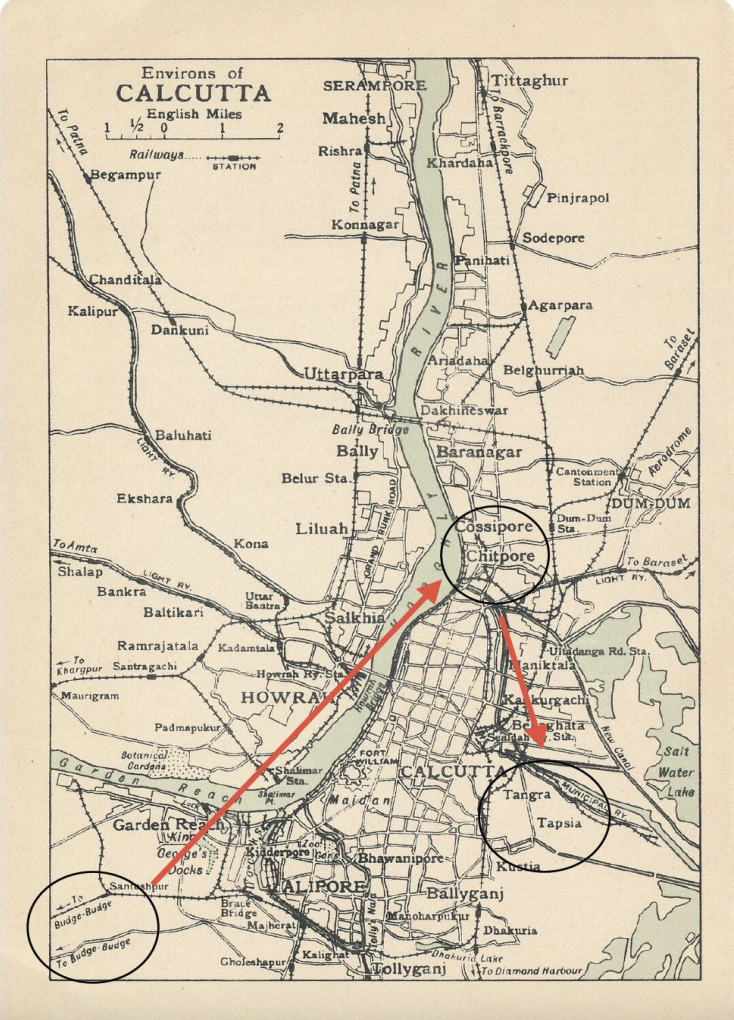

Figure 1. Map of Calcutta and its environs showing the three Chinatowns. John Murray, *Environs of Calcutta*, in *A Handbook for Travellers in India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon*, 20th ed., ed. L. F. Rushbrook Williams and Sir Arthur C. Lothian (London: John Murray, 1965), map, AbeBooks, https://www.abebooks.com/maps/Environs-Calcutta-Murray-John/31106590877/bd.

However, we know that Chinese migrants were living in Calcutta even before the arrival of Tong Atchew. In Atchew's memorial to the British Supreme Board in 1781, we see his frustration about the "Chinese who have deserted from the ships and remain in Calcutta without any apparent means of subsistence" and how they were responsible for luring his indentured labor away from their duties in the sugar mill.[28] Based on this petition, both Ellen Oxfeld as well as Zhang Xing believed that the first Chinese settlers in Kolkata may have

[28] Bose, "A Bygone Chinese Colony in Bengal",121.

been runaway sailors and indentured servants .[29] Tansen Sen suggests, "It is likely that these Chinese came to Calcutta on ships frequenting between Calcutta and Canton."[30] Tong Atchew died shortly after this in 1783, and his estate was sold according to an advertisement that appeared in 1804.[31] Thus, until Atchew's death and the subsequent sale of his sugar mill, there were two distinct Chinatowns, one centered in Achipur and the other in Calcutta around the Bowbazar area.

Consequently, after the death of Tong Atchew in 1783, several advertisements in the *Calcutta Gazette* suggest that Atchew's indentured laborers were quick to desert Achipur and settle in the Bowbazar area of Calcutta. As early as 1784, we find an individual by the name of Tom Fatt offering his services to clean water tanks through the help of a specialized China Pump that "can finish the work quicker than any Bengali people".[32] In addition to this, he also owned a rum distillery, made loaf sugar, as well did all sorts of cabinet work. As Bowbazar received more Chinese settlers, we see advertisements of Chinese people who "keep a shop in China Bazar" in 1785.[33] Threatened by this development and informed by the cultural notion that the Chinese are deviant in general, we also see the colonial administration establishing several police stations in the neighborhood after this advertisement.[34]

These advertisements give us an idea about what life was like for the "First Migrants," as termed by Jennifer Liang.[35] In her extensive fieldwork, she also came across Chen Tung Fong, a retired Hubeinese dentist who has remained in the Bowbazar Chinatown

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[29] See Xing, "The Bowbazar Chinatown," 398; Oxfeld, *Blood, Sweat, and Mahjong*, 78.
[30] Sen and Xing, "The Chinese in South Asia," 206.
[31] Bose, "A Bygone Chinese Colony in Bengal," 122.
[32] Tom Fatt's advertisement can be found in W.S. Seton-Karr, *Selections from Calcutta Gazettes of the Years 1784, 1785, 1786, 1787, and 1788: Showing the Political and Social Condition of the English in India Eighty Years Ago* (O.T. Cutter, Military Orphan Press, 1864), 34, https://books.google.co.in/books?id=f0gOAAAAQAAJ.
[33] Seton-Karr, *Selections from Calcutta Gazettes of the Years 1784, 1785, 1786, 1787, and 1788: Showing the Political and Social Condition of the English in India Eighty Years Ago*, 91.
[34] Seton-Karr, *Selections from Calcutta Gazettes of the Years 1784, 1785, 1786, 1787, and 1788: Showing the Political and Social Condition of the English in India Eighty Years Ago*, 116.
[35] Liang, "Migration Patterns and Occupational Specialisations of Kolkata Chinese," 397.

throughout his life. Asserting the reasons for the heavy Chinese presence in Calcutta in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he says, "India at that time was governed by the British and had a reputation of being a rich country with good governance and plenty of work opportunities."[36]

Thus, for the Chinese settlers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the economic opportunities that Calcutta provided were the main reason behind their migration. Consequently, the multi-ethnic communities of Cantonese, Hunan, Hakka, and Hubei Chinese were able to carve out a variety of occupational niches for themselves, which included working in tanneries, shoemaking, dentistry, hairdressing, carpentry, as well as establishing restaurants.[37] Ellen Oxfeld, as well as Jennifer Liang, highlight how the Hakka Chinese were able to take up shoemaking and working in tanneries as their primary occupation because it was considered impure by caste Hindus and Muslims.[38]

A distinctive feature of the eighteenth-century Bowbazar Chinatown was the predominant presence of male workers and the absence of women, as crudely indicated by Chaloner Alabaster.

> It seems strange that importing as they do cooks, priests, barbers, and doctors, they have not imported some of the fair sex….the only Chinese women known to have set foot in Calcutta were two poor girls from Australia .[39]

This was to change in the early twentieth century when the collapse of the Manchu empire, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, and the following Chinese Civil War would trigger a second wave of migration where most of the immigrants were women, unskilled workers, and

[36] Liang, "Migration Patterns and Occupational Specialisations of Kolkata Chinese," 398.
[37] Sen and Xing, "The Chinese in South Asia," 212.
[38] Liang, "Migration Patterns and Occupational Specialisations of Kolkata Chinese," 397.
[39] Alabaster, "The Chinese Colony in Calcutta," 374.

children who did not possess any specialized skills like the Cantonese, Hubeinese, Hunan, and Hakka Chinese that migrated before them.[40] Jennifer Liang gives us an idea about why the migrations in the early twentieth century took place through one of her interviews with Ng Yee Tung, a Cantonese carpenter who migrated to India in 1939. Ng Yee Tung recalls, "It was very dangerous living under Chiang Kai-shek. Anyone even remotely suspected of having Communist affiliation was arrested. Thousands disappeared, never to be seen again. It was a terrible time, and we could not even open our mouths for fear of being misunderstood and arrested for the wrong reasons."[41] The civil war between the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) and the KMT (Kuomintang) led by Chiang Kai-shek destabilized the civil order in China, especially in the countryside, which led people like Ng Yee Tung to migrate to Calcutta.

Life for this new wave of migrants was complicated because the Bowbazar Chinatown lacked dwelling spaces suitable for women and children, as it mostly had dormitories for single men. In addition to this, there was a dearth of economic opportunities for the unskilled workers and their families, and going back to China was not an option. In such a situation, these early twentieth-century Chinese migrants resorted to selling liquor, washing clothes, tailoring, and working in the vegetable market to make ends meet.[42]

Simultaneously, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, the more enterprising members of the Hakka shoemaking communities moved to Tangra, another part of town, to explore the possibilities of tanning leather. Working with animal skin was seen to be "impure" and "dirty" according to Hindu caste logic and was often relegated to "untouchables" who lay outside the four-fold Hindu caste structure.[43] Hakka Chinese tanners

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[40] Liang, "Migration Patterns and Occupational Specialisations of Kolkata Chinese," 401.
[41] Ng Yee Tung's interview can be found in Liang, "Migration Patterns and Occupational Specialisations of Kolkata Chinese," 401.
[42] Liang, "Migration Patterns and Occupational Specialisations of Kolkata Chinese," 402.
[43] Caste is a four-fold structure of hierarchical social stratification in Hindu-society. It is divided into Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants), Shudras (loborers) in order of their hierarchies within the

were able to maneuver these politics of purity and impurity associated with tanning leather among the caste Hindus to establish themselves in this occupational niche. After an initial period of struggle and economic hardship, the Hakka community experienced significant economic gains due to the increased demand for leather during the Second World War and the subsequent expansion of exports to the Soviet Union in the 1970s. These conditions led to the development of a third Chinatown in Kolkata around Tangra. The tanneries of Tangra prospered until the 1980s, after which they declined due to a number of reasons. The twin events of the Soviet collapse and globalization in India during 1991 meant that the tanneries had to compete in a free market. In addition to this, stringent environmental measures enacted by the local government led to many of these tanneries closing down, relocating, or, in most cases, being converted to restaurants. Lim Tse Yee, an owner of a shoe store and a resident of Chinatown, explains,

> There was no competition. But, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, we have lost that market entirely and now have to compete in the free market. While other producers improved and innovated, we are still using outdated machines. Because of the declining profits, many Dhapa Chinese have sold their business and left India.[44]

Furthermore, the conditions for Chinese-Indians worsened following the Sino-Indian War of 1962. During this period, the Indian state enacted the Defence of India Act, which resulted in the deportation of approximately three thousand ethnic Chinese individuals to a former prisoner-of-war camp in Deoli, Rajasthan. Even after they were released in 1967, Chinese-Indians continued to face discrimination, property losses, and business vandalizations. As noted by Lim, the steady out-migration of the Chinese community was triggered by a combination of economic hardship, discrimination, and the hostile environment that emerged

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caste structures. Communities that fell outside of this structures were deemed to be 'Untouchables as they were associated with occupations which were considered impure according to Hindu casteist logic.

[44] Lim Tse Yee's interview can be found in Liang, "Migration Patterns and Occupational Specialisations of Kolkata Chinese," 407.

following the Sino-Indian War. This process resulted in the gradual abandonment of the three major Chinatowns in Calcutta—Achipur, Bowbazar, and Tangra—as members of the community relocated to countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the United States.

Organization of Thesis

This thesis is organized into three chapters. The first chapter is an exploratory genealogy of how Chinese bodies were measured, quantified, and written about from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. I rely on a comparative reading of the writings of Chaloner Alabaster and Emily Eden to show how these colonial actors always paid attention to corporeal characteristics and phenotypical features of Chinese bodies, such as height, hair, complexion, and eyes, to distinguish Chinese migrants in Calcutta from the British as well as other Indians. By doing so, Alabaster and Eden strived to establish a stable racial category and ascribe certain meanings to those categories in terms of social attitudes, sanitary conditions, proclivity to gambling, drinking, violence, etc. In the twentieth century, these categories were operationalized in a more robust form. To arrive at this conclusion, I have analyzed a comic strip issued to Allied soldiers stationed in Calcutta during the Second World War, which instructed soldiers how to differentiate between Chinese civilians and Japanese spies in Calcutta through differences in their feet, stride, and eyes. I have also examined the confidential reports and intelligence files produced by the Intelligence Bureau (IB) to demonstrate that contemporary British intelligence practices similarly employed methods of quantification based on corporeal characteristics to gather information on the social and political dimensions of Chinese migrants in Calcutta. Lastly, I have drawn upon the oral interviews conducted by Joy Ma and Kwai Yun-Li in their works to illustrate how these racial categories adapted within a postcolonial context, becoming entwined with state

policies, citizenship, border defense, and national security. In the aftermath of the Sino-Indian War of 1962, these categories served as mechanisms for exclusion, incarceration, and violence against the Chinese community in India. Overall, Chapter 1 argues that the Chinese community settled in Calcutta was racially reified through keen attention to their phenotypic and corporeal features from 1850 to 1960. In doing so, this chapter traces the racial logic deployed on the Chinese community in Kolkata in the colonial period and how they reproduced themselves in the post-colonial period.

Chapter 2 aims to analyze how the Chinese community in Calcutta regulated their bodies and diets to prevent and cure diseases. Drawing upon the established conventions of traditional Chinese medicine and adapting it to the phenomenological reality of their settlement in Calcutta, they carved out a unique world of dietetics and therapeutics to carefully navigate around the institutions of biomedicine. In this chapter, I rely on the writings of two British officials by the name of Bradley Shelland and Augustus Somerville, along with intelligence reports from the West Bengal State Archives, to find elements of Chinese dietary tradition, such as *Qi* and *Yin-Yang,* when they describe the culinary landscape of Calcutta's Chinatowns. Their writings also help illustrate the central tension between the western biomedical worldview and alternative therapeutic traditions. By examining how Chinese consumption practices, such as drinking liquor and smoking opium, were consistently associated with moral decay and degeneracy - rather than being recognized for their medicinal uses - these accounts underscore the western biomedical framework's inability to accommodate alternative healing systems. I also suggest in this chapter that the Chinese in Calcutta, in some instances, engaged with biomedicine in strategic and creative ways to not only cure the body but also secure the interests of their community by addressing the asymmetrical power hierarchies between Chinese migrants and the state, along with its policing authorities. Furthermore, I have also provided an analysis of one of my oral

interviews with Tony Lo, a member of the Chinese community in Calcutta, to show how food, drinks, and tonics were used in a therapeutic manner in the community. Overall, this chapter suggests that when the Chinese first arrived in Calcutta, they brought their own understanding of health and wellness. This worldview often came into conflict with the dominant biomedical worldviews of the colonial administration and later the post-colonial Indian state informed by British concepts. As a result of these tensions, traditional practices often either resisted dominant biomedical attitudes or appropriated them when necessary. These tensions were instrumental in establishing and giving way to a more hybridized therapeutic approach that opposed, subverted as well as adapted biomedical practices with traditional ones.

Chapter 3 examines how Chinese migrants from Hubei practiced and developed dentistry in Calcutta from the 1920s to the 1960s. In this chapter, I look at the trajectory of this profession and how it evolved from being an unregulated, heterogeneous branch of medicine operating with its own logic to a vernacularized tradition that blended biomedical knowledge and practices with indigenous ones. In this evolution, I pay attention to the multiple transformations that occurred within this branch of medical practice that allowed the services offered by the Hubei Chinese to be popular, affordable, and accessible. I argue that the hypermobility practiced by Chinese dentists as wandering teeth setters in various districts of West Bengal allowed them to be competitive in the therapeutic marketplace. Since they were not restricted by any western or Chinese classical texts, the Hubei dentists were able to transform their medical spaces and practices in multiple instances. I also suggest that the Hubei dentists were able to politicize their clinics and their status as doctors in the community to advocate for domestic politics in China through their interactions with the KMT and the CCP. Finally, with the passage of The Dentists Act in 1948, the Hubei dentists were put in the same discursive and medical fields as other Indians. This allowed the

professionalization of their occupation as well as the Indianization of their identities. Even at this juncture, the Hubei dentists were able to preserve their uniqueness by blending institutional biomedical practices with indigenous ones. Relying on multiple interrogation transcripts, surveillance reports, and interviews with two practicing Chinese dentists in Calcutta, as well as one of their clients, this chapter argues that Chinese dentists were highly mobile, aspirational, and entrepreneurial in their efforts to maintain a balance between embracing change and maintaining a degree of autonomy in their practices.

CHAPTER ONE - Quantifying Chinese Bodies and Establishing Difference in Calcutta's Chinatowns, 1850-1960

Introduction

"*The Chinese are largely a closed community, so there is little exposure to the locals. Then there is always this 'special' thing about our features – the eyes, the nose, etc. And that feeling of difference is present on both sides.*"[45]

These were the words spoken by Paul Chung in an interview with Sipra Mukherjee and Sarvani Gooptu in 2009. Paul Chung was a member of the Chinese Indian Association, which is a community-based in the city of Calcutta dedicated to preserving and promoting the culture, heritage, and interests of the Chinese community in India. The above comments reflected how Paul Chung confronted the characteristics that differentiated his community from others. Eleven years later, a newspaper report appeared in 2020 that shed light on how people from Calcutta's Chinatown were discriminated against based on their looks. Under the context of the spread of the Covid-19 virus, the Chinese community settled in Calcutta was very often subjected to derogatory slurs such as "Chinese men have come with Chinese virus".[46] Paul Chung's observations were still widely relevant after 2009.

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[45] Quoted in H. Banerjee, N. Gupta, and S. Mukherjee, *Calcutta Mosaic: Essays and Interviews on the Minority Communities of Calcutta*, Anthem South Asian Studies (Anthem Press, 2009), 139, https://books.google.co.in/books?id=cSTEOx_Lw9MC.

[46] Debaashish Bhattacharya, "'We Are Not Chinese from China, We Are Indians,'" *The Hindu Business Lines*, April 24, 2020, https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/blink/know/covid-19-a-threat-for-kolkatas-chinese-community/article31422692.ece.

Since then, there have been many efforts to support establishments in Calcutta's Chinatown in the middle of a mass exodus of Chinese Indians leaving for Canada, Australia, and North America. Despite these efforts made by journalists, historians, and local heritage tour guides, the residents of Kolkata's Chinatown have historically been regarded as "special," as Paul Chuing describes. Since their initial migration in 1778, the Chinese migrants in Calcutta have always been viewed as the unchanging other–different, and alien. Central to their distinction from the colonial and later postcolonial contexts was the emphasis placed on their phenotypical and corporeal attributes.

This present chapter seeks to provide a century-long exploratory genealogy of how the Indo-Chinese community was racially profiled by phenotypic features spanning from 1850 to 1960. In doing so, it tries to trace the emergence of a racialized view of Chinese immigrants in Calcutta, how it was intricately tied to the specific political context of the period, and, lastly, how these attitudes polymorphously adapted themselves in the post-colonial condition. In its effort to show the continuity of racial logic from a colonial state to a post-colonial one, this chapter relies on a comparative analysis of chronicles, letters, intelligence reports, and oral interviews. In tracing this century-long historical exploratory genealogy, I have relied on several archival as well as oral sources. These include Chaloner Alabaster's 1858 account in the *Calcutta Review*, Emily Eden's letters and journals, a pamphlet issued to American soldiers stationed in Kolkata during the Second World War, several intelligence reports from the "Chinese Nationals" files housed at the West Bengal State Archives as well as the rich repository of oral testimonies by the survivors of the deportations following the 1962 Sino-Indian War.

Since this chapter is interested in racial categories dependent on phenotypic features being used to initiate difference and stigmatization of communities, oftentimes leading to their exclusion, I use a number of analytical frameworks used by historians of science and

feminist theorists. An analysis of "The Feralness of Race" is extensively discussed by Projit Bihari Mukharji in his book *Brown Skin, White Coats: Race Science in India, 1920-66* where Mukharji puts forth an analysis of how racial differences can constantly adapt to a variety of disciplinary formations including "comparative linguistics, ethnology, craniometry, medical jurisprudence and comparative anatomy " and how "each of these new formations mobilized new research tools, new methods, and new ways of defining race."[47] Differences established through distinct physical features also find a presence in the postcolonial democratic state with its unique ramifications. Mukharji asserts that racial logic and racial thought are often asserted in a condition where newly emerging nations are primarily defined by the existence of powerful elites along with a lasting influence of colonialism as well as the inequalities it created.[48] This is also in line with Srirupa Roy's discussion of the "ethnicization of a nation" where blood and race are used to define who belongs to the nation and who does not.[49]

I also rely on the material-semiotic framework put forth by historian of consciousness and feminist theorist Donna Haraway, which is used in a number of studies in diverse disciplines such as cultural studies, medical anthropology, and history. She defines semiosis as "the process of meaning-making in the discipline called semiotics".[50] In defining the interrelatedness of the material world and the symbolic explanation for it, she is interested in the "simultaneity of both the facts and explanatory theoretical power and also the relentlessly tropic, historically contingent, practical materiality" in objects of knowledge.[51] Put simply, material-semiosis is a set of analytical tools to understand how social practices, as well as categories, are both material (tangible) and semiotic (carrying meaning). It does not suggest

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[47] For a dicussion of the 'Feralness of Race' see Projit Bihari Mukharji, *Brown Skins, White Coats: Race Science in India, 1920-66* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023), 6–12.
[48] Mukharji, 2.
[49] See Roy, Srirupa. 2007. *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Postcolonial Nationalism*. N.p.: Duke University Press.
[50] See Donna Jeanne Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 201.
[51] Haraway, *The Haraway Reader*, 204.

that one linearly comes before the other, that is to say, that the category emerged first and then its meaning, but rather how both the category and the meaning lend themselves to each other to create social realities. In this chapter, I hope to show that the racial categorization of the Chinese community was material-semiotic, whereby tangible and observable differences expressed through physical markers gave way to a set of social meanings, judgments, and values that were attached to them.

