

Ceramics in the collection of the Museum of Chinese Australian History, Melbourne

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In recent years, many archaeological excavations in Victoria and other Australian states have retrieved Chinese ceramics items used by the Chinese to store, prepare and serve food. Very little is known about these vessels. They have been listed and briefly described in archaeological reports, but a lack of common terminology and understanding of the vessels is evident. This paper represents a preliminary stage of a Masters thesis at La Trobe University, which will catalogue complete and fragmentary overseas Chinese ceramics. The project will also develop a common terminology for the vessels, with reference to existing American and Asian research. This analysis also forms the basis for exploring questions about cultural identity. This paper examines the collection held by the Museum of Chinese Australian History in Melbourne, presenting information regarding the form, manufacture and usage of these vessels. It also makes a preliminary examination of elements that make the Australian assemblage distinctive, as well as possible variations within Australia.

In the last few years, there has been increasing research into the Chinese people that came to Australia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These people, known in China as *huaqiao*, which translates as sojourners, or overseas Chinese, came largely from Guangdong province in southern China. Many in Victoria came from See Yup, the four districts to the south of Canton (*Guangzhou*). The *huaqiao* were poor. They were driven to Australia to seek work and gold by need. Consequently, they brought little luggage. The items they did bring or purchase in Australia from Chinese merchants are becoming the focus of archaeological and historical research. Food and eating habits played enormously significant roles in traditional China. They expressed social and personal titles and positions as well as having ritual and economic significance (Anderson & Anderson 1977). As Andrew Piper (1988:34) states 'Diet is an important way for people to assess themselves culturally'. The ceramics of the Chinese in Australia are material evidence of diet and food habits, and as such have the potential to tell us much about the everyday life of the overseas Chinese.

In the United States of America, much research has been conducted into the ceramics used by the overseas Chinese in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some of the most detailed works include Chace (1976), Quellmalz (1972, 1976), Wegars (1999) and Yang and Hellmann (1997). Willets and Lim published *Nonya Ware and Kitchen Ch'ing* in 1991, which is a wide-ranging examination and illustration of ceramics found in overseas Chinese sites in Asia, and Neville Ritchie's 1986 doctoral thesis provides a detailed description and analysis of the ceramics found in New Zealand. Although this is useful for Australian archaeologists, a body of research into the Australian situation is needed. Jane Lydon, in her recent book, *Many Inventions* (1999), turned to American research to understand the ceramics excavated in the Rocks in Sydney, but finding the Australian range included patterns not found in America, also used Willets and Lim's (1991) Asian research. Obviously the Australian assemblage is unique, and as such deserves an analysis on its own terms.

The ceramics used by the overseas Chinese differ from Chinese export porcelain in form, decoration, place of manufacture and period of export. Much Chinese export porcelain was made for a western market; Europeans and Americans, and so was made in familiar western forms, often in large multiple-piece dinner services. The decorations were also designed to suit a western market. While they may have had

some Chinese influences, the decorations were often family coats of arms or pastoral scenes. Often the buyer in England or America specified the form and the decoration. Chinese export porcelain was produced at Jingdezhen, which was the Chinese centre of porcelain manufacture from the fourteenth century. The vessels would then be shipped to Guangzhou, where they were sold to the European or American traders. The trade in export porcelain had reached its peak by the end of the eighteenth century, when the European craze for things Chinese began to die out, and European and American kilns were able to produce porcelain and other vitrified wares domestically at a lower cost than importing it.

The vessels found in Chinese occupied sites in Australia, America, New Zealand and Canada are Chinese in form and decoration. They were brought to Australia from China by men on their way to the goldfields, or by merchants to sell to Chinese immigrants. The forms include rice bowls and small liquor cups, as well as stoneware storage vessels. The decorations are traditional Chinese patterns that often have a long history for example 'Bamboo', which has reportedly been produced since the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 AD) (Pastron et al. 1981:426). The vessels are coarsely potted and the decorations are often roughly painted. They were made for a Chinese market, both domestic and overseas, as similar vessels are found in Malaysia (Willets & Lim 1981) and the Philippines (Quellmalz 1976:289), in sites occupied by Chinese people. These vessels were made in provincial kilns in southern China, not in Jingdezhen. Although the American market for Chinese export ware lasted longer than the European, it had largely disappeared by the late nineteenth century, whereas the market for wares in Chinese forms continued into the twentieth century.

