



Image source: Saigoneer

The Chinese Community In Sai Gon

H.B.R.A202511

*The Vibrant and Rich Cultural Identity
of Chợ Lớn – Ho Chi Minh City*



HERITAGE BRAND REVIEW AWARD

Heritage Brand Review Award 2025

2024 - 2025

STROLLING AROUND CHOLON



Introduction

Hi guys,

We're excited to introduce you to the Chinese community living in Cho Lon – Ho Chi Minh City. This is a long-standing community that has significantly contributed to the richness of Saigon's cultural identity in particular, and Vietnamese culture in general. Since their earliest days of migration, the Chinese people have brought with them both tangible and intangible values from traditions and customs to cuisine and spiritual beliefs.

In this journey, we'll take you through the bustling streets, lively markets, and hidden alleyways of Cho Lon, all infused with cultural depth and daily life. We also want to highlight the harmonious blend of Vietnamese and Chinese cultures, a reflection of how this community has maintained its heritage while contributing meaningfully to the city's growth.

Through this magazine, we hope you'll gain a deeper understanding of the Chinese community and the unique values they have brought to Saigon. More than that, we wish to inspire you to continue exploring and celebrating the vibrant cultural mosaic that surrounds us.

We are



*Cao Huong
Anh Ly*



*Tran
Gia Han*



*Vu Thien
Ngoc Mai*



*Vu Ngoc
Tuong Vy*



*Le Duc
Chieu Nghi*

Heritage Brand Review Award

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Overview of the History of the Chinese Community

The Chinese community in Saigon, particularly in the Cho Lon area, began to take shape in the 17th century when groups of Chinese migrants arrived in Southern Vietnam. Initially, they migrated for various political and economic reasons, ranging from escaping conflicts in China to seeking new business opportunities.





“Chợ Lớn” quickly developed into a bustling commercial hub thanks to the contributions of the Chinese in industries such as trade, commerce, and manufacturing. Over the centuries, Binh Tay Market has become an area rich in Chinese culture, featuring temples, guild halls, and unique architectural styles that embody the history and traditions of the community.



Unique Architecture

The architecture of the Chinese community in Chợ Lớn reflects a harmonious blend of traditional Chinese elements and local Vietnamese identity.

Iconic structures such as guild halls (e.g., Nghĩa An Guild Hall, Hà Chương Guild Hall) and temples (e.g., Thiên Hậu Temple, Ông Temple) are adorned with intricate patterns, sculpted stone pillars, and distinctive curved roof tiles characteristic of Southern Chinese architectural style. The spatial arrangement of worship areas, courtyards, and the use of traditional materials such as wood, stone, and bricks create a harmonious whole that honors the enduring cultural values of the Chinese community.



Bình Tây Market, also known as Chợ Lớn (District 6, Ho Chi Minh City), was built in 1928 on a swampy land area of over 25,000 square meters by a Chinese merchant named Quách Đàm.

Despite being designed by a French architect, the market bears a strong Eastern influence.

Over its 90 years of existence and development, Bình Tây Market has maintained its role as a major wholesale market in the city.

Today, it has become a vibrant shopping and sightseeing destination for both domestic and international tourists.

Bình Tây Market

Cha Tam Church

Cha Tam Church (located on Học Lạc Street, District 5, Ho Chi Minh City) serves as a place of worship for the Chinese Catholic community in Saigon. The church was founded by Father Pierre d'Assou, the first priest of the parish, whose Chinese name was Đàm Á Tố (Tam An Su in phonetic transcription). Thus, the church is popularly known as "Cha Tam Church."

While the church interior features a strong Western Gothic architectural style, the entrance gate distinctly reflects Chinese culture with its curved roof corners, symbolic depictions of carp transforming into dragons, and a traditional three-arch gate design. This unique combination creates a harmonious blend of two cultural traditions, honoring both Western solemnity and Eastern elegance.



Situated on Nguyễn Trãi Street, Thiên Hậu Temple is regarded as one of the oldest and most sacred temples for the Chinese community in Chợ Lớn. Recognized as a National Historic Site in 1993, it is located at 710 Nguyễn Trãi, Ward 11, District 5, Ho Chi Minh City.

The temple's architecture reflects a harmonious integration of Chinese artistry and traditional feng shui elements. Its roof is adorned with ceramic statues depicting mythical stories and symbolic creatures such as dragons and phoenixes. The temple is dedicated to Thiên Hậu Thánh Mẫu, the goddess who protects seafarers, and serves as a spiritual hub for the Chinese community.

Thiên Hậu Temple

Tuệ Thành Guild Hall



Nhị Phủ Guild Hall, also known as Miếu Nhị Phủ or Chùa Ông Bổn, is one of the ancient temples built by Chinese immigrants from the two prefectures of Tuyên Châu and Dương Châu in Fujian Province. The temple is dedicated to Guan Gong and Ông Bổn, deities who are believed to protect the community. The temple's architecture is remarkable for its blend of stone and wood carvings alongside intricate ceramic decorations. The roof, with its gracefully curved corners, creates an atmosphere of solemnity and serenity. The handcrafted bas-reliefs are particularly striking, carrying deep cultural significance and reflecting traditional craftsmanship.

Ông Bổn Temple

Nhị Phủ Guild Hall



Nghĩa An Guild Hall, also known as Chùa Ông or Miếu Quan Đế, is a sacred site established by the Teochew Chinese community who migrated to Vietnam. The guild hall is dedicated to Quan Thánh Đế Quân (Lord Guan), a revered figure symbolizing loyalty, righteousness, and justice in Chinese culture.