The long history of the Chinese migration to India and the subsequent establishment of the first Chinatown in South Asia has received scant academic contributions.[52] Ellen Oxfeld's book, *Blood, Sweat, and Mahjong,* is the only full-length academic book about the condition of the Chinese community settled in the city of Calcutta.[53] Oxfeld's anthropological study draws on extensive fieldwork conducted among the Hakka community settled in Calcutta, as well as the others who have out-migrated to Toronto. She defines the Chinese community settled in Kolkata as "pariah capitalists" - a class of individuals who had the economic capital but were chronically politically powerless. Apart from this, there are a few articles that roughly lay out the demographic pattern as well as the spatial layout of the community, such as Ramakrishna Chatterjee's article titled "The Chinese Community of Calcutta: Their Early Settlement and Migration".[54]

It would also be appropriate to mention here several articles written by Tansen Sen as well as Zhang Xing, who have collaborated in a few instances to provide a much more detailed analysis of the migrant Chinese communities in Calcutta. Their co-written article

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[52] Few notable scholarly articles on the Chinese community of Calcutta are Sen and Xing, "The Chinese in South Asia"; Xing, "The Bowbazar Chinatown"; Liang, "Migration Patterns and Occupational Specialisations of Kolkata Chinese"; Chatterjee, "The Chinese Community of Calcutta: Their Early Settlement and Migration."; Aparna Chatterjee Sen, "Education, Occupational Aspiration and Religious Orientation: A Case Study of the Chinese Community of North Bengal," *China Report* 45, no. 1 (January 2009): 65–73, https://doi.org/10.1177/000944550904500106; Chatterjee, "The Chinese Community of Calcutta: Their Early Settlement and Migration." While Sen, Xing, and Liang offer historically grounded analyses Chatterjee and others anthropological studies on the community.

[53] See Oxfeld, *Blood, Sweat, and Mahjong*.

[54] See Chatterjee, "The Chinese Community of Calcutta: Their Early Settlement and Migration."

"The Chinese in South Asia" traces the historical developments in Calcutta's Chinatown, providing a detailed history of the Bengali-Chinese cultural interactions, the occupational niches of the various communities that lived in Calcutta related to the diverse origins of these communities while also providing a glimpse into the inner lives of Calcutta's Chinese migrants.[55] Joy Ma's book *Deolliwallahs* is a rich repository of oral narratives of the experiences of various individuals who were racially profiled and incarcerated after the Sino-Indian War of 1962.[56] Another resourceful oral repository can be found in Jennifer Liang's work, where she provides "An Insider's History" of Chinatown through several interviews that she took as part of her fieldwork there. She identifies three major waves of migration that took place in the nineteenth century, the early twentieth century, and the post-Second World War period.[57] Xing's academic publications focused more on how a mixture of Chinese-Indian religious practices in temples and course curricula in primary schools in Calcutta's Chinatown led to a distinct identity creation for the inhabitants of the neighborhood. Kwai-Yun Li's MA thesis, made accessible online by the University of Toronto, also has transcripts of her interview with four members of the Chinese-Indian community who recount their memories of the Sino-Indian War of 1962.[58] These works successfully articulate the condition of life and the cultural significance of the communities of Chinese Indians in India. However, an analysis of how they were perceived by the colonial power and what specific attitudes were deployed toward this community often remains unexplored. Also absent from these works is how these attitudes reproduced themselves in the post-colonial context.

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[55] Sen and Xing, "The Chinese in South Asia."

[56] See Joy Ma and Dilip D'Souza, *The Deoliwallahs: The True Story of the 1962 Chinese-Indian Internment* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 2020). Although Ma and D'Souza's work is not specifically concerned with the Chinese community of Calcutta, many of their interviewees were from Calcutta and for the purposes of this chapter, I have analyzed the inteeviews that reflect the Sinophobic attitudes of the Indian state towards Chinese migrants.

[57] Liang, "Migration Patterns and Occupational Specialisations of Kolkata Chinese."

[58] Kwai Yun Li's thesis can be accessed at Kwai Yun Li, "Deoli Camp: An Oral History of the Chinese Indians from 1962 to 1966" (University of Torronto, 2011), http://hdl.handle.net/1807/29477.

A British Man in Calcutta's Chinatown

Chaloner Alabaster's 1858 accounts of "Cossitallah" and "Durramtollah"–two districts surrounding Calcutta's Chinatown–are some of the earliest descriptions that exist about the Bowbazar Chinatown. Alabaster's account provides a very detailed description of what he saw, smelt, and heard in Chinatown while he was accompanying an anti-British Chinese official by the name of Ye Mingchen to his exile in Calcutta. His account has been instrumental in every academic contribution that has been made to understand the condition of the Chinese migrants in Calcutta because he described the neighborhood, opium dens, and what he perceived to be the lifestyle of the Chinese community living in Calcutta. His descriptions open with the following lines,

> Among the communities which constitute the patchwork called Calcutta, there is a little one coloured whity-brown, which utterly distinct from all others, different in speech, in language, colour, dress, character, and institution, has almost escaped observation.[59]

From the very beginning of his account, we observe an attempt to differentiate the Chinese migrants settled in Calcutta due to their distinct characteristics. He finds this distinctiveness in their height, complexion, speech, language, and more. It almost makes Alabaster question how this community has escaped the attention of the British colonial apparatus.

Throughout his description of the opium dens, hog lard manufacturing sites, and Chinese temples of the Bowbazar Chinatown, we see Alabaster paying keen attention to all elements that he finds gross, grotesque, strange, offensive, and most importantly, different. Among the five hundred Chinese men and women he saw, he provides a detailed account of

[59] Alabaster, "The Chinese Colony in Calcutta," 368.

how different they are based on their physical features. His text is riddled with an appreciation of the uniqueness of the Chinese community in Calcutta, but this appreciation itself was rooted in an effort to try to make sense of a non-European community and their lifestyle as he was accounting for their differences while reifying them racially. One can find a note of how the Chinese were a cheap source of labor compared to British workers when he says "A Chinese carpenter works as neatly as, and far more cheaply than, an Englishman".[60] He also appreciates the general honesty of the Chinese community in who had migrated exclusively for the sake of economic mobility when he remarks "The Chinaman is the more honest, he says he likes his own country better, far better than other; but he wants to make rupees, and here he makes them quicker."[61] Such statements notwithstanding, his texts are littered with a constant representation of Chinese men as "copper brothers" after noticing their distinct complexion.[62]

Alabaster's chronicles also expressed a continuous emphasis on the Chinese being categorized as a race who are wholly different from the "Britishers" as well as the "dirty Hindoos".[63] Alabaster establishes a peculiar set of "new offensive race" in his account.[64] He simultaneously isolates the younger members of the community from the older ones. He also segregates "two distinct colonies, belonging to two distinct races" based on their occupation of shoe-making and ship-carpenting. Interestingly, he also shares an anxiety that the perceived differences between these two races are at risk of being annihilated as they continue to marry outside of their community.[65] This shows Alabaster's efforts to attempt to isolate, categorize, segregate, and stabilize communities that were not meant to be stable in the first place.

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[60] Alabaster, "The Chinese Colony in Calcutta," 384.
[61] Alabaster, "The Chinese Colony in Calcutta," 382.
[62] Alabaster, "The Chinese Colony in Calcutta," 371.
[63] Alabaster, "The Chinese Colony in Calcutta," 384.
[64] Alabaster, "The Chinese Colony in Calcutta," 375.
[65] Alabaster, "The Chinese Colony in Calcutta," 369.

Alabaster sets out to identify his categorized races based on their physical features. He portrays a particular disdain for the older members of the community as he finds no apparent reasons for them to be present in Calcutta. He goes so far as to draw a direct line of correlation between their bodies and their brains when he says "These old men are most Chinesy…their brains seems shrunk like their bodies." He again draws this parallel when he says "Unlike Confucius, who at ten knew all things, they at sixty-five know nothing".[66] Alabaster found them to be "A framework of bones covered with some dried up muscle and clothes in a shrivelled skin! An Old Chinaman is an awful sight".[67] This suggests that Alabaster had a normative definition of a particular set of traits and characteristics that he considered to be "Chinese" which he never explicitly declares and the older members of the Chinese community were the one who conformed the most to that category.

If the older members of the community were an "awful sight" in Alabaster's constructed categories, one would naturally assume that the younger members would be more appealing to Alabaster as they would have been far away from what Alabaster considered "an awful sight". However, even the younger working members of the community are mocked on the basis of their physical features when Alabaster says of the carpenters, "they walk sturdily, their little straw hat is cocked jauntily, and their brawny arms look as if they could knock a man down on occasion."[68] Perhaps not surprisingly, just like the older members of the community, the younger Chinese migrants of Calcutta distinguished themselves to Alabaster on account of their unique corporeal features that he observed. If bone framework was the distinguishing factor for older members, the Chinese way of braiding hair on top of the scalp while leaving the rest of the head shaved was the distinguishing feature for younger members. Alabaster's attitude toward the Chinese races that he encountered in Calcutta being

[66]Alabaster, "The Chinese Colony in Calcutta," 381-382.
[67]Alabaster, "The Chinese Colony in Calcutta," 381.
[68]Alabaster, "The Chinese Colony in Calcutta," 380.

meek, obedient, dirty, and unintelligent are reflected when he refers to the Chinese "tail" and how it could be used to whip workers, clean tables, polish boots, or even hang people.[69]

Alabaster was not the only one who held such views, nor did he act in an insulated manner. His attitudes were reflective of how the colonial government perceived differences and made an effort to quantify them in fixed, stable categories. The register in which Alabaster mocked the English dialect of the Chinese men and women he encountered in Chinatown is similarly reflected in another *Calcutta Gazette* advertisement from 1817, which declares the following,

> A Hoy teacher of foreign tongue, too much chin chins every stranger Gentleman, very too much late come from Europe have and begs leave to acquaint them that he can talkee lesson everyday, in the Canton dialect, at his house in Mo. 4 Old China Street have got, from two o'clock ten minutes till four o'clock everyday…etc. etc.[70]

In his discussion of what he saw in Bowbazar Chinatown, sight remains a powerful lens through which he quantifies and racially reifies the Chinese community. There are extensive descriptions of places, people, and practices that are "dirty" and filled with "grotesqueries". For example, the opium dens of Chinatown were to Alabaster, a "nasal inconvenience"[71], the people were an "awful sight", the temples were "ill-smelling lanes"[72], and the confusion that his eyes and nose were subjected to found a justification as he argued that the Chinese are generally opposed to any sort of "municipal reform" and by extension cleanliness.[73] He believes this is the case because Confucius said nothing about it. He goes further to suggest

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[69] Alabaster, "The Chinese Colony in Calcutta," 384.
[70] For the advertisement see Hugh David Sandeman, *Selections from Calcutta Gazettes Vol.1 (1816-1823)* (Calcutta: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1869), 190, https://southasiacommons.net/artifacts/4350319/selections-from-calcutta-gazettes-vol1-1816-1823/.
[71] Alabaster, "The Chinese Colony in Calcutta," 377.
[72] Alabaster, "The Chinese Colony in Calcutta," 372.
[73] Alabaster, "The Chinese Colony in Calcutta," 380,384,377,372.

that because of this, they like to be surrounded by what Alabaster considered "ill-smells".[74] In his account, it seems that this general condition of dirt and deficiency was all-encompassing and apparent in every aspect of Chinese life in Calcutta. Thus, what Chalanoer Alabaster was trying to suggest was that because of their generally different phenotypic features, the Chinese in Calcutta occupied spaces that smelt and looked different, and similarly they were prone to antisocial practices, which can also be interpreted as different or alternative social practices that were racially unique to them such as opium smoking, drinking and gambling. Alabaster, through his account, established a stable code of appearance, lifestyle, and social practices for a community that had not been stable since its arrival in 1778.

An English Lady's Ruminations on Chinese Migrants

Similar attitudes of initiating differences on the basis of corporeal features are found in the letters and journals written by Emily Eden. Emily Eden's letters and journals from her travels with her brother, George Eden, Governor-General of India from 1836 to 1842, provide a rich inner history of colonial life in the early nineteenth century. Since these letters and journals were, at the time of their creation, written to a mostly private audience addressing the self and a few close friends, we are able to go beyond some of the official rhetoric that Alabaster and other colonial actors employed in the various advertisements and accounts discussed until now. It stands in contrast to Alabaster's account, which was mostly an effort to use Chinatown as a site for knowledge production, but it reflects some of the attitudes employed by Alabaster, which would have found ways to incorporate itself within the colonial society in Calcutta.

[74] Alabaster, "The Chinese Colony in Calcutta," 377.

While describing a drive from Barrackpore, Emily Eden mentions "a Chinese, with his twinkling eyes and yellow face and satin dress, stalking along amongst those black naked creatures".[75] One can see a reflection of the categories that Alabaster used to differentiate the Chinese migrants from the Hindu populations in Chinatown. Eden's journals show her obsession with acquiring Chinese satin, Chinese paintings, and Chinese furniture. This desire likely influenced Eden to seek out interactions with members of Calcutta's Chinese community, especially craftsmen and shoe-makers. We find evidence of such interactions in her 1837 letter to Robert Eden where, overwhelmed with the number of Chinese goods in her house, Eden writes,

> I have already achieved a yellow parchment complexion of great merit, and can make a handsome plait of long hair; therefore my great care is to pinch my eyes up in the corners and flatten my nose, and, if that can be achieved, there will be something very attractive in the general appearance of Chang Foo Cottage, Knightsbridge. I know I shall be fined or imprisoned before I leave this, for snipping off by irresistible impulse the long plait of hair our Chinese shoemaker wears. It touches the ground, and one snip would have it off. [76]

In all probability, the Chinese shoemaker mentioned here goes by the name of Aumon "who glides about Government House with his eyes half-a-mile apart, his long pigtail touching the ground"[77] and finds mention in a later journal entry.[78] In all of these accounts, Emily Eden, much like Alabaster, paid keen attention to physical markers such as complexion, eyes, nose, and hair to racially classify a community that was different from them. Interestingly, Eden always seems to use the color yellow to define an aberration from the normative in colonial society. When she is worried about the influenza and cholera ravaging the city of Calcutta,

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[75] Eden and Eden, *Letters from India*, 100.
[76] Eden and Eden, *Letters from India*, 78-79.
[77] Eden and Eden, *Letters from India*, 160.
[78] Eden and Eden, *Letters from India*, 160.

the color yellow is seen to define literal weakness in her cultural imagination when she says, "we are only left a shade weaker and a shade yellower."[79] Eden's tone is one that both admires as well as mocks the Chinese people she encounters in her daily life. We see a sense of tacit exoticization on her part when she exhibits the desire to become Chinese on account of her owning several Chinese objects, but this desire obviously meets its limits when she and her family face tragedies when the color yellow becomes a signifier through which a fear of cultural contamination is articulated.

A War of Territories and Categories

As we move from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, we see a maturation in the mechanisms of ensuring difference within a colonial society. Much of it had to do with the changing political situation. British colonial rule had started to stabilize and consolidate itself in the nineteenth century after the Revolt of 1857, which led to the British Crown taking direct control of India. The twentieth century brought its own challenges with the onset of the Second World War. The Eastern front of the war, especially the China-Burma-India theatre, became extremely important after the Japanese invasion of Burma in 1941. In this situation, the port city of Calcutta became an important transit point for circulating communications and supplies.[80] During this period for the Allied army, a number of them being American, stationed in Calcutta, threats of Japanese bombing and Japanese spies remained high.

[79]Eden and Eden, *Letters from India*, 81.
[80] Santasil Mallik, "GI Photos of Calcutta: Toward a Vernacular Understanding of War," *Trans Asia Photography* 13, no. 1 (May 1, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1215/21582025-10365026.

Figure 2 and 3. Excerpts from the illustrated pamphlet issued to Allied soldiers stationed in Calcutta. Milton Caniff, *A Pocket Guide to China.*

Like many of the troops deployed in South East Asia, the Americans deployed in Calcutta were also carrying an illustrated pamphlet produced by the War and Navy Department titled "How to Spot A Jap".[81] This comic strip informed by certain racist notions and illustrated by Milton Caniff provides a detailed account of the phenotypic features that differentiate the Chinese from the Japanese. Following the same trajectory of genealogy seen with Alabaster and Emily Eden, this illustration drew on differences in height, complexion, eyes, pronunciation, feet, and stride. In one of the comic strips, we see an extensive calcification model that informs the soldiers on how they should go about differentiating between Japanese spies and Chinese civilians. It says,

> C is dull bronze in color while J is lighter more on the lemon yellow. C's eyes are set like European's or American's but have a marked squint…J has eyes slanted towards his nose…[82]

In this comic strip, "C" is an abbreviation for Chinese, and "J" is an abbreviation for Japanese. Interestingly, we see that the framers of these categories were also aware of how ambivalent they were. These markers could occur in a wide number of communities that were not Japanese and would ultimately prove counterproductive in surveillance operations. Notwithstanding the ambiguous nature of these categories, the pamphlet endeavored to blur the lines of differences by advising that the Japanese spies might very well be hiding among Chinese civilians when it says,

> You may find Japs among any Oriental civilian group…that is a favourite infiltration trick…make your man walk…the Chinese strides..the Jap shuffles (but he may be clever enough to fake the stride)...make him remove his socks and shoes, if any…[83]

[81] The comic strip and the visual illustrations can be found in Milton Caniff, *A Pocket Guide to China.*
[82]Milton Caniff, *A Pocket Guide to China.*
[83]Milton Caniff, *A Pocket Guide to China.*

This scrutiny of physical characteristics and frustration of such racial categories not being as stable as imagined carries on to much more details of the feet when it mentions,

> The Chinese and other Asiatics have fairly normal feet...the Jap wore a wooden sandal ("Geta") Before he was issued army shoes...He will usually have a wide space between the first and second toes...often calloused from the leather strap that held the "Geta" to his foot…[84]

These codified differences based on contemporary anthropological practices were perceived as objective truths during the twentieth century. For all their attention to detail on how to differentiate the Japanese spy from the Chinese natives, the Allied army stationed in Calcutta found their pamphlets to be of little help.

The Intelligence Bureau of British India also felt the threat of the Chinese presence in India. Siding with their American Allied partners, they issued a confidential report on Chinese activities in India from 1941-44. This document aims to examine the reasons behind the growing Chinese interest in India during the Second World War. In its deductions, the report believed that the growing Chinese interest in India was due to Chinese intentions of setting up India as a base of communications and military training after the fall of Burma. Additionally, the report also believed that "the British Government's declared intention of handing India over to the Indians as possible after the war has quickened Chinese interest in their future prospects in the country".[85] Thus, the Kuomintang government's interest in India can be attributed to clear geopolitical motives; however, the circumstances resulting from the Second World War contributed to a heightened state of vigilance within the intelligence authorities of British India. The British authorities harbored a deep mistrust of Chinese

[84]Milton Caniff, *A Pocket Guide to China.*

[85] "Chinese Nationals in Darjeeling," 236/1939 (12) (Darjeeling), in *Foreigners*. Shakespeare Sarani, Kolkata: West Bengal State Archives, 535.

intentions in India, firmly believing that the efforts of Chinese spies to gather intelligence across the country would inevitably culminate in the transmission of sensitive information to the Axis powers.[86]

These anxieties expressed themselves in increased surveillance of the Chinese communities in India based on an elaborated method of setting up central and provincial branches and maintaining files on "Chinese Nationals", "Untrached Chinese Nationals", "Lookout Notices", "Mail interceptions" and "History Sheets" to gather intelligence on the social, political, occupational, and religious aspects of Chinese life in Kolkata and other districts of Bengal. The way the Chinese under the intelligence scanner distinguished themselves was through their corporeal features. As early as 1936 we find a lookout notice for Chang Chutan Chi, who held an official registration certificate from Vizagapatam to Hooghly but his whereabouts were unknown. Of particular interest is the method the intelligence authorities employed to find Chang Chutan Chi. In the lookout notice, there is an elaborate section of "Descriptive Roll" which measures Chang Chutan Chi's corporeal features. It mentions, "Height 5'5"; colour of eyes, dark brown;".[87] Thus, wartime anxieties also produced newer technologies to identify Chinese individuals through keen attention to their physical features.

