

Xing Zhang, **Preserving Cultural Identity through Education: The Schools of Chinese Community in Calcutta, India**, 2010, Singapore: *ISEAS Publishing*. (ISBN 978-981-4279-88-8)

Zhang Xing's book published in 2010 is based on the author's PhD dissertation research focusing on the history of Chinese school in Calcutta in response to huge influx of Chinese immigrants to India in the mid-1950s.

The book expounds the endeavour of the Chinese immigrants to preserve and revive the roots of their culture and their education system among the younger generations. The huge influx of Chinese into Calcutta led to the establishment of the provision for education to the Chinese children. Initially the mode of education of these children was in the form of private tuitions especially home tuition by some learned one from their own community. Gradually the system of private tuition took an institutionalized form with the coming of schooling system. This served the dual purpose of community bonding as well as preservation and conservation of Chinese language among the new generation who were away from their motherland. In support of the above mentioned fact, the author has provided an intensive and extensive account of the schools that existed in that period, though there was not much significant difference with respect to their ideologies or their mode of teaching. The author has mentioned about the schools established by Christian missionaries and those under the assistance of Chinese government. The Christian missionaries also imparted Confucian values along with moral education. Initially all these schools imported books from China and the sole focus of these schools were on Chinese history, custom and culture while the history, custom and culture of India was totally ignored.

The latter part of the book explains the disintegration of their education system due to ideological differences and factionalism. Only one or two schools have been functioning till date where the education now imparted is in English and Chinese language both. This book also explains how the Indo-Chinese conflict in 1960s led to the decrease in the number of Chinese school. Many Chinese in India became victim of the war induced hostility and started migrating to America and other European countries. Only then the equal importance of English was realized. Simultaneously, reduced enrolment of Chinese in Indian school led to decrease in number of Chinese schools.

Throughout the book the emphasis has been that, medium of instruction as 'Chinese' played a very significant role as the parents always wanted their children to return to motherland and serve there. Moreover they did not want their children to be 'Indian'. The reason behind this was a sense of inferiority among the Chinese regarding India or Indian culture. Neither they preferred educating their children in any Indian language nor did they enrol them in any school which used Indian textbooks. The thing which was quite interesting to note here is that in one part of the book it was also mentioned that they even sang Indian National Anthem in the school. Though they tried to keep themselves aloof from India and its culture but it is ironic that in practice they were unable to completely detach themselves from 'being Indian'

To provide an authentic account, the author has made use of several archival data, police reports and reports of several investigating committees to bring out a true picture of the school and the issues associated with the same. She also made an extensive field visit by interviewing the Chinese living in Calcutta, those who returned back to China after getting educated in India and Indian emigrated Chinese diaspora in Canada, America etc to get a detailed note of their schooling in Calcutta. The data has been

represented in the form of several pictures of the schools which explains their establishment as well as functioning.

Towards the end of the book the study was inclined more towards the political aspect of carrying out Chinese education in the country. The People's Republic of China consulate in Calcutta made several attempts to acquire control over the Chinese school. Because of factionalism among supporters of erstwhile Guomindang Regime and the Communist regime, few schools stopped importing books from China and this again lead to the closure of several schools. Thus the author has focused on political environment to explain its direct impact on the functioning of Chinese school.

The book is well informative and has highlighted several facts which had been dormant for many years, as not many studies have been done on the Chinese schools in Calcutta. But sometimes the information seems to be repetitive in nature. Moreover, as the title of the book suggested, it was expected from the author to give an account of several Chinese cultural practices as well. To a certain extent the book has focused on preservation of Chinese culture via education within which language and textbooks took the centre stage. It was expected from the author to shed light on various forms of festivals, folk dances, music etc. which could have been described as a part of their school curriculum. The study failed to provide an explanation of the pattern of education which should have been an important aspect of study.

The book, though being informative, is unable to take the reader back to the time and give a visual representation of the situation which would have been existed thereof. The author has also presented a tabular form of data about all the Chinese schools functioning in different time periods in Calcutta with a detailed note regarding year of establishment and closure, location, number of students, teachers etc.

This book opens up new channels for further investigation and research in this field and provides a nice collection of the historical aspect of the Chinese schools in Calcutta. The usage of several Chinese words and sentences along with their translations, makes the study even more interesting. Also the author avoids using complex linguistic jargons which makes it an easy read for the readers.

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