The only circumstance, inconsistent with our notions of good breeding, to be witnessed at a Chinese dinner table, is that during and after the meal, eructations are heard around, to a disgusting extent; this practice is indulged in, for the purpose of evincing how good the food is, and how fully the guests have satisfied the cravings of hunger; for according to Chinese ideas, a stigma would be cast upon the host and entertainment were these unmusical sounds omitted.

As soon as the lengthy repast was over, tea was handed round as before, the host ushering his visitors to the theatre to witness dramatic representations, and pyrtechnic display. The costumes of the actors were rich, (being that of the ancient Chinese, which is invariably used upon the stage, although it differs little from that of the present day) both for the male and female characters; the latter being performed by youths, as women rarely, if ever appear on the stage.

Each character, upon coming on the stage, advanced to the front of it, and informed the audience whom he represented, and what he was about to perform. A singer dressed in female attire excited much applause, by uttering to our ears, most inharmonious and unmusical sounds whilst twanging an abominable accompaniment on a three-stringed instrument, resembling a guitar. A buffoon caused much laughter and merriment by his clever repartee and witty speeches; a distressed damsel appealed to the softer feelings, whilst a tyrannical father excited the bitterer portion of our nature. Processions of soldiers appeared continually on the stage, apparently to us, for the express purpose of walking off again; as these gentry were perpetually walking across the stage making their exit on one side, to reappear at the other.

We could not enter fully into the various smart things that were uttered by the respective characters, but conclude they must have been most excellent, from the evident delight of the numerous friends, that had been invited to witness the performances; and from the shrill laughter and applause, heard from the lattice above, where the ladies of the family were seated unseen, to behold the representation.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The Chinese are proficients in the pyrotechnic art, and the fireworks which were exhibited at the end of this entertainment were chef d’œuvre of skill—the four elements having been called into requisition to furnish animals, birds, fishes, and reptiles, both real and imaginary; from whose bodies issued streams of flame. Fire dragons ascended into the air, and were metamorphised into fire-vomiting lions; a huge bird of some unknown species, fluttered in the air in a sheet of flame, presently a huge serpent crawled from out of the beak of the bird, and was lost to view in many tinted flames; one large lantern ascended, in a mass of fire, from which smaller lanterns issued, which in their turn sent forth various and innumerable forms. On the back of an enormous fish was seated a portly mandarin, from whose aldermanic corporation burst forth streams of fire, which appeared to cause intense delight, and excite the greatest merriment amongst the spectators. The last firework was by far the beautiful and perfect, being completely artistic in its details; this represented a mandarin’s house with the whole of the adjacent buildings belonging to the residence, the roofs being ornamented with bells and figures; this burned for some short time, and then changed into a mandarin seated in his sedan-chair, with the usual train of attendants, bearing flags, beating gongs, and carrying lanterns; the effect of this mass of many-coloured flames, defining the outline of the various forms baffles description; and as the last sparks died away, we could have been tempted to follow Oliver Twist’s example, *and asked for more*. It is the custom of the country, after an entertainment, to send presents to the host, which usually consist of a chest of tea, a pecul of sugar candy, fruits, and edibles of a less expensive nature; the party who receives the presents, invariably gives the servants of the donor, who bring the gifts, a *cum shaw* of some few dollars, which the domestics divide equally amongst the head servants of the establishment; at all events, they profess to do so.

1. This species of entertainment is termed in Anglo-Chinese, a Sing-song. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)