



Institute of Chinese Studies

# WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*A Chinatown in Celluloid  
Geographies*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker:  
**Navnidhi Sharma**

16 July 2025

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Speaker:** Ms. Navnidhi Sharma, Doctoral Candidate, Cinema Studies, New York University, New York.

**Chair:** Prof. Avijit Banerjee, Head and Professor, Department of Chinese Language and Culture, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan; and, Adjunct Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi.

**Date:** 16 July 2025

**Venue:** Zoom Webinar

- The seminar examined the reconstruction of the shared histories of India and China through popular visual and print media. The speaker laid emphasis on cinematic discourse that moves beyond the constraints of national borders and geopolitical frameworks. Before the 1962 war, there existed vibrant cultural exchange between the two countries. However, in the aftermath of the war, racial discrimination, and public hostility against the ethnic Chinese community became commonplace.
- Ms. Navnidhi Sharma noted that Hindi language cinema in Bombay can be seen as an archive of the history of a disappearing community. The portrayal of ethnic Chinese in such films is often dichotomous. Their image is visible, yet, equally invisible in many ways. This reveals how cinema makes people visible, or hyper-visible, and at the same time obscures their identity.
- Further, the speaker stated that while ethnic Chinese were often employed as extras or as junior artists on film sets, they were in fact an integral part of the Bombay film industry.
- Ms. Sharma drew attention to one such ethnic Chinese artist, Moosa Chang, who would often have to wait for months to secure work in a film. The irregular nature of work highlighted the persistent struggles faced by Moosa. At the same time, ethnic Chinese women artists also faced challenges due to the sporadic nature of work in the film industry. Their predicament was further exacerbated as they also struggled to sustain their families. This, according to the speaker, is a story that remains to be told.

- Ms. Sharma concluded by highlighting how ethnic Chinese artists played an integral role in the Hindi film industry, despite persistent challenges. From the 1960s onward, cinematic representations became increasingly nationalistic, with portrayals of China, and by extension, of ethnic Chinese, split between commercial popular culture and tragic narratives. Both forms of representation contributed to a distorted and marginalised image of the Chinese figure within Indian cultural imagination.

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