By 1945, the intelligence authorities had improved their methods to include as many details in their descriptions as possible. A lookout notice for a murder suspect named Ying Yong Chou during this time had the following details in his description roll.

Age … 28 years.
Born … In Rangoon 1917.
Height … 5'3.
Build … Strong
Complexion … Dark
Eyes … Brown

[86] "Chinese Nationals in Darjeeling," 535.
[87] "Chinese Nationals in Hooghly," 236/1939 (12) (Darjeeling), in *Foreigners*. Shakespeare Sarani, Kolkata: West Bengal State Archives, 53.

Hair … Black - well brushed back.
Dress … European - slevenly dressed.
Distinguishing marks and peculiarities - One gold tooth upper centre jaw. Said to have diagonal knife on forehead..not sure. Walks with decided swagger. Speaks good English[88]

The intelligence authorities were also quick to adopt newer technologies such as photography to make Chinese physical features visible to them. Photographs of Chinese migrants were maintained along with their physical descriptions in the "Foreigners, Strangers, Preachers and Mendicants" section of the West Bengal Criminal Intelligence Gazette.[89] Virtually any Chinese migrant who did not remain in their places of residence came under suspicion and distinguished themselves through their corporeal features. Thus, by 1945, a discernible effort emerged among intelligence officers and their informants to expand their categorization of Chinese migrants beyond basic physical attributes such as height and eye color. This effort included detailed descriptions of build, complexion, hair, teeth, and attire.

[88] "Untraced Chinese Nationals," 236-B/1939 (12), in *Foreigners*, Shakespeare Sarani, Kolkata: West Bengal State Archives, 102.
[89] Sections of the West Bengal Criminal Intelligence Gazette along with photographs and physical descriptions are found in "Untraced Chinese Nationals," 297, 296, 263, 256, 254.

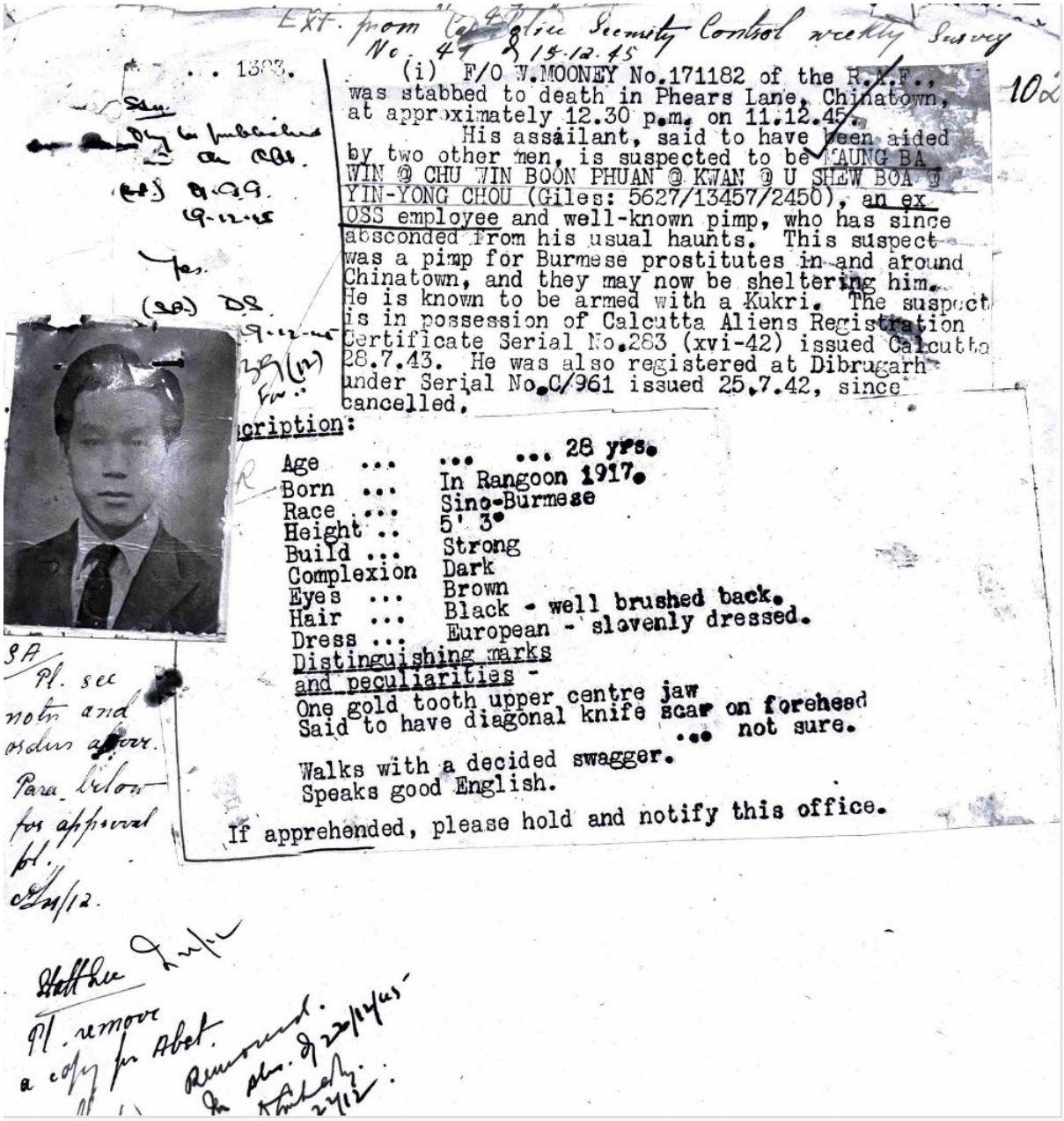

Figure 4. The look-out notice for Ying Yong Chou. "Untraced Chinese Nationals," 236-B/1939 (12), in *Foreigners*, Shakespeare Sarani, Kolkata: West Bengal State Archives, 102

Following Alabaster, Eden, and later the materials provided to the Allied army stationed in Kolkata and the Intelligence Bureau records, we see the full development of an increasingly stable and monolithic category obsessed with defining what a Chinese person looks like. What circulated as discourse in Alabaster's and Eden's writings took on more tangible forms during the Second World War in the Intelligence Bureau's efforts to

categorize Chinese migrants. In most instances, these categories were dependent on phenotypic features and markers for their meaning. Once defined, these categories proceeded to racially reify a community in terms of their behavior, cultural expressions, sanitary conditions, and religious practices. We also see the general anxiety when this stable category threatens to disrupt itself as with Alabaster's frustration with the annihilation of races as well as a tacit exoticization of eastern phenotypic features as in the case of Emily Eden wanting to change the composition of her hair, nose, and eyes on account of her owning several Chinese artifacts.

One would be inclined to think that with the promise of national sovereignty, such colonial racial categories and the meanings associated with them would cease to exist. However, as we shall see, these categories developed newer meanings and attached themselves to concepts of citizenship, belonging, and incarceration, bringing the prospect of violence within the post-colonial democratic state of India. Race as a category defined by observable features morphed to utilize the tools of a nation-state such as citizenship, national security, and border defense to initiate newer forms of exclusion than the ones that were seen in the colonial period.

India, after a decade of its independence in 1947, witnessed the emergence of a border dispute with China. The McMahon Line, named after Sir Henry McMahon and drawn in 1913, currently serves as the de facto boundary between India and China. Aksai Chin, a region in Ladakh, was subjected to contending claims by India and China. India claimed that Aksai Chin was a part of the Ladakh region, while China claimed it to be part of Xinjiang. In 1962, Mao Zedong moved troops across the McMahon Line as he did not accept the validity of this colonial border, starting the Sino-Indian War of 1962.[90] In the middle of these

[90] Ma and D'Souza, *The Deoliwallahs*, 24–39.

contending sets of claims by India and China, Chinese Indian refugees were subjected to racial profiling and forced incarceration without proof.

Similar to the colonial state, a threat was perceived by the Indian state with regard to the existence of Chinese spies among the Indo-Chinese community, a large number of whom were settled in Calcutta. To this end, the Indian government passed the Defence of India Act in 1962 which justified a policy of racially profiling around three thousand Chinese-*looking* individuals having "hostile origins", closing down their business ventures, selling off their enterprises, and deporting them to a British built internment camp in Deoli, Rajasthan.[91] In the middle of rising border tensions, The Foreigners Act and the Indian Passport Act were weaponized to imprison suspected Chinese spies. A 1951 Stateman report mentions a Chinese individual by the name of K.H. Chin who was suspected of entering India "without any passport, visa, or entry permit, once from Burma and again from Tibet."[92] In addition to the internment and criminalization, the Defence of India Act, in tandem with the Foreigners Act, also left a lasting legacy on how the Chinese community in India would be perceived for the following generations.[93] Joy Ma, a woman born in the Deoli camp, recalls the legacy that the Sino-Indian War had for the community,

> This is the legacy of 1962. In every hateful stereotype expressed about one or the other community today, every murderous attack on members of a different religion, every call to go to Pakistan, every unthinking use of words like chinki and kalya, you can trace roots that stretch back half a century to that prison camp. We don't realize, but this is what Deoli has done to us.[94]

[91] The Defence of India Act can be found in https://lddashboard.legislative.gov.in/actsofparliamentfromtheyear/defence-india-act-1962
[92] "Chinese Nationals in Calcutta," 236/1939 (12) (Calcutta), in *Foreigners*, Shakespeare Sarani, Kolkata: West Bengal State Archives, illegible.
[93] The Foreigners Act can be found in https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/The_Registration_of_Foreigners_Act_1939.pdf
[94] Ma and D'Souza, *The Deolliwallahs*, 184.

She connects the rampant proliferation of slurs based on complexion to what she refers to as the legacy of the Sino-Indian War. More than declaring a decisive victory for India or China, the war provided the tools to racially discriminate against an entire community that had been settled in India since 1778.

This development is an example of the "ethnicization of a nation" as coined by Srirupa Roy, where it became possible to use categories of blood and race to determine who belonged to the nation and who did not. This process of identifying the other with respect to such markers expressed itself in violent ways after the Sino-Indian War. Ying Sheng Wong's account in Joy Ma's work explicitly mentions how the train carrying him and other internees to the camp was marked "Enemy Train". He also remembers seeing around two hundred villagers with *chappals* (sandals) in their hands shouting, "Go back, Chinese!".[95] In the interviews made accessible by Kwai-Yun Li's work available online, Ming's account reflects how these categories developed and continued to derive their meaning in civil society based on physical features. Ming, a Canadian resident who was born in Bowbazar Chinatown, remembers the way she was looked at and mocked by her friends in Assam,

> When the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident started, the Assamese shunned us. We became taboo. The Assamese taunted me and all the Chinese, like pulling the corners of their eyes upwards and shouting.Cheena, Cheena, Chin, Chin.. Sometimes they threw stones or rotten vegetables at us and yelled at us to go home. I had to change my route to school. I went through the back alleys and walked really fast. Most of my friends became my tormentors overnight.[96]

Viewed as part of a historical genealogy, we are able to see how the emphasis on Ming's eyes echoes much of what was thought to be the distinguishing features of the Chinese settled in

[95] Ma and D'Souza, *The Deolliwallahs*, 11.
[96] Ming's interview can be found in Yun Li, "Deoli Camp: An Oral History of the Chinese Indians from 1962 to 1966," 30.

Calcutta, especially in Emily Eden's account as well as the illustrated pamphlets handed out to the Allied soldiers.

From the evidence presented, it becomes apparent that similar categories of race defined by phenotypic features were used over a century but with different ends in mind. Race was used to define, identify, and to some extent segregate in the nineteenth century. Through most of Alabaster's and Eden's accounts, we see efforts to establish a stabilized category and ascribe certain meanings to those categories in terms of social attitudes, sanitary conditions, proclivity to gambling, drinking, violence, etc. In the twentieth century, we see the operationalization of those categories to initiate more material forms of exclusion based on incarceration and violence. Violence in this context includes both instances of direct violence but also the violence initiated by the state and its apparatus by radically altering the material conditions of life for the internees at the Deoli camp.

Ying Sheng Wong remembers "It was the most horrible experience of my life. I still remember it as a terrible dream" when he remembers how his family was denied adequate nutrition and health resources when they were in the camp.[97] He remembers how the camp internees had to survive on uncooked rice and burnt vegetables. Wong recounts how dogs around the camp would disappear suddenly and later their bones and skulls would be found in the camp leading to the assumption that the internees had cooked and consumed them. Wong's father died in the camp after he fell seriously ill. The inadequate medical resources extended to the internees explain why Wong saw his father's dead body melting away as there was no ice to preserve the body in the heat of Rajasthan.

Similarly, Yeeva Cheng's account highlights another end for which these categories were used - widespread stigmatization across generations. Yeeva Chang, nineteen at the time when interviewed by Joy Ma recalls that due to her father's experience in the camp, her

[97] Ma and D'Souza, *The Deolliwallahs*, 15.

family was always hesitant to raise the topic and how her father would always weaponize his experience in the camp to admonish them. She remembers "His knowledge about the Camp could be wielded as a weapon ... If they didn't do something right or he didn't like their attitudes, he would remind us how lucky we were, thereby reminding us of what he had to go through at a young age".[98] This weaponization in and of itself would lead to internalization of the status quo by Yeeva Chang as she recalls that even in a school in North Carolina, far away from India, she remembered a certain sense of social hierarchy when she says,

> We carried ourselves very quietly, and if people pushed and bullied us in school, we didn't say anything…It made me aware that there's this delicate balance, of Western values, of speaking up and being vocal, and Eastern ones, of being reflective, of recentering yourself.[99]

Thus we see that the categories devised in the nineteenth century had more material stakes in the twentieth century. The same colonial racial logic that was conceptualized in the nineteenth century was operationalized in the twentieth century. The objective of this racial logic this time was to stigmatize the Chinese community in India, instill fear in them across several generations, deprive their material conditions, and exclude them from the general body politic. What started as a colonial category in the nineteenth century perfected itself as a mechanism of exclusion in the later half of the twentieth century.

Conclusion

In following the trail of evidence presented in this chapter, it becomes clear that over the course of a century, Chinese people became legible to the state when markers on their

[98] Ma and D'Souza, *The Deolliwallahs*, 89.
[99] Ma and D'Souza, *The Deolliwallahs*, 92-93.

bodies were fixed in a normative racial category. The whole range of simultaneous processes that went into the creation of this category and ascribing meaning to it led to the emergence of this material-semiotic identity that was dependent on both the observable differences as well as the ascribed stereotypes for its meaning. This identity was neither fully material nor fully symbolic but co-produced by the attention to phenotypic features and racial reification. The tools for this racial reification differed according to the political context of the time. In the nineteenth century, comparative linguistics and attention to anatomy were used by Alabaster and Eden. During the Second World War, informative graphic strips and intelligence reports institutionalized the standard practice of identifying Chinese migrants by recording their height, complexion, and color of eyes and hair, among other distinctions. During the Sino-Indian War, government policies and the discourses surrounding Chinese migrants in India enabled social stigmatization after the war. For all their efforts, the Intelligence Bureau and the comic strips were unsuccessful in trying to find a way to differentiate the community by restricting their identities to their phenotypic features. Until 1968, the Intelligence Bureau (IB) was tasked with both internal and external intelligence functions. However, deficiencies in its external intelligence capabilities, notably in predicting Chinese movements before the Sino-Indian War of 1962, prompted the establishment of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) in 1968, with a specific mandate for external intelligence.[100]

Representation in popular culture provides an alternative but reflective lens to look at the same developments. *Neel Akasher Niche*, a film directed by Mrinal Sen in 1959, about an honest Chinese hawker Wang Lu, is the first film to be banned in independent India. Recent

[100] For an overview of the development of the Intelligence Bureau in the colonial era as well as the subsequent development of Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) see Shabir Reshi and Seema Dwivedi, "Growth & Development of Intelligence Apparatus during British Colonial Era in India," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* 4, no. 4 (2015): 13–19; Jayshree Bajoria, "RAW: India's External Intelligence Agency," 2008, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/raw-indias-external-intelligence-agency#chapter-title-sup-1.

representations, such as Srijit Mukherjee's 2020 film *Dwitiyo Purush* continue to portray Calcutta's Chinatowns as a place that is gritty, dirty, and infested with crime. Through the evidence analyzed, this chapter argues that these representations including the Covid-19 slur of "Chinese men had come with the Chinese virus" are a part of a historical continuum of the Indian Chinese community being characterized, according to Paul Chung, as "special".

CHAPTER TWO - Food, Medicine, and Dietetics in Calcuttas Chinatown, 1920-1960

Introduction

Physicians must first recognise the causes of an illness and know what transgression of the normal (bodily balance) has taken place. To correct this imbalance, an adequate diet is the first necessity. Only when this has failed should drugs be prescribed

–Cou Xuan[101]

Cou Xuan, a famous Chinese physician of the fourteenth century, believed this to be the guiding principle of Chinese medicine. Dietary interventions superseded pharmacotherapy. The central importance given to food in Chinese culture and medicine has influenced ways of life in both China and elsewhere. In this context, it becomes important to understand how Chinese migrant communities historically adapted themselves to follow or disrupt the conventions surrounding food in Chinese medicinal thought. As migrants who are foreign and different from the majoritarian ethnic or racial community, following traditional Chinese conventions around diet would be a challenge. How then, did they go around feeding themselves in a healthy manner that was believed to ensure longevity in their tradition?

The city of Calcutta and its long history of having Chinese settlements might provide a possible answer. Since 1778, Calcutta has experienced multiple waves of immigration from China, primarily centered around Achipur (a village on the banks of the Hooghly River, approximately thirty kilometers from Calcutta), Tiretti Bazaar, and Tangra. It is important to note that the Chinese community in Calcutta is not homogenous; it comprises various ethnic groups, including Cantonese, Hubeinese, and Hakka Chinese. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these communities lived in segregated neighborhoods and worked in occupations deemed undesirable by caste Hindus and Muslims.[102] Their world was markedly different from that of the British or Indian elites of the time. Even after gaining independence and becoming naturalized citizens, their status did not improve significantly. The Sino-Indian War of 1962 was a pivotal moment that determined their fate. Following this brief conflict,

[101] Quoted in Linda C. Koo, "The Use of Food To Treat and Prevent Disease in Chinese Culture," *Social Science & Medicine* 18, no. 9 (1984), 759.

[102] These jobs would mostly include working with animal skin in the leather tanning industry. For a discussion of how the Chinese in Kolkata navigated these notions of case purity and pollution see Oxfeld, *Blood, Sweat, and Mahjong*, 16.

many members of this community were interned in camps on suspicion of espionage.[103] Despite their eventual release, they continued to face stigmatization, prompting many to relocate to countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United States. Nevertheless, a small number of Chinese-origin individuals remain in Calcutta, primarily in the Chinatowns of Tangra and Tiretti Bazaar.[104]

Suffering from illness is a universal human experience, and the Chinese in Calcutta were not an exception. The working conditions in their factories, the poor sanitation in their neighborhoods, and the climatic conditions of a foreign country made the Chinese in Calcutta particularly vulnerable to diseases. Their socioeconomic status, linguistic barriers, and cultural differences usually inhibited them from accessing biomedical facilities. Consequently, they were compelled to develop an alternative system of therapeutics, not only to cure their ailments but also to minimize visits to local medical facilities. A significant part of this strategy was to eat and drink healthily according to their traditional standards. Dietary modifications ensuring bodily balance, longevity, and wellness were very influential practices in the realm of Traditional Chinese Medicine. The Chinese in Calcutta both drew from these practices as well as pragmatically adapted them to the realities of life in Calcutta. There was no uniformity in this dietary regime; it was personalized to the individual's needs. This meant sourcing foodstuffs encouraged by Chinese traditions, many of which were at odds with the Bengali traditions prevalent in Calcutta. To prioritize their health, Chinese immigrants maintained their own foodways and supply networks to meet the specific needs of their

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[103] For Chinese settlement patterns and occupational niches see Chatterjee, "The Chinese Community of Calcutta: Their Early Settlement and Migration."; Sen and Xing, "The Chinese in South Asia"; Ma and D'Souza, *The Deoli Wallahs*.; and Chatterjee, "The Chinese Community of Calcutta: Their Early Settlement and Migration."; Sen and Xing, "The Chinese in South Asia"; Ma and D'Souza, *The Deoli Wallahs*.; For a historical understanding of the condition of the Indo-Chinese community after the Sino-Indian War of 1962 see Chatterjee, "The Chinese Community of Calcutta: Their Early Settlement and Migration."; Sen and Xing, "The Chinese in South Asia"; Ma and D'Souza, *The Deoli Wallahs*.