The Museum of Chinese Australian History (or Chinese Museum) in Melbourne has acquired, through purchase and donation, a small collection of the type of vessels often encountered in archaeological contexts. The Museum also has photographs of items from other Victorian collections, both private and public. There are also modern examples of some vessel types on display, which are often nearly identical to archaeologically retrieved vessels. A relative lack of archaeological excavations into Victorian Chinese sites has meant that information regarding ceramics, and other aspects of material culture, have had to come from museum collections rather than contextualised archaeological assemblages. Not only do they lack an archaeological context, but collection procedures will also skew the range of vessels retained. Many vessels are

donated, either by family or by bottle hunters, rather than systematically purchased. What a donor or a curator chooses to retain and what they choose to throw away will necessarily influence information that can be retrieved from the vessels. By describing and contextualising these complete vessels I intend to develop a framework for the analysis of archaeological material.

THE WARES

The wares associated with overseas Chinese settlements are utilitarian, and can be classed as either food storage items, or food service items, although in some cases there may have been some crossover between the categories. Items with religious significance, or that are purely decorative are less often found. Items associated with opium use, also often made of ceramic will not be dealt with in this paper, which will focus on food-related items.

Storage items were usually made of coarse heavy stoneware, which is very strong and would survive the long voyages within China and overseas, although some vessels, such as medicinal teapots, liquor bottles, and some wide-mouthed jars, are made of a finer bodied ware. These items frequently appear in excavations of sites occupied by the overseas Chinese in Australia, New Zealand, and the USA. They have been referred to as *Jian You*, Temmoku (Wegars 1999:1) or Asian *T'zu* (high-fired ware) (Mueller 1987). They are often glazed with a vitreous brown or green glaze, the most common being a glossy dark brown glaze. High fired black and brown glazes were commonly used on storage jars and liquor bottles in the rural areas of China. The raw materials for these glazes were the iron rich muds and silts of local rivers (Wood 1999:137). The storage vessels have limited decorative treatment. Glazes appear to be purely practical as they are applied haphazardly and unevenly, although firing in a wood kiln would account for some inconsistencies and variations in glaze finishes. No decorative motifs are used with the brown glaze, although some green glazed storage jars have moulded patterns. Construction of the vessels is rough. Little attempt is made to hide joins, and the clays are coarse and impure. Ritchie (1986:231) suggests these vessels were made to a basic design by independent potters in southern China. These vessels have shown relatively little variation over time, with some forms having been made since the Southern Sung Dynasty (1127–1279 AD) (Quellmalz 1976:292). Similar items are still produced in China, and may be found on the shelves of Chinese grocery shops today, holding preserved vegetables and bean curd.

It has been suggested that these storage vessels were not reused (Greenwood 1980:119), as when new supplies were purchased they would arrive in similar containers. However, there is some evidence from New Zealand and the USA that some jars may have been recycled. In New Zealand, and in the USA, wine bottles have been modified to form bowls (Ritchie 1986:234), and food jars have been found with blackened bases, suggesting they were used as cooking pots (Ritchie 1986:234, 242). In Australia, a food jar was reused as a container for nails, probably by Europeans (Lawrence 2000:112).

By contrast, items used for serving food in the overseas Chinese context are made of porcelain or porcellanous stoneware, and are often highly decorated. Anderson and Anderson (1977:366) note that southern Chinese tableware items are made from 'common, easy-to-work, cheap materials – and are made...to last and to be decorative'. Close examination of these vessels reveals some were constructed on a wheel, and some, notably small vessels, such as liquor cups, were made by hand. There seems to be a distinctive range of forms that were used by the overseas Chinese in Australia, New Zealand, the USA, and Southeast Asia, including bowls,

spoons, teacups, liquor cups and teapots. It is thought that these were manufactured at Swatow (now called Shantou), a port on the South China coast, famous for coarsely made wares with hand-painted patterns 'freely, if rather crudely, drawn' (Neave-Hill 1975:152). They would then have been shipped to Guangzhou for export (Ritchie 1986:215). However, Quellmalz (1976:289) suggests that there could have been a range of provincial kilns that produced these vessels, such as Dehua in Fujian province (Lam 1985:80). These wares were known as *min-yao*, which refers to items from a people's kiln, as opposed to *kuan-yao*, which were items from Imperial kilns. In recent literature they have been referred to as *Kitchen Ch'ing* (Willets & Lim 1981).