As a cultural and spiritual hub, Nghĩa An Guild Hall plays a significant role in preserving the traditions and religious practices of the Teochew community in Chợ Lớn.

Ông Temple

Nghĩa An Guild Hall



The combination of

Vietnamese and Chinese cultures

The process of coexistence and development in Ho Chi Minh City has created a profound blend between Chinese culture and the cultures of the indigenous peoples.

In that cultural exchange, the Chinese not only absorbed local cultural values but also contributed to enriching the city's distinctive and diverse culture. The contributions of this community are distinctly and richly evident, spanning from material cultural elements such as architecture and cuisine to spiritual culture such as festivals, beliefs, and artistic activities.



In terms of material culture, the architecture of the Chinese community has become an indispensable part of the urban landscape of Saigon, with temples and assembly halls that embody Eastern styles. These structures are not only places for cultural and religious activities of the Chinese community but also attract both domestic and international tourists due to their unique architectural, historical, and spiritual values.

According to Dr. Trần Hồng Liên, the temples and assembly halls of the Chinese community in Ho Chi Minh City reflect an important part of this community's migration and integration process, with architectural styles ranging from traditional to modern, showcasing a blend of Chinese and local cultural elements. Many temples and assembly halls are also considered national historical and cultural relics, such as Thien Hau Temple, which was recognized in 1993, playing an important role in preserving the cultural identity of the Chinese community as well as in developing cultural tourism in Ho Chi Minh City.



In addition to architecture, Chinese cuisine has also been adapted to suit local tastes, creating diversity and richness in the city's culinary scene. Typical dishes such as hủ tiếu, a noodle dish from the Teochew people made from rice flour and adapted in the Vietnamese style with a clear and light broth, or various types of dim sum like há cảo xiu mai, and bánh bao, have all been adjusted in flavor and ingredients to better suit Vietnamese tastes.



The influence of Vietnamese - Chinese culture in cuisine has created a distinctive style, where dishes not only retain their original characteristics but also bear the strong imprint of the Saigon region. For example, the dish há cảo is usually made with a thin layer of dough and shrimp filling, but when it came to Vietnam, it could be enhanced with local ingredients such as vegetables or minced pork to create a distinct flavor. These variations have helped Chinese dishes become familiar and popular among the locals, while also attracting the affection of tourists.



Culinary fusion

In terms of spiritual culture, the blending of beliefs between the Chinese and Vietnamese is clearly manifested through traditional festivals such as the Lantern Festival, the Mid-Autumn Festival, and the Vu Lan Festival. During the Lantern Festival, the Chinese often organize activities such as lighting firecrackers, hanging lanterns, and enjoying traditional dishes like glutinous rice balls and rice cakes. Alongside this, the Vietnamese also immerse themselves in the festive atmosphere with their own customs, such as making Mid-Autumn Mooncakes and lantern processions, creating a joyful, bustling, and colorful ambiance.

What is special is that the festivals are not only occasions for people to gather but also rituals that express respect and gratitude towards ancestors and deities. Among them, the worship of Thần Tài - the deity who brings wealth to the family - is a typical example of the intersection of various beliefs. The image of the God of Wealth is placed with great reverence in many Vietnamese families, serving as a clear testament to the profound syncretism of deity worship between the two cultures.



Lantern Festival in Chinatown. Photo source: Thanh Niên Newspaper

In terms of language and education, the Chinese community in Ho Chi Minh City has continuously strived to preserve their language and cultural identity amidst the tide of global cultural integration. At specialized schools for Chinese children, the teaching of Chinese is implemented not only to help children maintain their ability to communicate within the family but also to convey rich cultural values, from customs and traditions to ancient legends.

At the same time, learning Vietnamese is also emphasized, creating conditions for the children to easily integrate with their friends and the surrounding society. The harmonious combination of language and cultural teaching has created a diverse and rich educational environment, where students are not only equipped with knowledge but also develop pride in their ancestral cultural heritage.

It is in this learning environment that children are encouraged not only to develop their language skills but also to foster respect and mutual understanding between different cultures. These efforts have significantly contributed to shaping young generations who are not only inheritors of culture but also developers, shaping the future of Ho Chi Minh City - a dynamic and colorful city.



*A corner of District 5
Source: Anh Ly*

Distinctive features in the customs and lifestyle of the Chinese people

The Chinese in Chợ Lớn not only preserve but also enrich their traditional customs, creating a diverse and vibrant cultural and spiritual tapestry.

The Dongzhi Festival, one of the most important celebrations for the Chinese community, is held with solemn worship rituals, demonstrating deep respect for ancestors and deities. Dong Zhi marks the transition between the old year and the new year, when the shortest day of the year passes, bringing hope for growth, prosperity, and abundance in the coming spring. The Dong Chi ceremony is usually meticulously prepared by families, with offerings such as incense, flowers, fruits, and sticky rice balls – symbols of reunion and harmony between generations.



*The Hoa community's Dongzhi (Winter Solstice) Festival
Photo credit: PHI BAO, Travellive*

On this holiday, the ancestral altar is solemnly adorned, where each family member offers incense to pray for health, happiness, and peace. The Chinese believe that this is an occasion to connect spiritually with their roots, while also expressing wishes for a prosperous new year.