[104] Around two thousand people of Chinese origin are reported to be living in Kolkata as of 2023 according to Ramadurai Charukeshi, "India's Disappearing Chinese Community," *BBC*, May 12, 2023, https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20230511-indias-disappearing-chinese-community.

unique diets. These networks would usually be clandestine because they would supply sensitive materials shunned by the Bengali locals such as dog meat, frog meat, liquor, and opium. Furthermore, sourcing and consumption of food, alcohol, and opium were also axes along which community ties were forged and strengthened. The presence of a common medical philosophy in addition to the efforts dedicated to source materials created and sustained relationships among community members.

This chapter aims to analyze how the Chinese community in Calcutta regulated their bodies and diets to prevent and cure diseases. Drawing upon the established conventions of traditional Chinese medicine and adapting it to the phenomenological reality of their settlement in Calcutta, they carved out a unique world of dietetics and therapeutics to carefully navigate around the institutions of biomedicine. In this chapter, I will be analyzing my interviews with a member of the community, past chronicles, and documents from the West Bengal State Archives to show the processes through which the Chinese community of Calcutta established this alternative system of health and wellness. Relying on this system, the Chinese in Calcutta were able to forge a dynamic relationship with biomedicine characterized by opposition, subversion, and appropriation.

Interventions

Food as a category of analysis within the realm of historical inquiries can be beneficial and has been extremely influential since the publication of the Petits Propos Culinaires in 1979. Since then, numerous scholarly works have demonstrated how food not only constituted culture but also religion, gender, and caste.[105] However, many of the

[105] The most recent study on the intersection of caste and food appears in Patole Sahu, *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada*, trans. Bhushan Korgaonkar (India: Harper Collins, 2024); JAYANTA SENGUPTA, "Nation on a Platter: The Culture and Politics of Food and Cuisine in Colonial Bengal," *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 1 (2010): 81–98; Kalyan Das, "To Eat or Not To Eat Beef: Spectres of Food on Bengal's Politics of Identity,"

questions examined by food historians also align with those asked by historians of science and medicine. Historically, science, medicine, and the ideas surrounding them have affected not only what is eaten but also how one eats in a medically sound manner. Juliana Adelman and Lisa Haushofer urge us not to treat food, nourishment, medicine, and science as separate and self-evident categories. Food is usually subjected to a cultural treatment while health is often treated more empirically. Arguing against this tendency, Adelman and Haushofer suggest that the relationship between food, science, and what it means to be healthy is historically constructed.[106]

This chapter seeks to contribute to the relatively limited scholarship on Chinese migration and settlement in Calcutta by specifically expanding how food and culinary practices have been addressed within this body of literature. Zhang Xing, in her article titled "The Bowbazar Chinatown" provides some description and discourses surrounding the restaurants in Calcutta's Chinatowns. She relies on the writing of Bradley Shelland and Tan Yunshan to chart out the establishment of some of the first Chinese restaurants in the city, namely, Canton and Nanking restaurants. She also discusses how Tan Yunshan was critical of Chinese restaurants in Calcutta. Tan Yunshan was an elite in the Chinese migrant community as he was a Chinese scholar. He was instrumental in setting up the Cheena Bhavan in Shantiniketan, a dedicated center for Chinese studies, with the help of Rabindranath Tagore in 1937. According to Xing, "For Tan Yun-shan, the Chinese restaurant

Economic and Political Weekly 50, no. 44 (2015): 105–14.; A good example of historical intersections of food with medicine, nationality, and masculinity can be found in Jayanta Sengupta, "Nation on a Platter: The Culture and Politics of Food and Cuisine in Colonial Bengal," *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 1 (2010): 81–98; For a discussion on how food constitutes communal differences.
see also Sahu, *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada*; SENGUPTA, "Nation on a Platter: The Culture and Politics of Food and Cuisine in Colonial Bengal"; Das, "To Eat or Not To Eat Beef."

[106] See Juliana Adelman and Lisa Haushofer, "Introduction: Food as Medicine, Medicine as Food," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 73, no. 2 (2018): 127–34.

did not represent civilization and distracted people from learning about real Chinese traditions and culture."[107]

In their co-written article titled "The Chinese in South Asia", Tansen Sen and Zhang Xing have traced the evolution and widespread popularity of Chinese restaurants in Calcutta. They claim, "There is little doubt that Chinese restaurants are the most successful and popular Chinese-owned business in Calcutta."[108] The surge in Chinese restaurants in Calcutta was seen with the increased flow of Chinese migrants during the Second World War. Relying on writings by Xuxian Yu's article on the economic activities of overseas Chinese communities, they show that by the Second World War, the city of Calcutta had around 150 Chinese restaurants and teahouses.[109] The Sino-Indian War had a marked impact on Chinese-owned restaurants in Calcutta, as incidents of property vandalism and significant losses in business revenue became the norm following the deportation of members of the Chinese community to the internment camp in Deoli, Rajasthan. However, many restaurants continued operating in many major cities of South Asia, such as Bombay, Karachi, and Calcutta, which led to the popularity of Indo-Chinese cuisine. The authors identify this development as the emergence of an "international brand" which led to the establishment of Indo-Chinese restaurants in Singapore, New York, and Canada.[110]

If Tansen Sen and Zhang Xing's study can be seen to account for the popularity of Chinese restaurants in Calcutta, Ellen Oxfeld in her book, *Blood, Sweat, and Mahjong*, argues in the opposite vein, where she believes that diet was a tool to establish the ethnic boundaries between Bengali locals and Chinese migrants. She argues that Chinese culinary practices, which did not restrict the consumption of beef and pork, stood in contrast to the dietary

[107] Xing, "The Bowbazar Chinatown," 405.
[108] Sen and Xing, "The Chinese in South Asia," 211.
[109] Sen and Xing, "The Chinese in South Asia," 211.
[110] Sen and Xing, "The Chinese in South Asia," 212.

norms of Hindus and Muslims, who abstain from beef and pork, respectively. According to her, this difference in culinary norms, in addition to other ethnic differences, distinguished and later segregated Chinese communities, neighborhoods, and occupational spaces in Calcutta.[111]

These works are crucial in setting the backdrop for the emergence of Chinese restaurants in Calcutta, as well as some of the discourses surrounding the restaurants and Chinese culinary norms. In this context, Tansen Sen's position is particularly striking as he believes that there is a "real Chinese tradition" which did not conform to the embodied and daily practices of sourcing and consuming food in Calcutta's Chinatowns. His critique as an insider of the community, yet materially distant in terms of socio-economic background, shows how Chinese culinary practices were dynamic and constantly evolving from traditional norms. This chapter argues that much of the evolution of culinary practices within the Chinese community in Calcutta was shaped by concerns for health and that this process simultaneously fostered and reinforced intra-community ties. In advancing this argument, the chapter seeks to contribute to existing scholarship by addressing an underexplored area—namely, the intersections between Chinese dietetic traditions and biomedical institutions.

Food and Chinese Medicine: *Qi*, *Yin-Yang*, and Balance

Food and eating habits play a significant role in Chinese healing systems, now categorized under Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Although TCM was later codified by a Western-trained Chinese doctor, this branch of therapeutics has been continuously influenced by various schools of thought such as Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism for over three thousand years. Central to this system are the concepts of *qi*, *yin* and *yang*, and

[111] Oxfeld, *Blood, Sweat, and Mahjong*, 49.

balance. For the purposes of this chapter, these concepts are necessary to understand how people of Chinese origin in the twentieth century, living in Calcutta, thought of and practiced these ancient ideas.

Frugality and moderation in food consumption are highly advocated in Chinese culture and tradition. The general idea was this — to live a healthy life free from illness one should not eat in excess. According to Joanna Waley-Cohen, the medical reasons for enforcing frugality were related to the ideas of *qi* and balance.[112] *Qi* is seen to be the vital energy of the human body, which is a microcosm of the universe consisting of multiple interconnected systems. Internal *qi* (life force or life energy) interacted with external *qi* (atmospheric conditions of cold, warm, hot, windy, dry, and wet) to keep the body in balance. This idea of the body in balance is crucial in Chinese thought and medicine. A person perceiving any disruptions to this balance should immediately address it.

An important element that ensures this bodily balance is the process of food selection which guarantees a balance of the opposing forces of *yin* and *yang* in food. *Yin* corresponds to dark, cooling, feminine energy, while *yang* corresponds to brighter, heating, masculine energy. Consequently, foodstuffs are divided into categories with either heating or cooling qualities. The classification of food into "heating" or "cooling" is based not on the temperature at which these foods are served but on their inherent qualities. Although there is no final consensus on what qualifies as "hot" or "cold" food, there is a general idea that permeated Chinese medical philosophy. Fatty meat like that of mutton or dog, alcoholic drinks, oily nuts, and flavorings like ginger are classified as hot food. Bland vegetables, seafood, and water plants are classified as cold foods. Similarly, methods of cooking such as boiling or seeping in cold water were seen as "cold", while stir-frying, grilling, or roasting

[112] See Joanna Cohen, "The Quest for Perfect Balance : Taste and Gastronomy in Imperial China," in *Food: The History of Taste*, ed. Paul H. Freedman, 1. publ (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007).

were seen as “hot”. To maintain bodily stasis, one should consume food that appropriately mixes “hot” and “cold” elements in terms of ingredients as well as cooking techniques.

Strengthening one's *qi* to nurture and restore the body was the reason why the Chinese have maintained vigilance over dietary balance since ancient times. It is also believed that age affects the levels of *yin* and *yang* in one's body. As a person ages, they become more “cold”, so their diet should include a significant amount of “hot” food to keep their physical energy in balance. Thus, the ideas of *qi*, balance, hot-cold, and *yin-yang* have remained a historically relevant part of Chinese material and cultural life in various forms since antiquity.

Food, Medicine, and Stimulants in the Archive

Food, opium, and illicit liquor figured widely in British writings on Calcutta's Chinatown during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The sources in West Bengal State Archives also emphasize the use, abuse, and circulation of these substances in Calcutta’s Chinatown. The British writings relevant to this section of the chapter were produced within the broader context of a colonial effort to observe, categorize, and render colonized societies legible, which were perceived as inferior to Western societies. The language used in these writings served as a tool to disseminate colonial knowledge and establish power hierarchies between the colonized and the colonizer. In this process of codifying knowledge about native societies, anything categorized as the “other” to Western sensibilities was either exoticized or castigated. This resulted in a “war of imperial categories” that suppressed indigenous epistemologies.[113]

[113] For a discussion on colonial efforts to produce knowledge about native societies see Bernard S. Cohn, “The Command of Language and The Language of Command,” in *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, The British in India (Princeton University Press, 1996), 16–56, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1h9dgs1.6; Also see Cohn, “THE COMMAND OF LANGUAGE AND THE LANGUAGE OF COMMAND”; Lal, *Empire of Knowledge*.

This was also the time when British perspectives on health, hygiene, and sanitation were being mapped on the racially segregated "black" and "white" towns of Calcutta. The Fever Committee and its recommendations led to the production of health maps and reports which reflected the British government's concerns for clean sanitary conditions of the city and the health of its British inhabitants. Observations by surgeons like Sir James Renald Martin and discussions by Richard Wellesley, the first Governor-General of India, conveyed the perspective that the native "black" towns were dirty, smelly, disorganized, and overcrowded. The cleanliness of these towns, or lack thereof, was directly linked to the moral cleanliness of their inhabitants. Thus, any progress was thought to begin with ordering and educating the native populations. Calcutta's Chinatown, located in the northern part of the city near Bowbazar, was considered part of the native "black" towns and exhibited all the characteristic features of such areas as imagined by colonial officials. Observers like Bradley Shelland and Augustus Somerville were suspicious of the food, opium, and liquor that circulated in this neighborhood. The suspicion and surveillance of these "dirty" and, by extension, "unhealthy" materials continued under the post-colonial state of India.[114]

Bradley Shelland was a British diplomat who wrote extensively about his travels in India, Persia, and the Middle East. He wrote a glaring description of Calcutta's Chinatown in the 1924 edition of the Cornhill Magazine. In this chronicle, Shelland, like most European observers, expressed his innate fascination with Chinatown and how different it was from both the European and Indian worlds that he had witnessed up until that point in his life. He

[114] For a discussion on British perspectives of health, hygiene, and sanitation see Swati Chattopadhyay, "Blurring Boundaries: The Limits of 'White Town' in Colonial Calcutta," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 59, no. 2 (2000): 154–79, https://doi.org/10.2307/991588; MARTIN BEATTIE, "Colonial Space: Health and Modernity in Barabazaar, Kolkata," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 14, no. 2 (2003): 7–19. Also see Chattopadhyay, "Blurring Boundaries: The Limits of 'White Town' in Colonial Calcutta"; BEATTIE, "Colonial Space: Health and Modernity in Barabazaar, Kolkata."

was in charge of licensing the Chinese restaurants which brought him to visit two very established restaurants in Chinatown — Canton and Chung Wah.[115]

Shelland mentions that these two restaurants were the only ones in Chinatown that had the license to sell liquor. The restaurant he was about to inspect would be the third if they were fortunate to get a license. The license fees for these restaurants were set at three hundred rupees a year. However, Shelland indicates that from the following year, pricing would be based on the amount of liquor sold in these establishments - "two annas every quart bottle of wine or spirits and two pice on beer".[116] A few possibilities emerge here. Perhaps, the restaurants were applying for a renewed liquor license to attract a larger clientele. Perhaps, the colonial administration was suspicious about the networks of clandestine liquor distribution systems within the neighborhood. Shelland is clear when he says "No liquor can be sold or taken away to be consumed off the premises".[117] Intelligence Branch files kept at the West Bengal State Archives mention numerous incidents of liquor raids and issued lookout notices for people selling illicit liquor as late as 1944.[118] These lookout notices were circulated by the policing authorities of the colonial and post-colonial governments to search for absconding criminals.

The manager of Canton restaurant had promised a night of exotic revelries to Shelland and his friend. Shelland and his friend were specific that they would only want authentic Chinese food and the manager had taken up the challenge. They were first served Chinese tea, followed by a seven-course Chinese meal, a tasting session of local Chinese liquor, and finally, a tour of the infamous opium dens in the neighborhood. This was the meal they were served in Canton Restaurant :

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[115] See Shelland, "Calcutta's Chinatown."
[116] Shelland, "Calcutta's Chinatown," 278.
[117] Shelland, "Calcutta's Chinatown," 278.
[118] "Chinese Nationals, Jalpaiguri," 236/1939(12) (Jalpaiguri), in *Foreigners*, Shakespeare Sarani, Kolkata: West Bengal State Archives.

Bird’s nest soup.
Mavi fish,
Prawns with mushrooms.
Flesh with shark’s fins.
Chinese curry.
Pudding.
Eggs (seven years old)[119]

Most of these dishes have been in the Chinese culinary repertoire since the late eighteenth century. Writing during this time, Yuan Mei, a Qing dynasty poet, frequently mentions dishes involving shark fin and bird's nest.[120] In traditional Chinese medicinal thought, shark fin was seen as a strengthening food due to its rich protein and mineral content. Bird's nest soup was believed to possess properties that could prevent aging and alleviate conditions such as stomach ailments and asthma, while also enhancing physical strength, metabolic function, and libido.

The food preparations served to Shelland were not regular staples in a Chinese household. Elites in Qing China historically ate bird's nest soup and shark fin for their health benefits. Bird’s nest soup and shark fin were believed to aid in strength, stamina, and longevity. The manager at Canton restaurant was acutely aware of his societal position in relation to Shelland’s. To navigate this dynamic, he designed a menu that embodied the grandeur of Chinese cuisine, fit for royalty, while subtly incorporating a touch of Britishness—adding pudding—to cater to the taste of the officer responsible for approving his business license. Notwithstanding how he crafted his menu, the manager at Canton restaurant chose food inherently linked with therapeutic value.

Writing in 1929, Augustus Somerville, the then Commissioner of Police, is also besotted by the “Chow-shops” and “Chop-shops” of Chinatown. These spaces were both a

[119] Shelland, “Calcutta’s Chinatown,” 281.
[120] See M. Yuan, S.J.S. Chen, and N. Mones, *The Way of Eating: Yuan Mei’s Manual of Gastronomy* (Berkshire Publishing Group, 2018), https://books.google.com/books?id=uCP1vQEACAAJ.

restaurant and saloon which Somerville considered "neither pleasant to remain nor safe to be too curious".[121] He could have very well been articulating the suspicions felt by the colonial government. His own Christian biases that dominate his understanding of Calcutta's Chinatown are mentioned early on in his account when he says:

> I am no evangelist but I do honestly believe, that a little more Christian fortitude and forbearance on both sides, a little more love and a spirit of intellectual brotherhood, would do much to mitigate many of the evils, religious, social and domestic[122]

It is very clear from Shelland's and Sommerville's accounts that they were bringing their understandings of consumption, moral decay, and degeneracy which were linked to both the health and hygiene of the individual as well as the nation.[123] Addiction was thus characterized as a hereditary condition that was both a disease as well as a vice.[124] Shelland, for example, cannot imagine how "the gambling den (where opium was often consumed) and the Chinese church live under the same roof".[125] Sommerville goes up to the extent of categorizing the opium dens that existed in Calcutta into "two distinct classes". The "opium den proper" was the secretive space where opium smoking was seriously pursued without any distractions. The other class of opium dens catered to a wider non-Chinese clientele and often "combined brothels, drinking saloons and gambling dens".[126]

Both these accounts were deploying and building on the stereotype of the classic Chinese opium fiend who was an emaciated and pathetic degenerate. These stereotypes

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[121] See Somerville, *Crime and Religious Beliefs in India*.
[122] Somerville, *Crime and Religious Beliefs in India*, v.
[123] For a discussion of how this worldview came in conflict with traditional Chinese ideas of hygiene see Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China*, Asia: Local Studies / Global Themes 9 (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 2014).
[124] See Louise Foxcroft, *The Making of Addiction: The "Use and Abuse" of Opium in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, First issued in paperback, The History of Medicine in Context (London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017).
[125] Shelland, "Calcutta's Chinatown," 284.
[126] Somerville, *Crime and Religious Beliefs in India*, 124.

largely developed out of xenophobic reactions to Chinese communities during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries influenced by social Darwinism.[127] These mental images conjured up by literary and journalistic depictions cemented the correlation between Chinese people and degeneracy. Writing during the late nineteenth century, Charles Dickens describes a woman in London who had consumed opium to an extent that she was comparable to a "Chinaman".[128] Vestiges of these stereotypes tainted the understanding of both Shelland and Somerville. However, both accounts express immense surprise when they witnessed that opium smokers in reality were quite calm and not prone to habits and actions which might indicate degeneracy. Somerville mentions "The Chinaman in Calcutta takes his opium like a gentleman".[129] Likewise, Shelland also remarks "There is nothing in their faces to mark them as opium fiends. In fact, it would be wrong to term them as opium fiends at all. They are just tired and weary Chinamen seeking sleep and dreams after a hard day's work".[130]

Consumption of opium was very common in Calcutta's Chinatown in the early twentieth century. Both Shelland and Somerville mention the existence of opium dens. They were usually dimly lit and illuminated by oil lamps. The opium dens would provide their patrons with pipes, opium, and a little corner where they could consume it. The pipes were a foot and a half long with a small bowl at the end. The keeper at the den would stuff it with opium and the smoker would light it up beside an oil lamp. There was not much attention paid to luxury however there would be instances where the opium dens would provide some

[127] For a discussion on alternative medical usage of opium and how they were affected by these stereotypes in Late Imperial China see R. K. Newman, "Opium Smoking in Late Imperial China: A Reconsideration," *Modern Asian Studies* 29, no. 4 (1995): 765–94.
[128] Charles Dickens 1812-1870, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (London : Chapman and Hall, 1870., 1870), 3, https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9910138990302121.
[129] Somerville, *Crime and Religious Beliefs in India*, 37.
[130] Shelland, "Calcutta's Chinatown," 285.

kind of a pillow. These spaces were usually calm and not prone to violence or disturbances.[131]

Opium smoking was a common feature of Chinese social, recreational, and medical lives despite the restrictions taken against it in China, and in all possibility, these habits were also prevalent in Calcutta's Chinatowns.[132] All opium smokers were not prone to addiction and degeneracy. There were many light and moderate users of opium in China. Opium is considered to be the world's oldest painkiller and poppy seeds have been a part of Chinese pharmacopeia since the tenth century.[133] Since then, opium has been widely used for regulating bowel syndromes or relieving pain. It was also recommended by doctors as per a 1910 report.[134] Thus, it was not at all unusual for someone to consume opium to relieve bodily aches after a hard day's labor. In fact, the person who first shows Somerville the existence of the clandestine "opium den proper" was a Chinese laborer, an old carpenter named Ah Hing.