The patterns discussed below are designs commonly found on *Kitchen Ch'ing* vessels in America and in Asia, and therefore have been named by researchers. There is no general consensus on the correct terminology for these patterns. However, an article by Ruth Ann Sando and David Felton (1993) examines the inventory of a Chinese shop in nineteenth-century California, and it revealed several Chinese names for tableware designs. These would seem to be the preferred terms, and will be used in this paper although terms used by previous researchers will be discussed. These terms include 'Bamboo', 'Double Happiness' and 'Simple Flower'. However, the term for celadon is given as 'Wintergreen', but because of the long history of the term celadon, it will continue to be used in this paper.

Motifs and techniques were varied and certain motifs appear to be associated with particular vessel forms, although this may vary regionally. Teapots are frequently decorated with images of pheasants and peonies in polychrome enamel, although in American assemblages, blue and white glazes seem more common on teapots (see Quellmalz 1976:290). Almost all examples of wine pots or saucepots found so far in Australia and overseas seem to have been decorated with a pattern known as 'Simple Flower' (Sando & Felton 1993:161). Blue and white underglaze decorations are commonly found in Victoria. Blue and white is a technique that dates back to the fourteenth century in China (Medley 1976:176), and perhaps even earlier. This technique involves a blue cobalt oxide being applied directly to the unfired clay and then a clear glaze, or a glaze with a greenish cast is applied. The absorption of the cobalt by the clay and application of the translucent glaze results in a complete fusion between the colour and the body of the vessel. The whole item is then fired at a very high temperature.

There are many different patterns executed in blue and white. Some examples of 'Double Happiness' bowls, called 'Swirl' by Pastron et al. (1981:430) or *Shuang Hsi* (Willets & Lim 1981:11) are present in Victorian private collections at Beechworth and Bendigo. This pattern usually consists of the Chinese symbol for double happiness, surrounded by swirled and floral patterns. 'Bamboo' is another blue and white pattern often encountered. This has also been called Three Circles and Dragonfly (Pastron et al. 1981:426) or *Qing Hua Wan* (Ritchie 1986:218). This design is a stylized floral pattern with circles, and what has been interpreted by some as a dragonfly (Pastron et al. 1981:426). Others (Praetzellis cited in Ritchie 1986:218) interpret it as the Chinese character *chin*, which represents the divine fungus; a symbol of longevity and immortality. 'Simple Flower', referred to by some researchers as 'Sweet Pea' (Willets & Lim 1981:13), is also occasionally found on bowls, sauce pots, wine ewers, and covered jars. This pattern incorporates a large central flower encircled by delicate vines. Items with this design belong to a category of vessels referred to as 'Shanghai Ware' (Willets & Lim 1991:13). They are made from a fine white porcelain and have clear, well-defined decorations. Willets and Lim (1991:13) suggest they may not have been in constant everyday use.

Polychrome overglaze decorations are also reasonably common in Australian assemblages and overseas. They are often found on teapots in the Chinese Museum collection, although they have been found on bowls (Quellmalz 1976:291) and saucers (Lydon 1999:220) in other contexts. These wares are thinly potted and brightly coloured, often including red, green, yellow, turquoise, brown and pink enamels. The most common polychrome pattern found on overseas Chinese porcelain is 'Four Flowers' or 'Four Seasons'. This pattern illustrates the flowers representing the four seasons. They are prunus or plum blossom representing winter, lotus representing summer, peony representing spring, and chrysanthemum representing autumn.

Chinese wine cups in Victorian collections have been associated with celadon, or 'Wintergreen', which is a pale blue-green feldspathic glaze. Celadon wares were perfected in China by the tenth century (Neave-Hill 1975:9), and have been admired worldwide. It is thought that celadon is a European term, referring to a character in a French play who habitually wore pale-green clothing (Gompertz 1958:21).