*The Hoa community's Dongzhi (Winter Solstice) Festival
Photo credit: PHI BAO, Travellive*

The worship sessions not only take place within the family space but also extend to the community, especially in areas like Chợ Lớn, where cultural and spiritual life is expressed through collective rituals. At the assembly halls and temples, the Chinese community often organizes larger ceremonies with the participation of many people. The sound of drums and gongs, along with the rising incense smoke, creates a sacred atmosphere. In that space, everyone shares faith and hope, while also strengthening the bonds between families and the community.



Chinatown bustling with Dongzhi Festival celebrations. Photo credit: Kyn Lee

After the ritual, other bonding activities such as making glutinous rice balls together or organizing small parties take place, creating opportunities for everyone to share stories and future plans. With a spirit of unity and sacred significance, the Đông Chí ceremony is not only an occasion to honor ancestors but also an opportunity for the Chinese community in Cho Lon to preserve and spread their unique cultural values. This is a clear testament to the harmonious blend of tradition and community, enriching the distinctive cultural and spiritual tapestry of the Chinese in modern life.

Dong

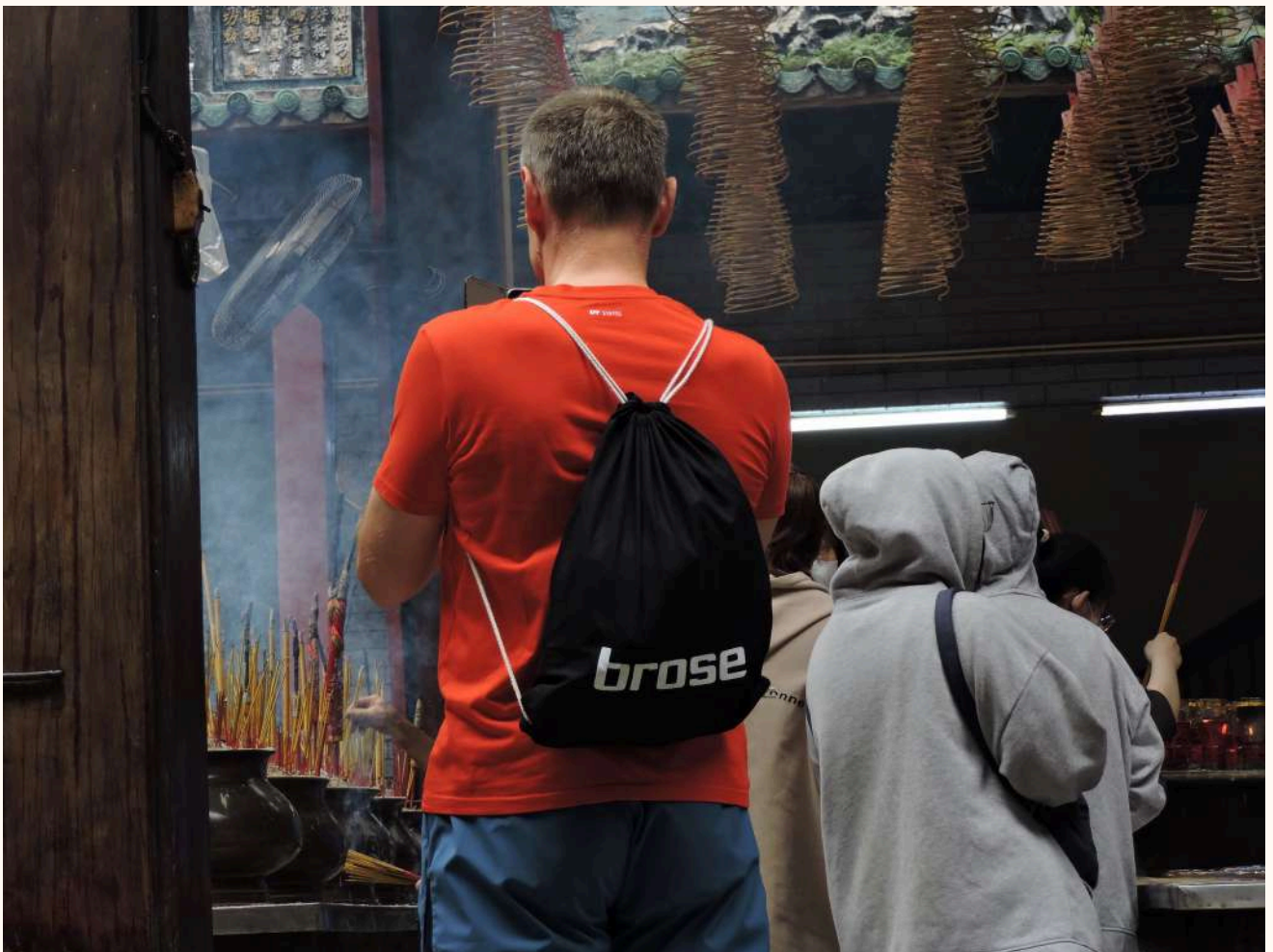
ZHI

FESTIVAL



With the characteristic of polytheistic worship, the Chinese combine elements of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in their belief culture. The pantheon of deities worshipped ranges from human deities like Guan Gong and Ma Zu to natural deities like the Thần Tài, Thổ Địa, and the Táo Quân.

These worship rituals are not only to pray for peace and prosperity but also to express gratitude and reverence towards the deities and ancestors. At the assembly halls, temples, or within family spaces, each altar carries special significance and is meticulously cared for, reflecting a deep belief in the sacred.