Opium was indeed consumed recreationally by Chinese merchants, traders, and segments of the youth population. However, this tacit fascination as well as suspicion over opium usage is also evident in the archives before and after 1947. The records mention one Chang Ye who had an opium den in Nanking Gully, Calcutta in 1947 and got supplies from an Indian vendor from French Chandernagore for five rupees per "tola" (about eleven grams) of opium. Even though he does mention the sale of opium openly in Chandernagore, Chang admits that it was "difficult to take the opium into British India evading the Excise people".[135] Thus, the use and circulation of opium were prevalent in Calcutta's Chinatowns,

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[131] Shelland, "Calcutta's Chinatown," 284-285.
[132] Newman, "Opium Smoking in Late Imperial China: A Reconsideration," 777.
[133] Newman, "Opium Smoking in Late Imperial China: A Reconsideration," 775.
[134] See W. Hamilton Jefferys and James L. Maxwell, *The Diseases of China, Including Formosa and Korea* (Philadelphia: P. Blakiston's Son & Co., 1910).
[135] "Chinese Nationals in Calcutta," 16.

frequently drawing significant scrutiny from British observers during the colonial period and from Indian authorities after 1947.

Along with opium, illicit liquor was also subjected to suspicion, and its circulation was heavily monitored. The Chinatowns around Bowbazar and Tangra were home to numerous local Chinese distillers who produced their own liquor and sold it to patrons. The markets for this liquor extended beyond Calcutta to places such as Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Benaras. Often, these distillers were members of clubs that oversaw the distillation and circulation of illicit liquor. The archives describe numerous interactions between Indian authorities and these distillers, who were sometimes apprehended and at other times managed to evade capture. As early as 1944 a certain Ma Kuan Hisen was fermenting liquor in 83, Phears Lane and refused to share her expertise with others.[136] The surveillance reports also provide details about a woman residing in Tangra by the name of Ku Chang Pan Hsiang who was convicted five times within a year in 1950 for her activities as a key member of a liquor club named "Iron Blood League". Along with her accomplices and lovers named Chung Ah Shee and Chung Kuan Ivge, she would either carry up to "8 gallons of illicitly distilled [liquor] in a rickshaw" or at other times she would carry fermented wash on a boat to make liquor around midnight.[137] There were others too who aided this network of illicit liquor markets around Calcutta, Darjeeling, and Benaras like Liao Wang and Yu King Tuck.[138] Yu King Tuck was infamous for evading authorities and continuously shifting his base of operations between Kalimpong and Darjeeling while suddenly reappearing at places like the Pasang Buildings in Benaras which was "a well known residence of Chinese who were suspected to be carrying on an illicit trade in foreign liquor".[139] Similar to opium, the

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[136] "Chinese Nationals, Jalpaiguri," illegible.
[137] "Chinese Nationals in 24 Parganas," 236/1939 (12) (24 Parganas), in *Foreigners*, Shakespeare Sarani, Kolkata: West Bengal State Archives, 357.
[138] Liao Wang is mentioned in "Chinese Nationals, Jalpaiguri," illegible; while Yu King Tuck is mentioned in "Chinese Nationals in Darjeeling," 565.
[139] "Chinese Nationals in Darjeeling," 565.

consumption and circulation of illicit liquor was also monitored by British and Indian authorities.

The sale and consumption of illicit liquor and opium among the Chinese community in Calcutta undoubtedly had a recreational aspect. However, the intense surveillance and policing of these networks should not imply that their use was solely for recreational purposes or for altering mental states. Opium, alcohol as well as alcoholic tonics in the form of extracts and wines were major constituents of Chinese *materia medica*.[140]Alcohol was seen to be a "hot" substance which was consumed when the body became "cold" to achieve balance. The Western biomedical worldview along with the moralities attached to addiction and degeneracy could not accommodate the possibility of an alternative branch of therapeutics where these drugs and tonics would be used in moderate amounts to cure the body.

The tension between these two worldviews is further illustrated by the presence of numerous Chinese eateries, tea shops, and hawkers that were popular in the neighborhood. These alternative spaces of nourishment were characteristic of Calcutta's Chinatown. Chinese eating houses served nourishing food, local community members often sold homemade dishes as food hawkers, and herbal tea shops offering Chinese medicinal teas were also very common. Tsao Hsueh Fu is one of the few individuals from the community whose personal comments survive in the archives. After being arrested for having no passports or registration certificates, he confessed that he was a cook in the Chinese Middle School in Calcutta in the early 1940s after escaping military conscription. He continued cooking for children in the school until 1950 after which he became a Chinese food hawker in Chinatown.[141] From his account, it seems like many others like him catered to the community by providing food that

[140] See Linda C. Koo, "The Use of Food To Treat and Prevent Disease in Chinese Culture," *Social Science & Medicine* 18, no. 9 (1984): 757, https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(84)90102-3.
[141] "Chinese Nationals in Calcutta," illegible.

was believed to be healthy like Tai Sung Fuang who had a famous eatery by the name of Santung Restaurant in Chinatown around the same time.[142] Herbal tea shops like that of Tien Jan Tea Shop at Phears Lane, Calcutta also make their presence known through the testimonies of people like Chen Chin Chung.[143]

Elements of communal affection and care like the alternative spaces of nourishment contributed significantly to the health and wellness of the community. However, networks of support and care took different forms as well. An illustration of this is the case of Fu Mei Chang who escaped to Calcutta after serving in the Chinese army in Burma during the Second World War. During his interrogation, he mentions that he was injured by a bullet on his left forearm. This injury kept him for two months in the army hospital. Upon his release, however, many members of the Chinese community in Calcutta came forward to help this man whom they regarded as one of their own. His friend, Yeung Hun-Chun provided him with sixty rupees and lodging while other members of the community provided him with food until he was able to look for jobs in Ramgarh. Even in his interrogation, he stated, "I was going to Ramgarh with a sum of Rs. 213/- collected from the chinese community in Calcutta for the expenses to be incurred".[144] Thus, networks of kinship, solidarity, and support in addition to the alternative spaces of nourishment aided the health and wellness of the Chinese community of Calcutta.

Practical Pluralities: Strategically Engaging with Biomedicine

[142] "Chinese Nationals in Burdwan," 236/1939 (12) (Burdwan), in *Foreigner*, Shakespeare Sarani, Kolkata: West Bengal State Archives, 31.
[143] "Chinese Nationals in Darjeeling," 565.
[144] "Chinese Nationals," 236/1939 (12) (Midnapore), in *Foreigner*, Shakespeare Sarani: West Bengal State Archives, 19.

The evidence analyzed so far might suggest that the Chinese residing in Calcutta resisted biomedicine, ignored its existence, or had limited interactions with it. However, the Chinese community of Calcutta was consistently engaged in a dialogue with biomedicine. They often interacted with biomedical facilities and infrastructure under certain conditions, keeping their interests in mind. Hospitals, doctors, and post-mortem examinations were commonly utilized but with different purposes in mind. These institutions and their practices were sometimes used for healing, while at other times, they addressed injustices against the community or facilitated safe escape routes to Calcutta. During the Second World War, Calcutta became a crucial refuge for Chinese individuals avoiding military conscription due to its substantial Chinese population and the presence of Chinese associations and support groups that safeguarded their interests.

An example of these hybrid practices can be found in the cases of Liu Hsin Yin and Tsao Hsue Fu. Both these individuals were conscripted from the Sichuan province of China and received their military training in Kunming to serve in the Second World War. Tsao Hsue Fu was stationed at Dibrugarh, Assam, while it is not known where Liu Hsin Yin was stationed. What they had in common, however, is that both Liu Hsin Yin and Tso Hsue Fu spent considerable time in a British military hospital recuperating and recovering. Tsao Hsue Fu spent two months in a hospital he did not remember when he fell sick. Liu Hsin Yin was transferred to multiple hospitals over a period of three months. The exact reason as to why Liu Hsin Yin was in the hospital is unknown. However, both individuals were able to utilize the institutions of biomedicine to recover from injuries and then escape from the hospitals to take refuge in Calcutta, the nearest place with a substantial Chinese population, to avoid military conscription. Thus, Chinese people who settled in Calcutta not only strategically

interacted with biomedical institutions but also abandoned them when necessary, according to their interests.[145]

The interaction with biomedicine varied among individuals. While Tsao Hsue Fu and Liu Hsin Yin were fortunate to benefit from it, the same cannot be said for Liao Wang's wife, who is referred to merely as a "Chinese Woman in Dhapa" in the Intelligence Bureau files.[146] On the night of October 24, 1949, Liao Wang's house was raided by a dozen armed men from the Excise Department for illicit liquor. During the raid, one of the armed men struck his wife on the head with the butt of a gun after she allegedly uttered "some rude words" to him, according to the officer's testimony. Consequently, she fell unconscious, and her neighbors rushed her to a hospital where she eventually died. Enraged by this brazen act of violence, the Chinese Association (Lan Hup Fei) took legal action against the perpetrator.

Eventually, the entire strength of the community was mustered to seek justice for her. Young men and women spoke to the press, and the senior members arranged for the services of two doctors to conduct a thorough post-mortem examination. This post-mortem examination was crucial because the Excise Department claimed that Liao Wang's wife had died after she carelessly slipped and fell on the ground. However, the post-mortem examination revealed that she died due to severe head injuries. In this instance, the institutional practices of biomedicine, along with significant community support, were invoked to bring justice to Liao Wang's wife and hold the authorities accountable for their violence.

The case of Liao Wang's wife suggests that the Chinese in Calcutta were not strictly opposed to the institutions and practices of Western biomedicine but they carefully and strategically maneuvered around them, keeping their interests in mind. Western biomedicine

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[145] Tsao Hsue Fu's case can be found in "Chinese Nationals in Calcutta," illegible; while Liu Hsin Yin's case can be found in "Chinese Nationals in Darjeeling," 553.
[146] See "Chinese Nationals in 24 Parganas," 252.

and its apparatus were utilized not only to cure an individual but also to address asymmetrical power relations between the members of the Chinese community and the state, including its policing and legal apparatus. In the case of Tsao Hsue Fu and Liu Hsin Yin, a hospital became a site for both physical recovery and then escape from military conscription. In the case of Liao Wang's wife, medical professionals, and post-mortem examinations were strategically employed to strengthen the community's position in its interactions with the Excise Department. Thus, the interactions between the Chinese living in Calcutta and institutionalized biomedicine were characterized by opposition, subversion, as well as appropriation.

Food, Medicine, and Stimulants in Memory

Traditional archives are political in their organization of knowledge and establishment of truth claims, reflecting state interests. A cursory glance over the "Chinese Nationals" and "Foreigners" files at the West Bengal State Archives reveals that both colonial and post-colonial governments aimed to produce knowledge about the Chinese community that facilitated their isolation, categorization, and control. Chinese experiences, perspectives, and traditions are largely absent from these documents, except in rare instances of recorded direct speech, often obtained through coercive interrogations. Relying solely on these archives limits the understanding of Chinese life in Calcutta. Incorporating oral histories and memories creates a significant alternative archive for this chapter, aligning with China-India methodologies that transcend state-maintained temporalities and archives. My conversations with an older Chinese community member in the city reveal how his life intersected with traditional archival observations and events. For this chapter, oral histories are crucial as they demonstrate cultural adaptability in dietary and therapeutic practices over time.

Tony Lo, a man in his seventies, is the secretary of the Nam Soon Church in Calcutta's Old Chinatown. He looks after the church as well as the school attached to it in Damzen Lane, Kolkata. He has a daughter who is a housewife and a son who is currently settled in Canada. Tony was very generous to grant me an interview after my first visit to Nam Soon Church. As soon as I reached Nam Soon on a sunny afternoon, Tony welcomed me into the central social space (Hui Gang) of Nam Soon. This space, just like the church and cemetery dedicated to the church, is a cardinal element in any Chinese social or cultural institution in Calcutta. Hui Gangs are presently used for celebrations, drinking, playing mahjong, and general meetings but in the past, they were used to resolve conflict among the members of the community in addition to addressing concerns that people faced.

Speaking about his personal history, Tony Lo told me that his parents first arrived in Calcutta from the Guangdong district. His father was a carpenter his whole life and wanted Tony to become one too. This holds true for a lot of Chinese ethnic groups who carved out an existence as practitioners. The immigrants from Hubei were generational practitioners of dentistry while the Hakka Chinese were into the tannery business before they got into the restaurant business.[147] Tony's case, however, was different. After a few years of working as a carpenter, he found the job to be too laborious. Thus, he shifted his occupation to working as a cook in restaurants and continued doing so for the next forty years. Maybe this was the reason why he spoke so clearly and evocatively about food and what meaning it had for him in his memory.

Among his earliest memories, Tony remembers his mother taking very basic vegetables and turning them into something delicious for the various rituals and celebrations that used to happen in the church. Since his childhood, Tony recalls how both the food that was made in his house as well as the food offered at community gatherings were thought to

[147] For more details on Chinese occupational niches in Calcutta see Sen and Xing, "The Chinese in South Asia".

have medicinal properties. On asking why he thought that was the case, Tony remarked *"Chinese food mein sab cheez ka limit hai"* (Everything has its limit in Chinese food), by this he broadly indicated how the element of bodily balance was integral to the Chinese food that was cooked for consumption in the domestic realm as well in larger community gatherings.[148] Talking about the simplicity of Chinese food, Tony mentioned an archetype of a staple dish to me - a source of meat like chicken or fish, cooked in a broth, thickened with corn flour and seasoned with ginger, white soy sauce, sugar, and salt. This is very different from the commercial Indo-Chinese food cooked by Chinese families and chefs for Indian patrons. These dishes are usually deep-fried, heavily spiced, and tossed in a combination of sauces.

The archetype of a staple dish according to Tony and the commercial Indo-Chinese food reveals a few interesting things about how food figured among the numerous Chinese communities that settled in Calcutta. What food was made and for whom it was made determined if it would have medicinal properties. Yi Yin, a slave cook who later became the prime minister of the Shang dynasty in the second millennium BCE, is seen to be the ancestor of all Chinese chefs. According to him, cooking to achieve balance in food could be done by transforming ordinary ingredients into something "not excessively sweet or sour, lightly flavored but not tasteless, tasting of fat but not greasy in the mouth".[149] Tony's memory of a staple dish as made by his mother fits directly into the categories of Yi Yin. It is neither overtly "hot" nor "cool" according to the principles of *yin* and *yang*. The broth he remembers contains fats from the chicken or fish but is not greasy to taste. It most definitely is lightly flavored without the use of chilies, peppers, oils, or spices. Whatever amount of saltiness is added by the soy sauce is countered by the sugar to create a dish that mixes harmoniously in a bowl ensuring perfect balance, wellness, and longevity.

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[148] Tony Lo, interviewed by Rishav Chatterjee, August 7, 2024.
[149] Cohen, "The Quest for Perfect Balance: Taste and Gastronomy in Imperial China," 95.

In opposition to Tony's chicken or fish broth stands chilly chicken – an archetype of commercial Indo-Chinese food sold in most Chinese-owned restaurants and eateries in Calcutta, some of which are more than a hundred years old. It is made using chicken thighs, a fattier piece of meat, which is usually deep fried, before tossing in chilies and a myriad of sauces. Everything about this dish makes it adhere more towards the category of "hot" foods which would most definitely disrupt any sort of bodily balance that was envisioned in traditional Chinese medical thought. Family-owned restaurants located near Tony's house and Nam Soon Church serve chili chicken, a dish that enjoys significant popularity among their clientele. In all likelihood, Tony would find the typical chilly chicken to be entirely incompatible with Chinese cuisine that incorporated medicinal elements. The average clientele at a family-owned Chinese restaurant would likely perceive Tony's humble chicken broth as incompatible with their expectations of Chinese cuisine. This divergence stems from Tony's incorporation of medicinal principles in his cooking, a practice that is generally absent in the culinary framework of commercial restaurants. It should be mentioned that these contemporary commercial restaurants are very different from Somerville's "Chow-Shops" or the restaurants mentioned by Shelland which were mostly Chinese eateries serving food to the local population. Thus, the ends for which food was prepared would dictate how healthy it was.

The simple food described by Tony was seen to be healthy, had medicinal value, was said to increase lifespan, and for more practical purposes, helped in saving money by avoiding expenses at the clinic or the pharmacy. He also stressed the elements of balance and "limits" in cooking one's food as well as eating it. This balance would be achieved by mixing "hot" and "cold" food preparations in appropriate quantities to maintain bodily equilibrium. Food prepared in commercial establishments has no obligation to adhere to these standards of

health and dietetics. The purpose of creating them was to appeal to the Indian palate and be commercially viable not prevent diseases or ensure longevity.

In the context of the humid coastal summers of Calcutta, disruptions to the notion of bodily stasis through dehydration and indigestion were plenty. High temperatures and humidity would affect most Chinese families in Calcutta causing dehydration, indigestion, and "heating" of the body according to traditional Chinese medical conceptions. Tony recalls a home remedy from his childhood for these issues: *shiuli* flowers (Aethusa Cynapium) were dried, boiled, and strained to create a tea-like mixture. This remedy was used for indigestion, including loose motion and blood in stool. They stored this mixture in large quantities for year-round use, mixing it with barley in summer to cool the body and soothe the stomach. Maintaining bodily stasis through food and beverages was crucial for the Chinese community in Calcutta.

There are also other alternative ways in which drinks, beverages, and specifically alcohol figured within the community. Talking about the Chinese bone-setters who were found in quite large numbers around the neighborhood, Tony remembers that they used to mix a composition of powdered material with liquor and apply it to the place of injury before wrapping the area up to hold the bone in place. The powdered material later became the commercialized and widely available *Hung Fayo* and the alcohol used in most cases was rum and whiskey, which would be available at the house. During winter months, whooping cough used to be a serious problem for the elderly in the neighborhood. Tony's memories were sketchy at that point but he did remember vividly the elderlies around him mixing some medicine with commercially available liquor and drinking them when the whooping cough used to act up. In this case, alcohol, which falls in the "hot" category of food, would be administered to achieve balance in the body during colder months.

Looking at the world of teas made from flowers and alcoholic tonics derived from medicines reveals an entire realm of competing local claims and authority over what constitutes medicine. Even the Chinese medicine shops which were very popular among the locals did not have any standardized compositions or formulas. In my interview, I was told that as many as three Chinese medicine shops were present in the neighborhood. During his childhood, Tony remembered going up to the counter at these medicine shops and telling the person about his illness. After that, the person behind the counter would measure out ingredients and herbs before packing them up. These recipes of the kitchen and the medicine shops were never standardized and they all existed with minor variations in every household to deal with the changing weather and shifting balance of the body.

One of the most notable revelations that emerged during our discussions was the existence of clandestine supply networks for procuring meat deemed beneficial to health. There was a tradition of sourcing and consuming animal flesh that was usually stigmatized by Bengalis and other non-Chinese ethnic groups in Calcutta like dog and frog meat. Tony remembers hearing from his parents the practice of cooking frog legs with garlic in a Chinese curry for babies who used to urinate a lot. Tony also mentions the practice of eating dog meat around Tangra during the winter months to regulate body temperatures. The habit of consuming these meats for their health benefits was quite common among the members of the community.

At one point in our conversation, Tony remembered Chinese boys and girls running around Tangra during the peak winter months without any warm clothes during his childhood years. He asked me whether I could explain why that was the case. I surrendered and asked him to provide his explanation which illuminated another important aspect of Chinese life in Calcutta. Tony proceeded to tell me that there was an entire clandestine market for selling dog meat in Tangra. These markets would only operate during the winter months and sell the

meat of dogs who were not more than twenty days old. These markets would operate to supply dog meat for the sole reason of providing bodily warmth for older and younger members of the community. The Chinese living in Calcutta then were aware of the attitudes that surrounded the consumption of dog meat and would often pass it off as mutton or beef before serving it. The reasons for consuming dog meat were many according to Tony. They would regulate body temperature, reduce the necessity of visiting clinics as well as prevent expenditures on warm clothes in the colder months. This is why he believed that those boys and girls in Tangra could survive the winter months without warm clothes.

Conclusion

The world of Chinese medicine and curative foodstuffs available for consumption in Calcutta was very unregulated and personalized. People had to often rely on local claims of authority and systems of knowledge to cure themselves. This would also lead to the circulation of materials considered healthy by the community but stigmatized by outsiders. During the early twentieth century, these were the opium dens that figure so widely in Sommerville's and Shelland's accounts. After 1947, this attention shifted towards the supply lines of illicit liquor along with opium. Finally, as per Tony's recollections, a similar network was set up to supply dog meat until the 1960s. Thus, historically, the Chinese living in Calcutta paid attention to materials that they believed to be healthy and in doing so they forged communities around these materials which is apparent in the case of the numerous opium dens, liquor clubs, and Chinese eating houses discussed in this chapter. They went to great extent to set up local supply chains for their circulation. Faith in foodstuffs like dog meat, opium, or illicit liquor and their ability to cure individuals was integral to the establishment of these networks. Communal networks of care were also equally important for aiding health and wellness. Tony's memories highlight health-focused cooking practices for

both the household and the community. The archives also mention instances of friends and family supporting each other along with the existence of alternative spaces for nourishment. However, the attention to faith, care, affect, and conventions of Chinese medical thought did not isolate the Chinese living in Calcutta from the institutions of biomedicine. Interaction with biomedicine was strategically planned to address both individual health and broader community challenges.