These patterns are by no means exhaustive. Most American research has turned up vessels with designs not mentioned here. These are simply the most common, and the ones that have also been found in Australia. The Chinese Museum has examples of teacups with an image of two dragons painted in red underglaze. Between the two dragons is a pearl and a bat motif. Bats are symbols of happiness, wealth and longevity, and are documented in Hellmann and Yang's (1997:167) examination of ceramics from Sacramento, but they do not appear common. There are also two other bowls with images of dragons in blue and white. The dragon is a common motif in Chinese art as it is a very potent symbol, being the bringer of rain, the symbol of male fertility (*yang*), and if pictured with five claws, the Emperor. There is also a bowl decorated with human figures and Chinese calligraphy. These do not appear to have been as well documented in the American literature, although there are some references, discussed below.

The vessels in the overseas Chinese ceramic inventory are fairly standard, and can be broken down into various categories. All of the forms included below are either part of the collection of the Chinese Museum, or are present at the Museum as images from other Victorian collections.

Brown-glazed Stonewares

Wide-mouthed Shouldered Jar

These vessels, called *Fut How Nga Peng* in Cantonese (Hellmann & Yang 1997:182) are associated with the shipment and storage of food such as preserved eggs, vegetables and bean curd, salted radish and garlic, pickled lemons, oil and ginger (Fig. 1). Dried and preserved foods made up a great deal of the everyday diet of southern Chinese people (Anderson & Anderson 1977:328). They are made of coarse grainy stone-ware with a brown iron glaze.

The most common form is a pot with a dark brown glaze, usually 130 to 150 mm high. It tapers from the shoulders to the base, and above to a short straight neck with a wide mouth. They have concave bases that are left unglazed to prevent the vessels sticking to the kiln during firing. These pots are wheel-formed. The inside is glazed by pouring liquid into the pot and swishing it around, often resulting in an uneven cover. They are sometimes associated with unglazed saucer shaped ceramic lids, although a glazed example has been found in a private collection in Beechworth. Stoneware jars with bone-coloured glazes have also been found, often constructed in a globular shape, and they have also been associated with food storage.



Fig. 1: Wide-mouthed shouldered jar, Collection of the Museum of Chinese Australian History.

Liquor Bottle

These have been called 'Tiger Whiskey' bottles, *Mao-Tai* (McCarthy 1995:200) or *Tsao Tsun* (Hellmann & Yang 1997:182) (Fig. 2). They were used to import and store Chinese liquor. Chinese "wines" are alcoholic beverages made either from grain or starch bases (Anderson & Anderson, 1977:342) and so are liquors rather than wines in the European sense. The liquor most likely to have been in these bottles was *Ng Ga Py*, which is very strong and used for cooking as well as drinking (Hellmann & Yang 1997:182). The bottles have been used for serving wine as well as storage in some contexts. In Tasmania some of these bottles were found associated



Fig. 2: Liquor bottle, Collection of the Museum of Chinese Australian History.

with a pig oven (Gaughwin 1995:239) suggesting that the contents of the bottle were consumed when the oven was in use, which appears to have been on ceremonial occasions (Gaughwin 1995:240; Bell 1995:220). The liquor bottles have a distinctive carafe shape, are 155 to 160 mm in height, and are brown glazed. The glazes are applied by double-dipping, and are more varied and of a higher quality than other brown-ware. The clays are also usually finer. Neville Ritchie (1986:232) suggests that they were formed in moulds in three separate pieces which were then joined together, and this is borne out by the obvious join marks on the bottles.

Spouted Jars

In the archaeological literature, these vessels are commonly called soy sauce bottles (Fig. 3). They are a very standard size, usually 130 to 140 mm high, and are known as *Nga Hu* in Cantonese (Hellmann & Yang 1997:182). They may have been associated with service as well as storage, and may also have been associated with the shipping of liquids other than soy sauce, such as vinegar. They are large globose bottles with short pour spouts and narrow necks. They are made from stoneware with a brown-iron glaze. The base was probably formed on the wheel, with the top section mould formed and joined later. Ritchie (1986:237) thinks that the spout was joined to the clay body, and a hole pierced through with a stick. US research suggests that these have been reused as teapots in rural areas (Hellmann & Yang 1997:182).