*Praying for peace
Photo by Anhly*

For example, the altar of Quan Công is considered a symbol of righteousness and loyalty, while the altars of Thần Tài and Thổ Công are often arranged near the entrance to welcome wealth and prosperity.



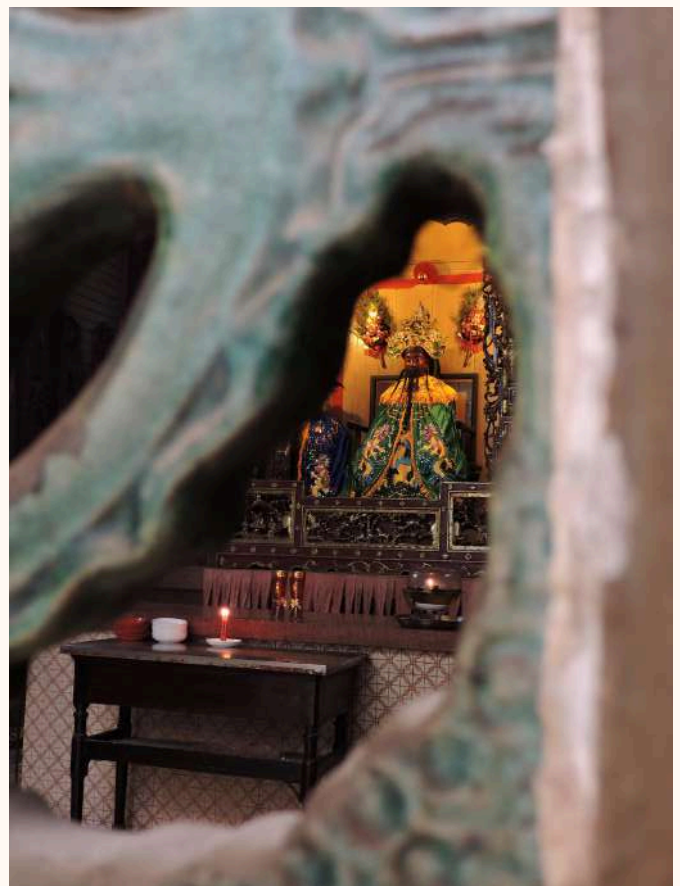
The incense coils are neatly hung.

Photo credit: Anh Ly

Customs such as daily incense burning or changing door stickers at the end of the year are not only rituals but also expressions of traditional culture, preserving family and community values.

Especially, the Chinese in Chợ Lớn believe that each profession is associated with a specific patron deity, who is regarded as the protector and bestower of blessings for those who pursue that profession.

Therefore, depending on the profession the family head is pursuing, they will set up an altar to honor this deity. For example, the goldsmith profession often worships Huê Quang Đại Đế, the herbalist profession worships Hoa Đà, and the carpentry profession worships Lỗ Ban.



A corner of Thien Hau Temple.

Photo credit: Anh Ly



In daily life, ancestor worship and reverence for deities are considered an indispensable part, reflecting gratitude and respect towards one's origins. Families often hold worship ceremonies on special occasions, from small family rituals to larger community events.

Worship at Thien Hau Temple.
Photo credit: Anh Ly

These rituals are often accompanied by traditional dishes such as steamed buns, boiled chicken, or various fruits, each carrying its own significance in the spiritual beliefs of the Chinese. In addition, traditional cultural and artistic activities are also actively organized, helping to create a warm and intimate festive atmosphere.

Traditional festivals such as Tet Nguyen Dan (Lunar New Year), Tet Trung Thu (Mid-Autumn Festival), and Le Cuong Ong Ba (Vu Lan) are still celebrated with great solemnity, attracting not only the participation of the Chinese community but also becoming occasions for many people from various cultures, including Vietnamese, to gather.

During these festive days, people not only prepare traditional dishes but also participate in cultural activities such as lantern processions, lion dances, and worship rituals.

These activities are not only entertaining but also an opportunity to strengthen the bonds between generations, from grandparents to grandchildren, reminding everyone of the cultural values and traditions of their ancestors.



Venerable Thich Hue Cong offers incense to the Buddha. Photo credit: Giac Ngo Online

Through each dance, the shimmering lights, and the lively music, the people not only remember their ancestors but also connect with each other in unity and love. That cultural aspect has highlighted the beauty of a city where cultures coexist and thrive, contributing to the formation of a diverse and unique cultural identity.



Besides the festivals, the customs and practices in the commercial activities of the Chinese community in Chợ Lớn also contribute to the unique cultural diversity of this area.

*A vendor stall at
Cho Lon Market
Photo by Anh Ly*



Traditional markets are not only places for buying and selling goods but also symbols of the community's cultural identity.

The stalls here are often attractively decorated, selling characteristic products such as bread, tea, fruits, and handicrafts heavily influenced by Chinese culture. On market days, the atmosphere becomes more vibrant with the participation of a large number of people, where they have the opportunity to meet, interact, and share cultural stories, creating a strong connection between generations. It is these commercial activities that reflect the spirit of solidarity and mutual support within the community.

The stalls are not just places for transactions but also spaces for people to enjoy music, participate in folk games, and savor local delicacies. Chợ Lớn has become an ideal destination not only for locals but also for those who love exploring and learning about the diverse culture of Ho Chi Minh City.

Historical and Economic Background

of the Chinese community in Vietnam from early times.