When the Chinese first arrived in Calcutta they brought their own understanding of health and wellness. This worldview often came in conflict with the dominant biomedical worldviews of the colonial administration and later the post-colonial Indian state. As a result of these tensions, traditional practices often either resisted dominant biomedical attitudes or appropriated them when necessary. These tensions were instrumental in establishing and giving way to a more hybridized therapeutic approach that opposed, subverted as well as adapted biomedical practices with traditional ones.

CHAPTER 3 - Chinese Migrant Dentistry in Transition, 1930-1960

Introduction

Dr. Mao Chi Wei is a man in his seventies who is perhaps the oldest practicing dentist in Calcutta's Chinatown. His clinic can be found on the busy street of Chittaranjan Avenue, among numerous shops butchering meat and small pharmacies selling medicine. Dr. Mao's present clinic on Chittaranjan Avenue has witnessed both his and his father's professional journeys. It has been the space where both Indian and Chinese-origin patrons have come to

make dentures, remove teeth, and receive topical worm treatment. Dr. Mao still attends to patients coming from a variety of social backgrounds. His clinic is not located in a particularly affluent neighborhood in Calcutta, which is why Dr. Mao and his assistant provide affordable service to people residing near Chittaranjan Avenue.

When I first visited Dr. Mao's clinic, I was particularly struck by what it was trying to convey to its patrons. At the entrance of the clinic as well as the seating area, one can find the flag of the Indian state peeking through an elaborate collection of Chinese proverbs and deities. The juxtaposition of the flag with Chinese deities communicates an effort to pass off as "Indian" and, by extension, "authentic". In the context of medical clinics, being "authentic" and "legitimate" is crucial because they highlight the doctor's credentials and the legitimacy of the services he provides. In Dr. Mao's clinic, this is evident through the display of the Indian flag as well as the "B.D.S. (KOL)" (Bachelor of Dental Surgery) to reiterate that he is Indian as well as qualified to treat people. This observation echoes the analysis of South Asian scholars who argue that institutions and professions of science and medicine became tools to claim legitimacy, modernity, and rationality in post-colonial India.[150]

The story of numerous Chinese-owned dental clinics in Calcutta, such as Dr. Mao's, is one of migration, aspiration, and adaptation. Chinese dentists from the province of Hubei first arrived in the city of Calcutta in the 1920s. They picked up knowledge of treating teeth on their journey and passed off this knowledge to the next generation. It is through the dissemination of this generational knowledge that the Chinese dentists in Calcutta were able to establish their professional niche. In the early years, they were able to set up highly mobile

[150] See Itty Abraham, ed., *South Asian Cultures of the Bomb: Atomic Publics and the State in India and Pakistan* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason* (Princeton University Press, 1999), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv10h9d8. Sankaran Krishna's chapter in Abraham's edited volume suggests that the fascination towards scientific and technological innovations such as nuclear weapons reflects the desire of the Indian middle class to be recognized at the global level. Gyan Prakash in his book argues that adapting to and modfifying western science was very important for anti-colonial nationalism as well as the independent nation-state of India to lay claims to modernity and rationality.

practices with rudimentary tools as they peddled their services in both the urban center of Calcutta and its peripheral districts. They were not degree-holders, nor were they formerly trained, but their practice soon became extremely popular. This unregulated and personalized practice of the Hubei Chinese dentist underwent significant transformations after the passage of the Dentists Act in 1948. This Act required dental clinics to be approved by the health department or a hospital with a dentistry wing. Consequently, the next generation of Chinese dentists had to acquire B.D.S. degrees from dental schools. As a result of this, they were able to successfully blend institutional as well as generational knowledge and practices to continue their practice.

The practice of Chinese dentistry, when analyzed historically, appears to be a hybrid category by itself. It was neither originally aligned with Western biomedicine nor did it develop along the lines of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Dr Mao categorically denied Chinese dentistry being influenced by TCM as the practice developed primarily outside China. Dr. Ronnie Lee, who has his practice in Bhawanipore, Calcutta, also agrees. The practice of Chinese dentistry however shares quite a lot of resemblance to the categories of "subaltern therapeutics", the branch of medical practices and tools that developed in resistance to or in subversion of the State, to cater to marginalized communities that were chronically excluded from State-backed medical regimes. David Hardiman's and Projit Bihari Mukharji's edited volume titled *Medical Marginality in South Asia* provides a tripartite division of the heterogeneous medical practices in South Asia. Beyond state-backed biomedicine, which itself is the heir of Western colonial medicine the authors identify three other realms - "excluded practices of syndicated traditions, folk medicine embedded in the everyday lives of communities, and various vernacularised and/or bowdlerised versions of

biomedicine (which is often popularly called 'Western', 'English' or 'daktari' medicine)." [151] Syndicated traditions usually included indigenous medical traditions that gradually became institutionalized and enjoyed state support such as Ayurveda, Unani, Yoga, Naturopathy, Siddha, and Homeopathy. The realm of folk medicine usually included practices that were deemed to be irrational, eclectic, and primitive. Vernacular traditions comprised a class of individuals who blended both western medical knowledge with indigenous practices.

Dentistry among Chinese migrants in Calcutta in the 1920s operated autonomously through its own cultural logic where discourse and practice often blended with each other and there was limited grounding in any textual or classical traditions. It was also extremely heterogeneous in its forms to be categorized as a single "medical system". However, within the next few decades, dentistry among Chinese migrants in Calcutta transformed to become a vernacularized tradition. In this chapter, I have to rely on biomedical terms like "dentists", "dentures", "dental extraction", "dental implants", "clinics", "practices", etc. for the sake of comprehensibility but it runs the risk of providing a very clinical, structured, and systematized reading of the variety of dental practices and dental spaces that were used by the Chinese dentists in Calcutta. It is important to note that nobody apart from literate Intelligence Officers used these terms to address Chinese dentists in Calcutta. Hubei dentists in Calcutta were addressed in vernacular terms like "*daater daktar*" (loosely translating to doctor of the teeth) their practises were called "*daat badhano*" (tying the teeth) and *"daat tola*" (removing the teeth). The use of these vernacular terms provided the Hubei dentist in Calcutta a realm of autonomy which freed them from grounding their diagnosis or surgeries in biomedical texts and traditions. In the years following the Dentists Act, the Chinese dentists who once practiced their own form of dentistry morphed to occupy the status of the

[151] David Hardiman and Projit Bihari Mukharji, *Medical Marginality in South Asia: Situating Subaltern Therapeutics*, Intersections: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 10.

vernacularized “Western” medicine. Their formal training as dentists and acquisition of B.D.S degrees allowed them to be in dialogue with both “Western” and “indigenous” practices.

A pivotal element facilitating this transformation was the emergence of a “therapeutic marketplace”, a pertinent concept derived from *Medical Marginality* that explains this shift. The “therapeutic marketplace” as characterized in this volume is a “space where dialogue and cross-fertilisation takes place between different types of therapeutic traditions and practitioners”.[152] From their emergence in the 1920s, the Chinese dentists in Calcutta and its peripheral districts were always in dialogue with dominant medical practices. They participated in a complex configuration involving multiple marketplaces, each occupying a distinct hierarchical position and operating with varying methods and value systems. This competition and cross-fertilization allowed them to adapt and negotiate around dominant medical practices by introducing rudimentary biomedical tools like tweezers, spanners, and chairs with headrests as well as being highly mobile, which increased their reach, popularity, and accessibility, unlike state-backed medical regimes.

In addition to participating in a “therapeutics marketplace”, a considerably high degree of mobility allowed Chinese dentists to become popular throughout Bengal. The mobility exercised by these Chinese dentists encountered significant challenges, as they were subjected to scrutiny for registration documentation and faced substantial resistance when traversing between the various districts of Bengal. The theoretical frameworks proposed by Barak Kalir offer a more nuanced explanation of the degrees, forms, and meanings associated with these mobilities. In his article “Moving Subject, Stagnant Paradigms” Kalirs criticizes analyzing mobilities from the vantage point of national borders. This approach restricts mobility studies as it gets obsessed with borders, states, and the interest of that state in the

[152] Hardiman and Mukharji, *Medical Marginality in South Asia*, 30.

process of what he calls "methodological nationalism".[153] Alternatively, he proposes to center the individuals who become mobile and analyze the state as imagined by them in their lived realities.

The hypermobilities practiced by Chinese dentists took the form of frequently moving between various districts of Bengal to peddle medical treatment and came in conflict with the policing authorities of the colonial as well as the post-colonial Indian state. In response to these obstacles, the Chinese adopted various strategies to circumvent the entry and exit restrictions imposed along district boundaries. Decentering yet not fully abandoning the state and its interests and reorienting it toward mobile individuals allows a shift of perspectives that shows how Hubei dentists were interacting with these restrictions, thereby re-mapping these districts of Bengal according to their professional interests.

Scholars writing on the Chinatowns of Calcutta have not yet provided us with a thorough account of the Chinese dentists of Calcutta. Historians so far have tried to account for the Chinese dentists of Calcutta within the larger history of Chinese migration in India. They have analyzed their economic activities based on how popular they were after the Second World War. They have also accounted for the degrees of their mobility that kept them popular across India. However, these analyses were always used to show the various strands and waves of the Chinese diaspora in India. An independent study of Chinese dentists, the evolution of their professions, the various forms that their clinics took, their interactions with biomedicine as well as the state's policing authorities remains unexplored. Looking at such a localized medical tradition in Calcutta can be purposeful in many ways. Firstly, it complicates the categories of folk and vernacularized medical traditions in *Medical Marginalities* when we consider the multiple transformations that occurred within the

[153] Barak Kalir, "Moving Subjects, Stagnant Paradigms: Can the 'Mobilities Paradigm' Transcend Methodological Nationalism?," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39 (February 1, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2013.723260.

profession. Secondly, it shows that in addition to mobility aiding the creation of distinct economic spaces, as argued by the scholarship so far, it also created distinct medical spaces.[154]

The present chapter shows the evolution of the profession of dentistry among Chinese migrants from the 1920s to the 1960s. In doing so, I analyze the multiple transformations that occurred within this branch of medical practice to show how it transitioned and morphed from being an unregulated, heterogeneous branch of medicine operating with its own logic to a vernacularized tradition that blended biomedical knowledge and practices with indigenous ones. In this chapter, I argue that by relying on a high degree of mobility and adaptability, the Hubei dentists were able to compete in the "therapeutic marketplace". Since they were not restricted to any Western or Chinese classical texts, the Hubei dentists were able to transform their practices, clinics, and services in multiple instances to remain popular, affordable, and accessible. To arrive at these conclusions, I have relied on the theoretical foundations provided in *Medical Marginalities in South Asia* and "Moving Subject, Stagnant Paradigms". My sources comprise multiple Intelligence Reports, Registration Certificates, intercepted letters, and transcriptions of interrogations found in the West Bengal State Archives, and corroborated them with the oral histories that I collected through open-ended interviews with Dr. Mao Chi Wei, Dr. Ronnie Lee, and Chandranath Chatterjee. Taken collectively, these sources enable an analysis of the evolution and multifaceted transformations of the dental profession among the Chinese in Calcutta, considering both the perspective of the state and that of mobile practitioners, along with their various interactions and negotiations.

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[154] As seen in Sen and Xing, "The Chinese in South Asia"; Xing, "The Bowbazar Chinatown"; Oxfeld, *Blood, Sweat, and Mahjong*; Chatterjee, "The Chinese Community of Calcutta: Their Early Settlement and Migration." Sen and Xing analyze the economic activities of Cantonese carpenters, Hakka shoemakers and Tannery owners, Hubei dentists and paper flower makers, Shandong silk traders, Chinese restaurants, laundries, and beauty parlors. These professions are also discussed in Xing's and Chatterjee's work. Oxfled's book focusses solely on Hakka tannery owners and their entrpreneuriship.

Hubei Dentists in the 1930s: Origins

Since 1778, Calcutta has witnessed a steady flow of Chinese migrants in multiple waves. The last wave of this migration was composed of the Chinese from the central province of Hubei. Beginning in the early 1930s, the Hubei Chinese started to migrate toward Calcutta because it was spatially closer and well connected by an overland trail through Burma (Myanmar) and a maritime route through Southeast Asia. All these areas were vibrant centers of the KMT activity where they found support for their education before entering Calcutta. The late 1930s and early 1940s witnessed a significant influx of Hubei Chinese into Calcutta after the political instability following the Sino-Japanese War.[155] Thus, the city of Calcutta, due to its spatial proximity and significant Chinese population, was a natural choice for Hubei migrants, especially after the Sino-Japanese War. Dentistry was an attractive choice of occupation for a number of reasons. First, it was an occupation that was both required in the host and well respected in China. Second, it did not require sophisticated language as the skills of the practitioners were the sole factor that made them popular. Additionally, it also bought enough income for an immigrant family to survive and relocate to different locations where there was a demand for their skills.[156]

Most Hubei Chinese in Calcutta carved up a unique occupational niche for themselves like other Chinese ethnic groups of Calcutta. They became extremely popular because of their sophisticated dentistry skills, especially in tooth extraction and denture making. It is difficult

[155] See Sen and Xing, "The Chinese in South Asia"; Liang, "Migration Patterns and Occupational Specialisations of Kolkata Chinese." There is a debate in the present scholarship regarding the origins of the Hubei dentists. Sen and Xing believes that they got popular only after the Second World War. They identify around 300 Chinese owned dental clinics in India. Liang believes that the Hubei dentists started arriving in Calcutta from the 1920s-1930s. She claims this because she has also interviewed Dr. Mao Chi Wei as part of her work.

[156] I would like to thank Dr. Ina Asim for her inputs here. She pointed out the multiple reasons why dentistry would be an attractive occupation for Chinese migrants in Calcutta.

to specify exactly why the Hubei Chinese picked up dentistry. Anthropologist Ellen Oxfeld believes that because of their condition of being positioned in an ethnic economy where occupations are allocated along lines of linguistic, regional, as well as caste backgrounds, the Chinese in Calcutta took up occupations that were considered dirty by upper-caste Hindus and Muslims. She says, "None of the occupations engaged in by Kolkata Chinese—whether it be the hairdressing, restaurant business, tanning and shoemaking of the Hakka, the carpentry of the Cantonese or the dentistry of the Hubeinese—is associated with high-caste activities in traditional Hindu thought."[157] However, Oxfeld's explanation is limited and can only be accepted to a certain degree because she does not explain why Hubei dentists became so popular despite practicing in a caste-segregated economy. Her caste-centric analysis fails to address why upper-caste Hindus eventually sought dental services, including gold implants, from the same doctors they had previously considered impure.

Numerous Intelligence Reports, Registration Certificates, intercepted letters, and transcripts of interrogation from West Bengal State Archives, as well as oral testimonies of surviving Hubei dentists in Calcutta, provide a much more complicated rationale of how and why dentistry became popular among Hubei migrants. Dr. Mao Chi Wei, one of the longest-practicing Hubei dentist in Calcutta, believes that dentistry was relatively unknown in Hubei at the time. They had picked up their dentistry skills on the elaborate ship route they took to come to India, which involved shipping out from Hubei to Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Burma before entering Calcutta.[158] However, multiple interrogation reports mention Chinese migrants from Hubei completing a course on dentistry before arriving in Calcutta. Chen Than Khow was a Hubei Chinese dentist who was arrested because his registration papers weren't in order. As per his statement taken in 1943, he mentions that he did a three-

[157] Ellen Oxfeld, "Still Guest People: The Reproduction of Hakka Identity in Kolkata, India," *China Report* 43, no. 4 (December 2007): 418, https://doi.org/10.1177/000944550704300403.
[158] Dr. Mao Chi Wei, interviewed by Rishav Chatterjee, September 3, 2024.

year course in dentistry after nine years of learning Chinese in his village before coming to Calcutta.[159] Similarly, Kan Hoonfa, also arrested with Chen Than Khow, mentions that he pursued a dentistry course for five years before arriving in Calcutta.[160] We also know that elders trained the second generation of Hubei migrants in their families. One Registration Certificate mentions the case of Chen Shao Kun, who was born in Calcutta's Chinatown in 1935 and pursued an apprenticeship under Chen Teng Jung.[161] Notwithstanding the reason the Hubei Chinese took up dentistry, it is clear that since 1930, they began to arrive in Calcutta with their dentistry skills and started opening up practices.

The earliest documented instance of a Hubei dentist arriving in Calcutta is found in Kan Hoonfa's case. We know that he was from the Tianmen district of Hubei, where he obtained his education in the Chinese language for five years after joining a school at the age of twelve. After this, he studied dentistry for five years in the same school before coming to Calcutta in 1930. He practiced dentistry in Calcutta for seven years before moving to Chittagong (present-day Bangladesh) with his family, comprising his wife, son, and two daughters. However, the Japanese bombings in Bangladesh in 1942 forced him to move back to Calcutta again. After a year, Kan Hoonfa again moved back to Chittagong and expressed no intention of going anywhere from there.[162]

The Hubei Chinese were the last among the multiple waves of Chinese migration to Calcutta. Their arrival was influenced by multiple factors, including political upheavals in China, Calcutta's geographical proximity, and the existence of an established Chinatown. The Hubei Chinese arrived with prior training or acquired their skills en route, gradually establishing themselves as skilled dentists in Calcutta through the dissemination of

[159] "Chinese Nationals in Darjeeling," 237.
[160] "Chinese Nationals in Darjeeling," 238.
[161] "Chinese Nationals in 24 Parganas," 412.
[162] "Chinese Nationals in 24 Parganas," 412.

generational knowledge. A decade after their arrival, the Hubei Chinese in and around Calcutta went about establishing clinics, which took a variety of forms.

Hubei Dentists in 1930-1940: Mobile Dentists, Mobile Practices

A particularly unique characteristic of the Hubei dentist was the extent to which they were mobile. The case of Kan Hoonfa shows a pattern of circular migrations; however, others were much more mobile, traveling from one district to another in Bengal to offer affordable treatment. This meant that although most Hubei dentists arrived in Calcutta, they rarely remained there. Aparna Chatterjee (Sen), in her study of Hubei dentists in the districts of North Bengal, claims that most dentists in the Siliguri preferred to remain there because they knew the "demand for a dentist was high and competition was less than in Kolkata."[163] This high degree of mobility, characterized by frequent travel across various districts of West Bengal, gave rise to two significant phenomena. First, it necessitated regular engagement between the Hubei Chinese and local policing authorities. The Registration Certificates issued to them required official stamps whenever they traveled to a district outside their designated place of residence. The Hubei dentists often frequently circumvented these restrictions to advance their professional interests. Second, their itinerant nature as dental practitioners in Bengal led to distinctive modes of service provision. Lacking a permanent clinic due to their constant travel, they relied on portable tools and sought support from others within their professional network to secure temporary spaces for practice.

An illustration of this hypermobility among Chinese dentists in Calcutta is present in Liu Tin Cheng's instance.[164] Liu Tin Cheng was from Tienmen, Hubei, and was around fifty-

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[163] Aparna Chatterjee Sen, "Education, Occupational Aspiration and Religious Orientation: A Case Study of the Chinese Community of North Bengal," *China Report* 45, no. 1 (January 2009): 67, https://doi.org/10.1177/000944550904500106.

[164] "Regular check to trace Chinese Nationals found registration or who have not been registered," 236/1939 (8D), in *Foreigners*, Shakespeare Sarani, Kolkata: West Bengal State Archives, 26.

two years old when he was moving from Ranaghat to Calcutta with his family in 1945. Liu Tin Cheng, his wife Liao Shih, and his eleven-year-old son Mung Fung were arrested in Calcutta due to an irregularity in their paperwork. As part of the formalities, Liu Tin Cheng wrote a letter in Bengali making his case. In this letter, he tried to convince the police authorities about his innocence in failing to provide his registration certificates as soon as he left Ranaghat. Eventually, he was released after the authorities re-registered him in Calcutta. However, the record of his registration certificate issue dates reflects that he had practiced in Jamshedpur, Lakhimpur, Calcutta, Ranaghat, and Tippera for a year or at times even less. Thus, Hubei dentists like Liu Tin Cheng were known to be hypermobile within the various districts of Bengal. A considerable degree of mobility can also be seen in the case of Puang Koi Shee, the only recorded female Chinese dentist. Documentation of her movements indicates that she arrived in Bombay from Karachi in 1949 and later came to Calcutta.[165] This hypermobility, which is an integral part of their profession, often made Chinese dentist come into conflict with colonial and later post-colonial policing authorities who monitored their entries and exits with extreme vigilance.

The physical spaces occupied by Hubei dentists underwent significant transformations, reflecting diverse spatial configurations shaped by the varying degrees of mobility exhibited within the professional community. The nature of their profession during 1930-1940 ensured that they either create make-shift informal medical setups or rely on kin networks to practice at their respective clinics. A 1944 confidential report to the Chinese Intelligence Wing at Calcutta's Intelligence Bureau provides an insight into how these medical spaces came about. The report mentions instances of theft at a certain "G and W shops" at Kanchrapara, which was a well-established district of Calcutta connected by

[165] "Chinese Nationals," 236/1939 (12) (Howrah), in *Foreigners*, Shakespeare Sarani, Kolkata: West Bengal State Archives, illegible.

railways and also had an air force station that was used by the United States Army for reconnaissance missions. The authorities of these shops were concerned that their Chinese workers had absconded from the shop without leave. Among them is Lan Foo who, in addition to being missing, has also stolen tools worth twenty-four rupees from the shop. It is worth noting here that Lan Foo stole medical tools that are essential in a dental clinic such as tweezers, spanners, spanner box, and medical vials.[166] Thus, this report warrants attention to a facet of how these medical spaces evolved through acts of theft aimed at acquiring rudimentary medical tools.

Apart from getting access to medical tools, the Hubei dentists of later generations also relied on their kin networks to provide a physical space from where they could dispense their dental services. It was not at all unusual for Chinese dentists in various districts of Bengal to rely on cousins and wives situated in other districts. The interactions of the Hubei dentists with the policing authorities of these districts provide some information on this aspect because they almost always found Chinese dentists traveling from one district to another without proper paperwork. Ching Kung Sien was a Chinese dentist who found himself in a similar situation. In 1948, he was arrested at his brother's practice in Khardah because he had not gotten himself registered after reaching Kharda. Upon interrogation, the police found out that he also occasionally traveled to Kharagpur and Calcutta for his profession. This was also true for Chen Than Khao and Kan Hoonfa, two individuals who have been mentioned above for the degrees of their mobilities. In Kan Hoonfa's case, as late as 1943, it was known that his brother Chang Fakan ran a dental shop in Hatibagan. Additionally, his wife, Chiang Shich, also ran a dental shop at Entally.[167] In addition to this, even though Chen Than Khao was arrested, he mentioned his brother's dental shop in Howrah.[168] As for Chen Than Khao's

[166] "Untraced Chinese Nationals," 16.
[167] "Chinese Nationals in Darjeeling," 281.
[168] "Chinese Nationals in Darjeeling," 281.

case, he was able to make the shift from Chittagong to Calcutta because he relied on his brother, Te-U-Wiung, to support him. Thus, Hubei dentists often utilized their family networks of doctors to help them be mobile.

Another vignette of what the medical spaces of Hubei dentists looked like comes from my oral interview with Chandranath Chatterjee, a man in his mid-eighties.[169] In our conversations, he recalled his experience of witnessing a Chinese-run circus in Jharkhand in 1965. There, he remembers seeing an advertisement of a Chinese dentist hanging under a tree. It was a Bengali hoarding that laid out the charges, which were set at 2 rupees for dental extraction and 4 rupees for dental implants. The practice itself was situated in a rudimentary tent. He remembered that the dentures were made out of calcium enamel on a metal mold. Within that practice, he remembers a peculiar machine, one that was operated using a foot pedal. The foot pedal generated enough energy to go around a belt supported by a wheel. This energy was used to power a needle that would be used on the tooth. He also remembers a primitive wooden chair with a fairly mobile headrest where the patient would lay their head. In most cases, the dentist had a gold enamel tooth to prove the legitimacy of their trade and the sophistication of their skills to operate on teeth. Chandranath Chatterjee also said that operations were mostly done without any anesthetic; however, at that circus, he remembers the dentists using a spray that acted as a mild anesthetic.

Chandranath Chatterjee's memories are of particular importance as they capture the perspective of the potential clientele of the Hubei dentists. It provides an insight into the most visually attractive and captivating aspects of their profession. The golden tooth, as well as the environment of a circus, are all components that are meant to attract clientele. Such Chinese-run circuses were pretty common in various districts of Bengal as well as in other states. Thou Thon is one such individual who was associated with a Chinese-run circus owned by

[169] Chandranath Chatterjee, interviewed by Rishav Chatterjee, August 4, 2025.

Subodh Banarji. Thou Thon's father used to perform jugglery in the circus, and he had grown up around various circus exhibitions and eventually started performing too. He has been associated with various circuses, including Victory China Circus, Diamond Circus Party, Thun-Shen China Circus, Nunching Circus, Young Bengal Circus Party, and Bengal Circus. His wife is also involved in performing at various circuses with him. He had taken his show to various districts in West Bengal, Bihar, Punjab, Bombay, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal, as well as Pakistan.[170] Corroborating Chandranath Chatterjee's memories, Thou Thon's statements, as well as the multiple Intelligence Reports, help us imagine the range of spaces where Hubei dentists dispensed their services. What began as an adaptation of some rudimentary medical tools in a make-shift space culminated, by the late 1940s, into a very popular profession that took place either in rudimentary tents in circuses or, at other times, in a few dental clinics that were established as a combined result of individual aspirations on part of the dentists as well as support from a strong family network of doctors. Aparna Chatterjee (Sen) characterizes aspirations among Chinese migrants in districts of Bengal into two categories: to migrate abroad or to be a successful businessman.[171] Among Hubei dentists, elements of entrepreneurship linked with the aspiration to become popular and skilled professionals are clear when one looks at the evolution of their practices and the multiple adjustments they undertook to establish their status as qualified dentists with sophisticated skills.

Politicizing the Clinic, 1930-1950

The evidence analyzed so far might suggest that the Hubei dentists were just ambitious and aspirational, which made their occupations flourish. However, in addition to

[170] Thou Thon's case can be found in "Chinese Nationals in Bankura," 236/1939 (12) (Bankura), in *Foreigners*, Shakespeare Sarani, Kolkata: West Bengal State Archives, 252-254.
[171] Chatterjee Sen, "Education, Occupational Aspiration and Religious Orientation," 70.

being aspirational and ambitious, the Hubei dentists were also very politically motivated to secure the interests of their community. Compared to the Hakka and Cantonese, the Hubei Chinese had an elevated status due to their status as doctors, education, skills, and reputation in their locales. The Hubei dentists often used this status to shelter Chinese refugees as well as host meetings of the Kuomintang (KMT). The Intelligence Bureau was already aware of this and sent out this intimation to its branches in 1943 :

> Chinese Dentists — As a class are not above suspicion from the security point of view and several have come to notice in Eastern India. Many people visit them. They are educated above the average and the Chinese Intelligence Wing point out that they have been known to render aid to deserters. Furthermore, many Chinese dentists have actually studied in Japan. If dentists desire to set up in practice or in any other way come to notice it is suggested that in addition to usual questions they should be asked
>
> a) Where educated, and up to what standard?
> b) Previous employment giving the name of firms and places.
> c) Residence in foreign countries.
> d) Present whereabouts of family.[172]

The Intelligence Bureau's assessments were made under the Japanese threat in eastern India during the Second World War. By 1943, Japan had already occupied Burma (now Myanmar) and sought to advance towards British India. As a result of this surveillance was heavily increased along India's eastern borders in anticipation of Japanese spies infiltrating India. Policing authorities were always vigilant about Chinese dentists and their practices. As a result of this, many Chinese dentists were arrested and interrogated, and questions regarding their education and previous employment were asked. None of the surviving investigation documents reported any Chinese dentists being educated or employed in Japan. However, the suspicions of the Intelligence Bureau were not misguided either because the Hubei dentists often came under their surveillance for either providing shelter to refugees or hosting political meetings in their clinics. The dentists exercised considerable caution in their activities, effectively eluding arrests. The efforts of the policing authorities were largely limited to

[172] "Chinese Nationals in Darjeeling," 256.

gathering intelligence, as they frequently received only fragmented tips or intercepted suspicious correspondence, which proved insufficient for making arrests.

One such incident occurred in 1947 when the Intelligence Bureau intercepted a letter that was sent from Darjeeling to The Chung Hua Christian Association at 8 Bow Street, Calcutta.[173] The translation of the letter said, "At 4 p.m. on 16th Dec. a photograph of the Chairman of the National…..(illegible)...will be formally presented to the Indian instructor Pai-no-chih; it will also be the graduation day of the first term of students. You are cordially invited to attend".[174] The illegible portion of the translated letter most probably refers to Chiang Kai Shek, who was the Premier of the National Government during the time. Additionally, most Chinese in Calcutta overwhelmingly supported the KMT during the time and sent them money through their headquarters in Calcutta. In this letter, it was later found that the address of the Chung Hua Christian Association was the same as Dr. Chen Po-Sheng's clinic, where he was known to hold gospel meetings only to provide shelter for political meetings. It was also found out that the Secretary General of the Indian headquarters of KMT was also associated with the activities of the Chung Hua Christian Association. Another intercepted letter from the KMT headquarters in Calcutta, which was sent to a dentist by the name of In Chung in Shillong in addition to KMT headquarters at Bombay and Jalpaiguri in April 1947, informs its members about the recent hike in membership dues. A minimum of twenty rupees should be paid, and those who are not able to pay this sum can pay a lesser amount with permission from the concerned branch.[175] Later, correspondence from the same branch sends out a word of thanks to In Chung for collecting two thousand two hundred and forty rupees in membership fees from the Shillong branch.[176] In addition to

[173] "Examination of Chinese Mail at certain P.Q.M. Bengal District," 396/43 (1), in *Interception*, Shakespeare Sarani, Kolkata: West Bengal State Archives, 117.
[174] "Examination of Chinese Mail at certain P.Q.M. Bengal District," 117.
[175] "Examination of Chinese Mail at certain P.Q.M. Bengal District," 135.
[176] "Examination of Chinese Mail at certain P.Q.M. Bengal District," 136.

being a dentist, In Chung was also an influential member of KMT's Shillong branch. In addition to dispensing affordable treatment, In Chung was quick to mobilize the members of the KMT party to support the party by collecting two thousand two hundred and forty rupees in membership dues.

With Mao Zedong's victory in 1949, there was a decided shift in the loyalties of the Hubei dentists. When Chinese Consul-General, Yao Chung Kan visited Calcutta in 1950, he was greeted with a reception attended by five hundred people. Hupeh Association, an organization that looks after the interests of the Hubei migrants, was present in that reception among many other such organizations. Wei Chien Wu of the Hupeh Association also made a short speech shortly after the Chinese Consul-General's speech.[177] It would not be wrong to assume the Hupeh Association, an organization of considerable influence in Calcutta, started convincing the Hubei migrants to support Mao's China. The effect of the Chinese Consular-General's visit to Calcutta, as well as the influence of the Hubei Association, can be seen in the overwhelming response of the Hubei community to one of the measures of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In 1951, the Chinese Consular-General in Calcutta received instructions from Peking to "send as many young overseas Chinese as possible to be trained under the various schemes of the Chinese Government at the expense of the Peking Govt".[178] Local intelligence sources suggested that these youth members would receive special training from Peking and be sent back to India to carry on party activities. Many young individuals from the Hubei community went aboard this ship to Peking. Among them were established Chinese dentists like Chen Chu Han and individuals like Chun Jung. Chun Jung was the Secretary of the Hupeh Association. He left for China in 1951 with the consent of his father to study dentistry. In other words, the Hubei dentists were very concerned about the domestic

[177] "Chinese Nationals, Jalpaiguri," 1278.
[178] "Chinese Nationals, Jalpaiguri," illegible.

politics in China and indulged in various forms of political engagements to voice those concerns. They frequently, yet cautiously utilized their clinical spaces for political meetings and were also appointed to influential positions within the KMT headquarters. They also relied on the Hupeh Association to decide their political loyalties and were willing to send their children to China to learn dentistry.

Biomedical Exchanges since 1947

By the 1940s, the Chinese dentists from Hubei had established themselves not only as medical practitioners but also as political actors. The paper trail of what happened to this class of medical professionals after the 1940s is absent from the archives. However, my interview with Dr. Ronnie Lee gave me an idea about the transformations in their practices since then. The informal and unregulated nature of the practices of multiple Hubei dentists significantly transformed with the passing of the Dentists Act in 1948. This Act required dental clinics to be approved by the health department or a hospital with a dentistry wing. This Act necessitated the requirement of a formal BDS degree to practice dentistry professionally. The passage of this Act was followed by the establishment of various dentistry colleges and, consequently, the next generation of dentists like Dr. Lee and Dr. Mao were made to obtain formal BDS degrees. Both of them, however, blended the practices of their parents with the knowledge they received in these dentistry schools. Thus, Chinese dental practitioners after 1948 engaged in a form of hybridized therapeutic practice where they combined generational knowledge with institutional knowledge.

Dr. Ronnie Lee's dental clinic is located in the busy neighborhood of Bhawanipore, Kolkata. He is a third-generation dentist in his family. He does not remember much about his grandfather, but his father was born in 1932 and had his clinic in Budge Budge near Achipur.

His father practiced without any qualification or degree and was instrumental in teaching Dr. Lee the practical aspects of his profession. He believes the reason behind his success as a doctor is attributed to his formal training at Manipal College of Dental Sciences as well as his father's contributions.

He showed me how dentures during the 1930s and 1940s were made out of thick rubber bricks. The dentist had to first take an impression of the patient's jaw and then carve out an appropriate mold. It was extremely personalized and “as unique as a fingerprint,” according to Dr. Lee.[179] Earlier dentists of Dr.Lee’s father's generation used to rely on local vendors like Chowdury Brothers for the supply of rudimentary tools like foldable dental chairs, tweezers, mouth mirrors, and faucets. These tools would then be carried to various districts of Bengal, which were located in urban peripheries, to dispense treatment. Dr. Lee remembers that apart from the tools, anesthetic materials were also rudimentary and local. Doctors would either use ether, morphine, or opium on the gums. He specifically described a cruder version of a dental drill that he witnessed. He described the tool, which was more like a “drilling machine operating like a pulley”.[180] In the absence of stable electricity, these machines would be operated like a foot-powered sewing machine. With the energy generated by foot-pedaling, this cruder dental drill would be used to make cuts on the teeth. Chandranath Chatterjee also remembers seeing a similar type of dental drill in Chinese circuses.

Following the implementation of the Dentists Act, Hubei dentists were compelled to engage with biomedical institutions, resulting in significant modifications to their professional practices. The previously personalized approach to denture-making gradually transitioned toward outsourcing. Rather than crafting dentures themselves, practitioners such

[179] Dr. Ronnie Lee, interviewed by Rishav Chatterjee, September 5, 2024.
[180] Dr. Ronnie Lee, interviewed by Rishav Chatterjee, September 5, 2024.

as Ronnie Lee began taking impressions of patients' jaws and forwarding them to specialized laboratories, which then produced the final denture models. In addition to this, there was also a shift in the materials that were used in these clinics. The material compositions of dentures transitioned from rubber to ceramic and, finally, plastic. Similarly, Dr. Lee's father made dental crowns with metal, but he uses porcelain. Thus, the Dentists Act brought in the final layer of transformations and modifications to the clinics of the Hubei dentists by making them pursue formal education and introducing newer dental materials. This ensured a move away from personalized treatment to systematized treatment grounded in medical texts and established practices. Just like the Hubei dentists of the 1920s, the dentists of Dr. Lee's generation also embraced these changes to compete in the therapeutic market and upgrade their professions.

Some dentists like Dr. Mao look at these changes in terms of their benefits. Dr. Mao was certain that the practice of dentistry had improved from what he calls the "primitive methods".[181] On being asked what these specific methods were, he remembered that clove oil was primarily used as an anesthetic. They were also able to use their own version of astringence to stop the bleeding from the gums. It is only in the last fifty years that the present generation started attending Dental schools and getting proper BDS degrees, adapting to modern technologies, and gradually upgrading the profession. In his concluding remarks, Dr. Mao mentioned that the Chinese dentistry profession is still evolving. He considers himself to be more privileged than others because he had a repository of knowledge in his father. Older methods of preparing dentures were fused by operationalizing them with newer technologies and laboratories. He is certain that other Chinese doctors are also following this hybrid method of dispensing treatment.

[181] Dr. Mao Chi Wei, interviewed by Rishav Chatterjee, September 3, 2024.

I then inquired whether Dr. Lee or his father experienced a sense of distinction or otherness due to their status as migrant dentists in Calcutta. He then said that from the 1930s to the 1990s, there weren't many non-Chinese practicing dentists in Calcutta. Oftentimes, ethnic Bengalis looked down on the profession of dentistry as something inferior. Those who wanted to become doctors opted for other specializations and became associated with the hospital. This vacuum led to the emergence and reinforcement of the racial stereotype that Chinese individuals were inherently the superior kind of dentists. This served as another layer of legitimacy in their profession as dentistry became closely associated with their ethnicities. However, different Hubei dentists responded differently to this stereotype. Dr. Lee, for example, is indifferent to it when he says about himself, "Someone like me, I have become Indianized".[182] Dr. Lee's practice is far away from Calcutta's Chinatowns, and he does not interact much with the community. However, his father was much more "Chinese" in his identity. He practiced near Achipur, which is a place of ancestral worship of the Chinese in Bengal, and was more active in the community. Dr. Mao, who is much older than Dr. Lee, puts in more effort to perform his identity as an "Indian" as well as a "doctor" by putting up the flag of the Indian state in his practice and displaying his degree qualifications in bold. Dr. Lee and Dr. Mao represent two different generations of Chinese dentists and their distinct efforts to appear legitimate. It is clear that Dr. Lee feels much more integrated within society and thus, is comfortable with his identity and heritage. However, Dr. Mao's practice shows a complicated negotiation between his Indian and Chinese identities.

Conclusion

[182] Dr. Ronnie Lee, interviewed by Rishav Chatterjee, September 5, 2024.

The trajectory of the evolution of dentistry as practiced by Chinese immigrants in Calcutta and its surrounding districts is one that reflects multiple adjustments and reconfigurations from the 1920s to the 1960s. Innovations in the form of rudimentary tools, mobile dental chairs, rubber dentures, and foot-powered dental drills in the early 1930s were driven by the necessity to compete in the therapeutic marketplace. The passage of the Dentist Act of 1948 and the discourses surrounding it led to the biomedicalization of the unregulated profession of Chinese dentistry in Calcutta. This brought further innovation in the form of formal degrees, the introduction of refined tools, and interactions with laboratories. Innovations in the 1930s guaranteed a certain degree of autonomy and distinctiveness to Chinese dentists; however, the innovations following the Dentists Act came with the promise of prosperity in the form of setting up more "legitimate" practices that would ensure economic mobility.

This process of biomedicalization came with a certain level of agency, which reduced the disparity between Indian and Chinese dentists. They now shared a common medical vocabulary, which allowed them to interact with each other. The Dentist Act, in a way, also legitimized the status of Chinese immigrants as dental doctors, as well as Indians. The adoption of standardized dental practices, collaboration with laboratories, utilization of advanced instruments common in most dental clinics, and engagement with a shared medical lexicon enabled Hubei Chinese migrants to integrate into society to a degree that was not seen earlier.

The promise of aspiration and mobility following the Dentists Act was successful in providing some parity between Indian and Chinese dentists, but it also set different standards through which Indian and Chinese dentist would communicate their legitimacy as dentists. In this competition, Chinese dentists had to show their allegiance to the Indian state, as seen in the case of Dr. Mao. They also had to dismiss traditional practices as "primitive" in favor of

newer ones, even as they continued to incorporate both older and newer methods in their practice. Since its inception, Chinese dentistry has demonstrated a high degree of adaptability to change and innovation. This flexibility was facilitated by practitioners' lack of strict adherence to classical texts and their considerable mobility—two factors that significantly contributed to their widespread popularity. As their professions morphed from an unregulated practice to a standardized form, they experienced a higher degree of integration into Indian society by performing their identities as legitimate citizens and doctors in subtle manners. Throughout this evolution, however, Chinese dentists were highly mobile, aspirational, and entrepreneurial in their efforts to maintain a balance between embracing change and maintaining a degree of autonomy.

CONCLUSION

Today, Calcutta's Chinatowns exist at the intersection of memory and materiality. The neighborhoods of Bowbazar, Tangra, and Achipur continue to preserve a limited number of structures, shops, restaurants, eateries, and temples that serve as enduring testimonies to the Chinese community's presence in the city over the past three centuries. Primarily maintained and operated by members of Calcutta's ethnic Chinese community, these establishments are a testament to the times when the community was thriving in population, business, and culture. Both Tony Lo and James Lee, whom I interviewed for this thesis, fondly remember their youth among these buildings.[183] James misses his friends who had moved away while Tony laments the loss of real community around the Nam Soon Church, people with whom he could cook, play mahjong, and occasionally share a drink in the evening. For both of them, Chinatown remains a distant memory, a place and time that no longer exists and cannot be recreated again.