According to the Nhân dân Newspaper Online, the Chinese migrated to Vietnam from the 16th century, and later in greater numbers during the late Ming Dynasty and early Qing Dynasty until the first half of the 20th century. They were poor people forced to migrate to Southeast Asian countries occupied by the West to make a living. But now they have risen, become wealthy, and some have even become billionaires with influence over a nation.

Current economic situation

According to World Bank statistics in 2023, the total GDP of 11 Southeast Asian countries is only 3.317 trillion USD, but the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia hold 2 trillion USD in liquid assets, equivalent to 60% of the total GDP of Southeast Asia. These figures can be said to reflect the continuous contributions of the Chinese community to the economies of Southeast Asian countries in general and Vietnam in particular.

In Vietnam, specifically in Ho Chi Minh City, according to statistics, the Chinese community lives with more than 500,000 people (accounting for 8% of the city's population). Chinese-owned businesses account for approximately 30%, which are recognized contributions to the economic development of Ho Chi Minh City, and also serve as an important bridge for Vietnam's economic, trade, and investment relations with the world.

The characteristic of the Chinese community is their integrity in business, whether in large or small transactions - it reflects respect in their profession, in the way they treat each other in buying and selling, a high sense of community, and the relationship between production, business, and cultural and social activities...

Among these, integrity is a prominent cultural trait that facilitates their transactions, something anyone who has interacted with them can feel. Hence the saying "quality goes hand in hand with price" is truly applicable when talking about the products sold by the Chinese, which may be slightly more expensive than the market price, but the quality is unquestionable due to its high standard and perfection.



Cholon – a bustling hub of trade and commerce. Photo credit: Anh Ly

Currently, the economic activities of the Chinese community are concentrated in the private sector, primarily in small and medium-sized enterprises, and are focused on the fields of small-scale industrial production and trade services. In the economic field, Chinese enterprises contribute more than 30% of the total economic output value of districts with a large Chinese population, especially in the Saigon - Cho Lon area, which has significantly contributed to this figure.

The role of the Chinese community in the economic development of Saigon

The Chinese have established many businesses, shops, and restaurants, from wholesale markets to modern shopping centers.

The Chinese community has established numerous businesses, shops, and eateries from traditional wholesale markets to modern commercial centers. They have found success in various fields, but trade and import-export remain their most prominent strengths.



*Bustling trade at Chợ Lớn
Photo by Anh Ly*

The Chinese established markets such as Chợ Lớn (District 5), which one of the busiest trading centers in the city. "Some economists have stated that the heritage of Chợ Lớn could nurture a tourism culture, bringing revenue to Ho Chi Minh City similar to how Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore have developed their Chinatown areas," quoted from the online newspaper Vnexpress on June 18, 2021.

They operate many retail stores and agents, providing a diverse range of goods from food, textiles to electronics. The restaurants and eateries along the streets around the Chợ Lớn area were all established by the Chinese and are very famous. Famous for their quality, the restaurants, despite their relatively high prices, are still bustling with people and families on weekends and during major holidays.



Bustling trade at Chợ Lớn. Photo by Anh Ly

Historically, during the French colonial period, the Chinese demonstrated their significant advantages in the business sector, especially in the trade of rice. With their skillfulness, the Chinese played an important role in the intermediary stage of rice purchasing in Nam Kỳ, controlling the market from the milling stage to the export stage.

Their relationships were not only close with foreign capitalists and colonial authorities but also influenced domestic production and manipulated the consumption of the local population. Therefore, in the field of import and export, it has become one of the key professions that help the Chinese economy develop.



Chợ Lớn is always full of life, welcoming visitors to engage in trade and cultural exchange

Photo credit: Vivu Vietnam

Chợ Lớn is a place that produces a variety of resources for the tourism sector, such as Chinese cuisine, architectural works like assembly halls and temples, and folk performing arts. Not sprawling over a vast area, but all gathered in the Chợ Lớn area, we will feel as if we have stepped into an extended complex entertainment area rich in traditional culture, yet bearing the unique imprint of the Chinese neighborhood here.

Although it is located near the central districts of Saigon, Chợ Lớn still attracts and engages local and international tourists by preserving a corner of the street that embodies poetic and artistic qualities alongside modern, contemporary buildings.

Although it has not yet truly stood out in terms of tourism compared to other areas in the city center, Chợ Lớn is becoming a hot destination that tourism investors are interested in and pursuing. They are gradually expanding their investment in tourism programs here more than before, attracting tourists to Saigon in general and Chợ Lớn in particular.



Cuisine and Market Culture



For over three centuries, the Chinese have become an inseparable part of the vibrant culinary and cultural tapestry of Southern Vietnam. They are not just residents but also close neighbors, friends, and compatriots with the Vietnamese and Khmer people. Stretching across the characteristic landscapes of the Mekong Delta, from small towns to peaceful hamlets, the sounds of conversations among the Chinese, Vietnamese, and Khmer people blend together, creating a lively and rich living space.

The bond between these communities lies not only in language but also in a spirit of sharing and understanding. The Chinese have opened their hearts, integrating into the culture of the land they chose to settle in, not only mastering their mother tongue but also adopting the language and traditions



of the Vietnamese and Khmer. In the South, cultural intermingling is not just a phenomenon but a unique beauty. From architecture and cuisine to clothing and festivals, each element reflects the diversity and richness of this community, making Chinese culinary culture consistently present and prominent in the heart of the Southern region.

Street vendors gathered in front of Binh Tay Market. Photo credit: Anh Ly

History and Origins of Chinese Cuisine

The Cho Lon area in Saigon, now part of Districts 5, 6, and 11 of Ho Chi Minh City, is a major commercial and cultural center for the Chinese community in Vietnam. Chinese cuisine in Cho Lon not only reflects the unique cultural identity of the Chinese but has also blended with local culture throughout historical periods.

Influence of Culture and Regions on Cuisine

Regional Diversity: The Chinese in Cho Lon come from various regions of China, each group bringing its own culinary characteristics. The Cantonese are famous for dishes like dim sum, roast duck, congee, and stir-fries. The Fujianese are known for soups, noodles, and steamed cakes. The Teochew are recognized for hu tieu (rice noodle soup) and seafood dishes. Cho Lon's cuisine reflects a harmonious combination of the cooking styles of these groups, creating a rich and diverse culinary landscape.



The iconic Peking Duck. Photo credit: Vacation Travel

Development of Chinese Cuisine in Cho Lon Through Different Periods

a. French Colonial Period (1859 - 1945)

Under French rule, Cho Lon developed strongly as a bustling commercial center. The Chinese not only engaged in business but also opened restaurants and eateries, serving both the Chinese and Vietnamese communities, as well as the French.

During this period, many Chinese dishes began to blend with French and Vietnamese cuisine, creating unique dishes in Saigon.

Restaurants, noodle shops, and dim sum establishments sprang up everywhere, turning Cho Lon into an attractive destination for both locals and foreign traders.



Chợ Lớn during the French colonial period. Image source: Vietnam Guide.

b. Post-1945 Period and the Formation of Street Food

After 1945, Chinese cuisine in Cho Lon became more popular with the emergence of many affordable eateries serving noodle dishes, congee, rice dishes, and dim sum. Many Chinese people opened small food stalls in the market, selling specialties such as hủ tiếu, bánh bao, dumplings, and xiu mai (pork dumplings).

Cho Lon was also the birthplace of famous street foods such as hu tieu Nam Vang (a dish with Cambodian origins but adapted by the Chinese), clay pot rice, ha cao (shrimp dumplings), and various stir-fried noodles.

These dishes quickly became an indispensable part of Saigon's culinary life, especially in sidewalk eateries and traditional markets.



Hủ tiếu Nam Vang. Source: VnExpress

c. Modern Period

Currently, Cho Lon still holds its position as the culinary center of the Chinese community in Ho Chi Minh City. Large and small restaurants in this area not only serve locals but also attract many international tourists.

Chinese cuisine here continues to develop with a combination of traditional and modern dishes. Some dishes have become symbols of Saigon's culinary culture, such as Peking duck, meat-filled banh bao, and tofu sweet soup.

Major Chinese festivals such as Lunar New Year, Mid-Autumn Festival, and Vu Lan Festival are all associated with traditional dishes, reflecting cultural identity and respect for ancestors.



Food Festival. Source: Cholon Downtown

Influence of Vietnamese Culture on Chinese Cuisine

Although Chinese cuisine in Cho Lon has a strong Chinese character, over the years, it has also been deeply influenced by Vietnamese culture. **Local Ingredients:** The Chinese have adapted to using locally available ingredients in Vietnam such as raw vegetables, Vietnamese spices, and local seafood to create dishes suitable for local tastes.

Seasoning: The Chinese have adjusted their seasoning methods to suit Vietnamese culinary habits, such as reducing spiciness and adding sweetness to dishes. **Dish Adaptations:** Some traditional Chinese dishes such as hu tieu and stir-fried noodles have been adapted to become familiar Vietnamese dishes. Hu tieu Nam Vang and braised duck noodle soup are typical examples of this combination.



Role of Cuisine in Cultural and Economic Life in Cho Lon

Cuisine not only plays an important role in the daily life of the Chinese in Cho Lon but also serves as a cultural bridge between generations and communities. Restaurants and eateries are places for giao luu (interaction), gatherings, and maintaining traditional values.

In Family Life: Each Chinese family has its own traditional dishes, and cooking is an important part of festivals and holidays. In the Economy: Chinese restaurants and eateries in Cho Lon not only serve the Chinese community but also attract tourists, helping to boost the local economy.



Characteristics of Chinese Cuisine

Traditional Chinese Dishes in Cho Lon Market

Peking Duck is perhaps a quite famous dish among Vietnamese people. This dish originated from Northeast China, especially the Beijing area. Peking duck is served in many luxurious and affordable restaurants and is always a focal point for tourists.

This unique dish is believed to have originated during the Yuan Dynasty (1206-1368) and has become a symbol of Beijing's culinary culture. To make delicious Peking duck, the chef must go through many different steps. First, you need to pay close attention to the selection of ingredients. After boiling, the cook does not cut open the duck but makes small holes and removes the internal organs.

This means that the duck meat after roasting will be tender, not lose moisture, and retain its delicious flavor. In addition, this dish also has many other spices combined such as sugar, garlic, licorice powder, soy sauce, and white vinegar to create a special sauce mixture.



Dumplings (*Sủi cảo*) are a traditional Chinese dish always eaten in the spring. Chinese people believe that no matter how far they go, they always return home for Tet (Lunar New Year) and enjoy dumplings with their families. Because the shape of dumplings resembles ancient Chinese coins, it is considered a dish symbolizing luck, wealth, and hope for a brighter future.