Many younger members of the community have left Calcutta to pursue career opportunities in the West. They try to support their families by either bringing them to live with them or sending them remittances, but most older members of the community are hesitant to leave Calcutta. They often do not want to move abroad and readjust their lives completely. Dr. Mao Chi Wei's son has his medical practice in Australia, but Dr. Mao still

[183] Tony Lo, interviewed by Rishav Chatterjee, August 7, 2024; James Lee, interviewed by Rishav Chatterjee, July 9, 2024.

chooses to practice in his own clinic in Chittaranjan Avenue. Tony Lo's son is currently settled in Canada and often asks him to leave his duties at the Nam Soon Church and join him in Canada, but Tony chooses to remain in Calcutta. At this juncture in his life, he does not wish to adjust to a country that is much different than the one in which he has spent most of his life.

In recent years, there have been some efforts to preserve the culture and heritage of Calcutta's Chinatowns and to raise awareness about the neighborhood. Tathagata Neogi and his team at Immersive Trails, a sustainable heritage walk and travel organization, have been instrumental in their efforts to collect pictures and information about Calcutta's Chinatown from various archives, as well as the people in Chinatown who cooperated with them. A walk dedicated to Calcutta's Chinatown has been on their roster since 2017.[184] The India National Trust for Art and Culture Heritage (INTACH) has also acknowledged the dwindling heritage of this once-thriving neighborhood. In 2022, INTACH, in collaboration with Cha Project, a Singapore-based design and placemaking lab, announced a mapping project comprising urban renewal, street restoration, conservation, and documentation.[185] The effect of these endeavors on the part of individuals like Tathagata Neogi or heritage organizations like INTACH on the neighborhood and its people remains to be seen.

However, I feel that before undertaking such ambitious efforts, it is important to ask why such a busy neighborhood with almost fourteen thousand ethnic Chinese living in it declined?[186] Almost all academic works on Chinese settlement in Calcutta identify the

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[184] Information regarding Tathagata Neogi and his team's platform can be found at "Immersive Trails," accessed April 23, 2025, https://www.immersivetrails.com/.https://www.immersivetrails.com/"Immersive Trails."

[185] Details regarding the conservation project can be found at OT Staff, "A Conservation Project Announced For India's Only Chinatown," *Outlook Traveller*, accessed April 23, 2025, https://www.outlooktraveller.com/experiences/heritage/a-conservation-project-announced-for-indias-only-chinatown.https://www.outlooktraveller.com/experiences/heritage/a-conservation-project-announced-for-indias-only-chinatownStaff.

[186] Ramakrishna Chatterjee estimates that just before the Sino-Indian War in 1961 the total Chinese population in Calcutta was around 14,000 in Chatterjee, "The Chinese Community of Calcutta: Their Early Settlement and Migration.," 61.

deportations following the Sino-Indian War of 1962 as the single turning point that forced ethnic Chinese in Calcutta and elsewhere to look for newer homes to migrate to.[187] Mobility studies often tend to center mobile individuals in favor of those who were left behind or those who chose not to move. The profound impact of the Sino-Indian War of 1962 on the Chinese-Indian community is indisputable. The implementation of the Defence of India Act, which was weaponized to racially profile individuals based on their physical characteristics, ultimately contributed to the decline of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership. Ethnic Chinese in India, who had lived in India for generations as citizens, were made to perform their "Indianness" in terms of loyalty and allegiance to the state in the aftermath of the Sino-Indian War but have the few who have chosen to remain in India despite the property loss, vandalization of business, and everyday racism left undisturbed since 1962?

The events of 2020, in many ways, echo the conditions of 1962. Similar to 1962, the Indian state was engaged in a border clash with China in the Galwan Valley border regions of Ladakh. Simultaneously, India was also grappling with the then-novel COVID-19 virus, which was first discovered in Wuhan, China. In this context, India witnessed a new surge of Sinophobia, where Chinese-Indians in Calcutta and elsewhere were subjected to derogatory racial slurs.[188] In a few newspaper articles around this time, several members of the community affirmed their identity as Indian citizens, emphasizing that the restrictions imposed by the outbreak of the virus and the border clashes constrained their mobility, preventing them from venturing far beyond their neighborhood. Monica Liu, an entrepreneur

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[187] As seen in Sen and Xing, "The Chinese in South Asia"; Xing, "The Bowbazar Chinatown"; Oxfeld, *Blood, Sweat, and Mahjong*; Chatterjee, "The Chinese Community of Calcutta: Their Early Settlement and Migration."

[188] Some of the articles that appeared during this period are Lauren Frayer, "India's Oldest Chinese Community Faces the Impact of the Two Country's Tensions," *NPR*, November 21, 2021, https://www.npr.org/2021/11/27/1059490199/indias-oldest-chinese-community-faces-the-impact-of-the-two-countrys-tensions; Dola Mitra, "'We'Re as Indian as Any Other Indian', Say Chinatown Residents," *News Click*, May 16, 2020, https://www.newsclick.in/Residents-of-china-town-face-discrimination; Online Archive, "Chinese-Origin People in Kolkata Face Racist Slurs amid Coronavirus Outbreak," *The New Indian Express*, March 26, 2020, https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/kolkata/2020/Mar/26/chinese-origin-people-in-kolkata-face-racist-slurs-amid-coronavirus-outbreak-2121748.html; Bhattacharya, "'We Are Not Chinese from China, We Are Indians.'" Bhattacharya.

who owns six restaurants in Calcutta, provided a statement where she said, "I look Chinese because my ancestors were Chinese, but I am Indian."[189] During this period, Tathagata Neogi was in contact with his collaborators in Chinatown to assist them in the crisis. He recalls that several members of the Chinese community gathered in front of the gates of the old Sea-Ip Church, recording and sharing a video of themselves singing the Indian national anthem on social media. This act was intended to assert their equal status as citizens and demonstrate their allegiance to the nation.[190]

Historians of science, such as Projit Bihari Mukharji, for instance, have suggested that there is no single racial category or phenotype for being "Indian". In his book *Brown Skin White Coats*, he uses the category of seroanthropology to study the mobilization of racial science and racial thinking in anticolonial movements and postcolonial nationalisms. Mukharji identifies seroanthropology not as a rigid discipline but as a "loose formation of techniques, personnel, and objectives that persisted until the mid-1960s in India".[191] Seroanthropology allowed blood groups and later, other inheritable characteristics to be mapped onto different races. In his discussion of the "Feralness of Race", Mukharji discusses the tendency of racial logic to adopt, morph, and constantly reappear in various disciplinary formations such as comparative linguistics, craniometry, ethnology, and comparative anatomy. In each of these configurations, newer ways of defining race were being mobilized. He identifies race shifting from a typological to a population concept. Furthermore, he claims that "the feral notion of race renders itself nearly invisible by camouflaging within older and vernacular vocabularies of community and difference."[192]

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[189] Quoted in Mitra, "'We're as Indian as Any Other Indian', Say Chinatown Residents."
[190] Tathagata Neogi, interviewed by Rishav Chatterjee, July 16, 2024.
[191] Mukharji, *Brown Skins, White Coats*, 9.
[192] Mukharji, *Brown Skins, White Coats*, 7.

It is useful to consider Projit Bihari Mukharji's discussion on race, as it may offer a more nuanced understanding of Monica Liu's assertion that, although she may appear Chinese, she is also Indian. The historical conditions of 2020, much like those of 1962, produced a clash of these categories and phenotypes, which are deeply embedded in Indian society through the language and vocabulary of different communities, as argued by Mukharji. Although physical appearance bears no inherent correlation to national identity, moments of a perceived threat to national security, such as border conflicts or the outbreak of a virus like COVID-19, often prompt the mobilization of a heterogeneous yet normative conception of "Indianness". In such contexts, communities that do not conform to this constructed ideal are frequently racialized and regarded as both nationally and culturally foreign.

The Chinese Indian Association, an organization that protects and promotes the culture, interests, and rights of Chinese Indians, issued an alert on social media to their members to report any instances of discrimination with evidence to the association so that they could cooperate with the law enforcement authorities.[193] A parallel can be drawn between the nationalist performance observed in 2020 and the Hindi language tests imposed by the Indian government on Chinese individuals following their release from internment camps in 1967, a prerequisite for applying for Indian passports again. Testimonies of Chinese-Indians hesitating to leave their neighborhoods during 2020 are reminiscent of Tony's memories when he recalls that his neighbors and friends from Bowbazar's Chinatown were not allowed to cross Howrah, a commercial center of Calcutta, in 1962. Thus, over the

[193] The post can be found at Chinese Indian Association, "Dear Friends, If You or Any of Your Friends Face Any Incident of Racism, Teasing or Heckling, Please Send a Message to Us Here or PM Us Here," *Facebook*, March 26, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/ChineseIndianAssociation/posts/pfbid02miHtshrJd6LUUY1aBP82Ui1UuHm5cHSnxb9PWPPdqwBF6HLHpLZ5xaNQNkFx61ePl?rdid=CtCJz5mjI3Jyc1Xo#.https://www.facebook.com/ChineseIndianAssociation/posts/pfbid02miHtshrJd6LUUY1aBP82Ui1UuHm5cHSnxb9PWPPdqwBF6HLHpLZ5xaNQNkFx61ePl?rdid=CtCJz5mjI3Jyc1Xo#Association.

past eight decades, little has changed. It remains evident that whenever India encounters a security threat along its borders with China, the Chinese-Indian community is repeatedly compelled to reaffirm its national identity, engaging in various performative expressions of nationalism.

I began this thesis by examining the underlying factors that led to the differentiation of Chinese migrants within Indian society. In Chapter 1, I examine the various processes that contributed to the construction of a racial category, which became discernible through the emphasis on corporeal characteristics observed in Chinese bodies and the subsequent ascription of meaning to these classifications. Both the colonial as well as the post-colonial states were responsible for the full development of this category. In the eighteenth century, British writers such as Chaloner Alabaster and Emily Eden distinguished Chinese migrants based on their physical attributes, including height, stride, hair, complexion, and eye shape. By doing so, they were attempting to isolate, categorize, establish a stable code, and ascribe meaning to it. This led to the creation of a material-semiotic Chinese identity. Its central logic was this–since the Chinese were inherently different in terms of their physical attributes, they were also different in terms of their sensibilities, intelligence, and civic sense. To both Alabaster and Eden, Chinese dwelling spaces were dirty, their practices were degenerate, and their inherent natures were deviant. This category, once established, took a more tangible form to initiate segregation, incarceration, and violence in the twentieth century, during both the Second World War and the Sino-Indian War. Eighteenth-century discourses on Chinese bodies and practices materialized during the Second World War through comic strips that provided visual guidelines for distinguishing Chinese civilians from Japanese spies based on physical appearance. Additionally, these discourses informed the Intelligence Bureau's efforts to identify Chinese migrants by emphasizing their corporeal characteristics. These categories also polymorphously adapted themselves in the post-colonial

condition as they got intertwined with national security, border defense, and citizenship. The Sino-Indian War's aftermath witnessed the Indian state using similar categories to pass the Defence of India Act, mobilizing its police force to locate Chinese Indians and incarcerate them in an internment camp in Deoli, Rajasthan.

In Chapter 2, the material-semiotic Chinese identity is extended to explore the rationales behind being suspicious about health-focused Chinese culinary and consumption practices. In this chapter, I highlight the tensions between a western biomedical worldview and Chinese dietetics. In this context, the writings of Bradley Shelland are useful in that they provide an actual menu of food that he was served in the Canton restaurant where he visited. Elements of traditional Chinese dietetics, such as *qi* (the life force) and *yin-yang* (the complementary forces primarily identified as female or male dominant), without which balance of a healthy body cannot be achieved, are present in the dishes served to Shelland, as preparations such as bird's nest soup and shark fin were believed to aid in strength, stamina, and longevity. Somerville's writing articulates the British rationale behind being suspicious of Chinese food and consumption, such as smoking opium and drinking. Together, these writings suggest that Chinese dietetics and consumption practices were always interpreted in terms of moral decay, degeneration, and vice, seen as an inherent disease. This sensibility is also present in the Intelligence Bureau's suspicion and monitoring of Chinese opium sellers and distilleries. The sale and consumption of illicit liquor and opium among the Chinese community in Calcutta undoubtedly had a recreational aspect. However, in this chapter, I suggest that the intense surveillance and policing of these networks should not imply that their use was solely for recreational purposes or for altering mental states. Opium, alcohol, as well as alcoholic tonics in the form of extracts and wines, were major constituents of the Chinese materia medica.

In this chapter, I also argue that the Chinese community in Calcutta did not actively resist Western biomedical practices and institutions but rather engaged in an ongoing dialogue with them. Their interactions with biomedical spaces and practices were strategic, shaped by specific circumstances, and aimed not only at bodily healing but also at addressing both individual and communal interests. Biomedical practices and spaces were often tools utilized either to escape from British hospitals in Assam and find refuge in Calcutta or to address the asymmetrical power hierarchies between the Chinese community and the state. Finally, in this chapter, I analyze my oral interview with Tony Lo, the secretary of Nam Soon Church, to illustrate how food, leaves, liquor, and meat—often in contrast to Indian culinary traditions—were utilized for medicinal purposes. These substances became so essential that the Chinese community in Calcutta established clandestine networks to secure them. This reinforces the argument that British surveillance of Chinese opium and liquor should not be understood merely as an effort to eliminate illegal substances but also as a mechanism of control over the community's medicinal and cultural practices.

In Chapter 3, I trace the evolution of dentistry as practiced by Chinese migrants from Hubei. The practice of dentistry among Hubei Chinese is particularly striking in that it neither aligns with Chinese medical traditions (unlike Chinese dietary practices discussed in Chapter 2) nor western biomedicine. Most Hubei Chinese had picked up their dentistry skills on the elaborate ship route they took to come to India, which involved shipping out from Hubei to Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Burma before entering Calcutta. Dentistry was a profession needed in many destinations, including India. A profession in the medical field was an occupation that was well-respected in China. It was even more attractive since initially it did not require formal medical studies in India as in other countries, and in addition did not require perfection in the language of the new country of residence. Between the 1920s and the 1960s, Hubei dentists underwent a transformation from unregulated dental

practitioners to a professionalized class of doctors, obtaining formal degrees and operating within established regulatory frameworks. In this chapter, I argue that mobility, aspiration, and a constant process of adaptation kept the Hubei dentists competitive in the therapeutic marketplace by making them both popular and affordable. The hypermobility practiced by Hubei dentists as wandering teeth setters in various districts of Bengal made them come under the intelligence scanner, whereby their travels between various districts of Bengal were monitored, and on many instances, they were apprehended for wandering out of their districts of residence. Furthermore, this hypermobility also led to multiple distinctive modes of service provision. Lacking a permanent clinic due to their constant travel, they relied on portable tools, opened up make-shift tents at Chinese circuses, and sought support from others within their professional network to secure temporary spaces for practice.

In this chapter, I also suggest that by the 1940s, the Hubei dentists had established themselves not only as medical practitioners but also as political actors. They leveraged their status as doctors within the community and their itinerant medical spaces to evade police surveillance and hold political meetings to advocate for domestic politics in China. In the 1940s, many Hubei dentists were responsible for raising membership dues for the KMT party office headquarters in Calcutta, while in the 1950s, they sent their children to communist China to receive training at the expense of the Peking government to carry on party activities overseas. Thus, Hubei dentists who were wandering tooth setters in the 1920s gained prominence in the 1940s to influence domestic politics in China through their political engagements in India.

Dentistry was a suitable choice for the many Chinese intellectuals who had associated with the KMT and now tried to escape political persecution. After the Shanghai massacre in April 1927, not only the brief collaboration between CCP and KMT ended, but Chiang Kai-shek and his followers separated from the government of Wuhan under the leadership of

Eugene Chen and Wang Jingwei. The party separation, known as the Nanjing-Wuhan split, strengthened Chiang and made the followers of Wang and Chen political refugees. They fled from Wuhan in Hubei to KMT strongholds in Southeast Asia, India, and other parts of the world. The political engagements of Hubei dentists reflect the shifting loyalties among the Chinese in India from their parent's generation - who had been either associated with the KMT refugees fleeing persecution by Chiang Kai-shek or later escaped the Japanese invasion - to the following generations who associated with the political ideals of the CCP. The goals of the CCP excited this generation as they also coincided with the political affinities between the CCP and the Indian Communist Party (ICP).[194]

Dentistry, as practiced by Hubei dentists, underwent a final set of transformations in the decades following the enactment of The Dentists Act in 1948. This legislation mandated the attainment of B.D.S. degrees and adherence to approved regulations for the practice of dentistry in India. As a result, Hubei dentists were required to align with the same medical spaces, regulations, knowledge, and practices as their Indian counterparts. This triggered the process of both their professionalization and Indianization. The biomedical intervention in the form of The Dentists Act came with the promise of aspiration and legitimation. However, even at this juncture, Hubei Chinese blended their institutional knowledge with generational knowledge to establish a distinctive occupational space to remain competitive in the therapeutic marketplace. This chapter argues that throughout their evolution, Chinese dentists were highly mobile, aspirational, and entrepreneurial in their efforts to maintain a balance between embracing change and maintaining a degree of autonomy.

My goal with this thesis was to show how Chinese settlers in Calcutta engaged with health, medicine, and healing practices. It also aims to highlight how the Chinese migrants in

[194] I would like to thank Dr. Ina Asim for her inputs here. During my thesis defense she pointed out the need to situate this section of the chapter within the broader political history of China as it explains the political affiliations of Chinese migrants in Calcutta.

Calcutta not only carved out distinctive occupational spaces as argued by Sen, Xing, and Oxfeld, but also distinct medical spaces.[195] Migration, mobility, and their status as foreigners in India were pivotal factors in the establishment of these distinct medical spaces within the Chinese community. These spaces emerged through complex interactions with western biomedicine, the policing apparatus of both the colonial and post-colonial state, and other Indian communities. By establishing these distinct medical spaces, Chinese migrants also contributed to the alternative therapeutic landscape of nineteenth-century Calcutta comprising Ayurveda, Siddha, folk medicine, and vernacularized traditions such as the "Daktars".[196]

One of the contributions of this thesis is that it complicates the categories discussed by David Hardiman and Projit Bihari Mukharji's edited volume titled *Medical Marginality in South Asia*. In Chapter 3, I have discussed how the authors provide a tripartite organization of medical practices in South Asia, namely, syndicated traditions such as Ayurveda, and folk medicine which are the bulk of practices that are excluded once medical practices like Ayurveda gets institutionalized, and vernacularized traditions such as that of the "Daktars" who blended western and indigenous practices.[197] The Chinese-Indian case vaguely resembles these categories but also destabilizes them in many aspects. We cannot define the medical practices of Chinese immigrants in Calcutta purely as syndicated or folk medicine. Even when they became akin to "Daktars", blending biomedical and generational knowledge, the ramifications and meaning of those exercises were different for the community. Chinese dietary regulations in Calcutta, for example, never became institutionalized even when they borrowed from ancient Chinese traditions. As a result, these practices never evolved into institutionalized medical traditions like Ayurveda or Traditional Chinese Medicine, both of

[195] See Sen and Xing, "The Chinese in South Asia"; Xing, "The Bowbazar Chinatown"; Oxfeld, *Blood, Sweat, and Mahjong*. Sen and Xing elaborate on Cantonese carpenters, Hakka shoemakers and tannery owners, Hubeinese dentists and paper flower makers. Oxfeld discusses the entrepreneurial evolution of the Hakka tanners.
[196] Hardiman and Mukharji, *Medical Marginality in South Asia*.
[197] Hardiman and Mukharji, *Medical Marginality in South Asia*, 10.

which benefit from substantial state support in India and China, respectively. Chinese dietetics and dentistry are akin to "folk medicine" as discussed in this volume in that the amount of heterogeneity in these practices makes it difficult to organize them as a system. However, the bulk of folk medicine in South Asia got its recognition only after syndicated traditions such as Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha excluded them once they became institutionalized. Since Chinese medical practices in India escaped any form of institutionalization, we cannot organize the remnants of this system into the realm of folk medicine. Likewise, "Daktars", as discussed in the volume, benefited from a selected reading of Western medical ideas and technologies while being in dialogue with indigenous medical traditions. In the case of Hubei dentists, the shift towards blending biomedical and generational knowledge came with a promise of legitimization. It facilitated not only the professionalization but also the "Indianization" of Hubei dentists who were put in the same medical and discursive field as other Indians. Thus, I believe that the study of the medical practices of an immigrant community in India, such as that of the Chinese, further complicates and enriches existing categorizations of medical practices in South Asia beyond dominant biomedical paradigms.

This work aims to provide a glimpse into the medical lives of Chinese migrants in Calcutta during the nineteenth century. I believe that further ethnographic research and archival investigation in China, New Delhi, London, and potentially Canada are essential to uncover additional facets of Chinese medical practices that remain underexplored. These include the networks of Chinese medicine dispensaries in Calcutta's Chinatowns, the domain of Chinese home remedies, and the origins of the now-globalized supply chains of Chinese medicine, as well as their reception among both Chinese and non-Chinese communities, among other areas. I hope that this thesis can serve as a point of departure in opening the floodgates toward these newer and engaging explorations.

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