Dumplings are meticulously wrapped, especially in the step of using the thumb and forefinger of the right hand to pleat the semicircular edge, which must be pleated evenly, called "Phuc pleating" to pray for financial luck and happiness in the new year, and a bountiful harvest. Besides Tet, Chinese people also enjoy dumplings on special family occasions throughout the year.

Braised Duck Noodle Soup (*Mì vịt tiềm*) is one of the unique dishes introduced by the Chinese during cultural exchanges with the Vietnamese in the Mekong Delta, demonstrating the harmony between the two distinctive culinary cultures of Saigon. The result is a unique and appealing dish. The broth has a natural sweetness, the duck meat is crispy and tender, and the fresh noodles are carefully made from eggs, creating an unforgettable flavor.



Chinese Sweet Soup (Chè Hoa), also known as Teochew sweet soup (chè Tàu), also creates a distinct impression with its unmistakable flavor. Not just a dessert, Chinese sweet soup is also considered a precious remedy, helping to cool the body and replenish blood and energy.

The characteristic of Cho Lon sweet soup lies in the light sweetness of rock sugar, combined with nutritious herbs. Each sweet soup stall has its own family recipe, creating delicate flavors that seem difficult to enjoy but are extremely refreshing and sweet. Some famous Chinese sweet soups include: egg tea sweet soup, black sesame sweet soup, stewed papaya sweet soup, quy linh cao, water chestnut and egg sweet soup, almond tofu sweet soup, barley and quail egg sweet soup, and ginkgo sweet soup.

Teochew Porridge (Cháo Tiều) is a characteristic dish of the Chinese, differing from Vietnamese offal porridge (cháo lòng) due to its unique preparation method. Instead of being cooked together with the porridge, the offal (liver, intestines, lungs..) is only added when the customer orders, then boiled and stirred into the white porridge.

The hot bowl of Teochew porridge emits a sweet aroma from the pork offal, blended with the smooth porridge. Squid, straw mushrooms, scallions, pepper, ginger, and chili add to the richness, and especially indispensable are the chicken egg and crispy fried dough sticks. This flavorful dish can be easily found throughout the small alleys of Chinatown.



Special Spices in Cooking

- Dried Chili: Adds color and a rich flavor, especially indispensable in Sichuan dishes. Sichuan
- Peppercorns: Have a numbing and fragrant spiciness, often used in hot pots and seafood dishes.
- Star Anise: An important spice in stews, helping to remove odors and enhance the flavor of beef and pork knuckles.
- Garlic: Often stir-fried first to enhance aroma and flavor in dishes.
- Soy Sauce: Used as a dipping sauce or to create flavor, with light soy sauce used for seasoning and dark soy sauce used for coloring.
- Black Vinegar: Beneficial for health, especially in reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease.
- Soybean Red Chili Oil: Used as a dipping sauce or marinade for grilled dishes, prominent in Sichuan cuisine.
- Ginger: Both a spice and a medicinal ingredient, helping to cool the body and enhance the flavor of congee and steamed fish.
- Scallions: Often chopped to garnish and season steamed seafood dishes.
- Sa Te Sauce: Adds a strong and rich spiciness, used to marinate meat and fish.
- Sesame Oil Sauce: Made from roasted sesame seeds, often used to mix with sauces, adding a characteristic aroma.

Chợ Lớn Culture

Cho Lon is considered the "culinary paradise" of the Chinese with dozens of delicious dishes such as há cảo, sủi cảo, hủ tiếu sa tế, mì vịt tiềm, cháo Tiều, and phá lấu. These dishes bear a strong Chinese flavor, combined with fresh ingredients, creating a unique culinary experience for diners.

When settling in Cho Lon, the Chinese brought diverse customs, practices, beliefs, and festivals, forming a rich cultural life. In particular, the lion and dragon dance (múa lân-sư-rồng) has become an indispensable part of festivals such as Lunar New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival, symbolizing luck and prosperity. Lion dance troupes often have a division between Southern and Northern lions, with many rich forms of performance.

All these factors not only help the Chinese community preserve their unique cultural identity but also create a unique space for cultural exchange in Chợ Lớn.



Traditional Occupations Still Maintained Today



The Cho Lon area is not only brightly colored with lanterns but also adorned with the unique architecture of houses, shops, and assembly halls. Over the years, the Chinese here have persistently preserved traditional crafts, the most prominent being tea and cake shops bearing an unmistakable cultural imprint.

Recently, the interest of young people in traditional crafts has helped Di Phat Tea Shop become a familiar destination.

Source: Kenh 14

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Every item in the shop is imbued with the family's dedication, with the traditional Teochew method of drying tea with charcoal, along with unique tea packaging styles such as paper wrapping, square wrapping, and banh it (pyramidal glutinous rice cake) wrapping, each with its own meaning.

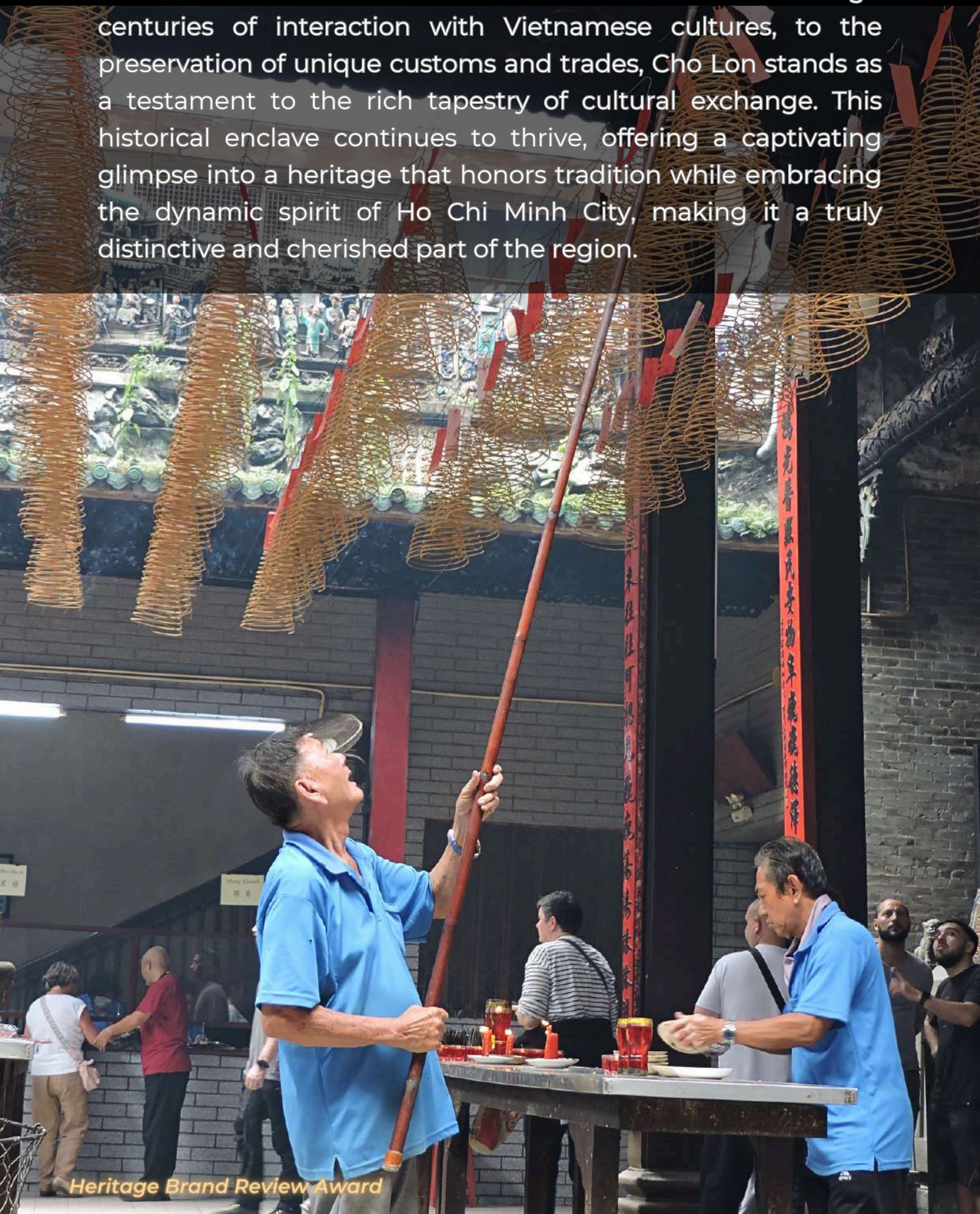
Tea appears in Chinese wedding culture; tea packages are used in weddings, given by the groom's family to the bride's family. This is one of the traditional tea packages that only Di Phat Tea Shop still preserves.

The banh pia (mung bean cake with salted egg yolk) making profession is also an indispensable part of the culinary picture of the Chinese in Cho Lon. Minh Hiep Cake Shop, run by Trieu An's family, has existed for over 70 years, attracting many customers both on weekdays and holidays. With a history dating back to 1948, the cake shop is not just a place to make food but also a symbol of the connection between generations. Banh pia is not only a precious gift during holidays, especially the Mid-Autumn Festival, but also a cultural bridge, expressing the honoring of traditional values.



Source: Du lich
Ho Chi Minh

In conclusion, the enduring presence of the Chinese community in Cho Lon has indelibly shaped Southern Vietnam's cultural and culinary landscape. From the vibrant markets and traditional dishes that have evolved through centuries of interaction with Vietnamese cultures, to the preservation of unique customs and trades, Cho Lon stands as a testament to the rich tapestry of cultural exchange. This historical enclave continues to thrive, offering a captivating glimpse into a heritage that honors tradition while embracing the dynamic spirit of Ho Chi Minh City, making it a truly distinctive and cherished part of the region.



Thank for your reading!

Cholon – More Than Just a Place, a Living Cultural Treasure

Cholon is not just a location but a vibrant cultural tapestry where tradition and modernity intertwine, creating a vivid portrayal of the Chinese community in Saigon. From flavorful hometown dishes and narrow alleys filled with historical stories to exquisite handicrafts preserved through generations, all these elements come together to form a rich and unique cultural mosaic.

Through each page of this magazine, we hope you've felt the rhythm, the soul, and the heartbeat of the Chinese community in Saigon. Let these experiences inspire you to discover more hidden gems, to understand and cherish the multicultural beauty of this city.

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Organizing Committee and our advisors for their unwavering support, guidance, and dedication, enabling this magazine to come to life and reach a wider audience.

Moreover, we sincerely thank the individuals, artisans, and the Chinese community in Cholon for their openness in sharing their stories, images, and invaluable cultural heritage.

And finally, to you, our dear readers, thank you for taking the time to read, feel, and embrace each page of this publication. We hope this magazine serves as a bridge, connecting you to the rich cultural heritage of Saigon-Cholon.

See you on our next cultural journey!

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