Fig. 3: Spouted jar, Collection of the Museum of Chinese Australian History.

Globular Jars

The globular jar or *Ching* (Hellmann & Yang 1997:182) is a large rounded form, between 280 and 360 mm in height (Fig. 4). It narrows to the mouth and has lugs around the shoulder region. These vessels were probably completely formed on the wheel and have been produced since the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) (Quellmalz 1976:293). Vessels of this shape have been associated in the USA with the shipping of bulk soy sauce or preserved goods such as eggs (Evans 1980:90). In Australia and New Zealand, they were used for the storage of *Shao Hsing*, which is a beer-like brew (Paul Macgregor, pers. comm.). Quellmalz (1976:293) suggests they may have been reused to return the bones of the dead to China for burial.

Straight-sided Jars

There are reportedly several sizes of these jars, although the Chinese Museum only has a small example (43 mm in height)



Fig. 4: Globular jar, Collection of the Burke Museum, Beechworth.

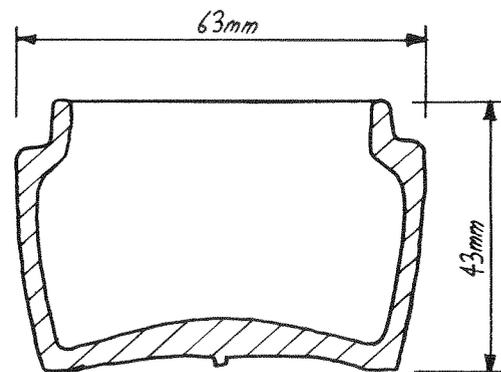


Fig. 5: Small straight-sided jar, Collection of the Museum of Chinese Australian History.

(Fig. 5). They often have glazed lids, fitted onto an unglazed seat. They were also used for the storage of food, and have been recycled as storage jars and medicine jars (Hellmann & Yang 1997:187). They are known as *Jiung* in Cantonese (Hellmann & Yang 1997:182).

Pan

These have also been referred to as *Shi Ben Tou* (Chace, cited in Ritchie 1986:256) or *Tsoi But* (Hellmann & Yang 1997:187). They are flat stoneware dishes, glazed on the inside and partially on the outside. It has been suggested that they were used for cooking (Ritchie 1986:256) or for food service, and that they were only used by the poorest families (Hellmann & Yang 1997:187).

Green-glazed Storage Jars

These vessels are made of a similar stoneware to the brown-glazed storage vessels, but are glazed with a light-green glaze

(Fig. 6). This glaze is made from ground glass mixed with mud from the Pearl River (Wood 1999:224). They are unglazed at the base, and for 10–20 mm around the bottom of the vessel, suggesting that they were held at the base and dipped into the glaze in the same way as the brown-glazed stoneware. The example at the Chinese Museum is hexagonal, 150 mm high with a floral pattern press-moulded into each of the six panels. Neville Ritchie suggests that these were closed with unglazed lids held on with 'split bamboo, "netting" and glued paper' (Ritchie 1986:265). It is likely that these were associated with the storage and shipment of more luxurious foodstuffs, such as cassia or preserved ginger.



Fig. 6: Green-glazed ginger jar, Collection of the Museum of Chinese Australian History.

Kitchen Ch'ing

Rice Bowls

These bowls can vary considerably in size, although they often have a mouth diameter of about 130 mm, and are about 62 mm deep. They have a small foot-ring on the base. They are made of porcelain or porcellanous stoneware, and are decorated with blue and white, celadon or polychrome enamel glazes. The glaze patterns of these bowls were traditional and some, such as 'Bamboo', have remained relatively unchanged for 500 years (Patron et al. 1981:426). The rice bowl was the most basic item of tableware for southern Chinese families. Each member of the family had an individual bowl for rice, and meat or vegetable dishes were often served in the cooking pot (Anderson & Anderson 1977:365). These were also the traditional "wine" cup for poorer families, and on feast occasions, would be filled with liquor after the food was finished (Anderson & Anderson 1977:365).

The walls of these bowls can be curved or straight. This is thought to be a result of manufacturing processes rather than deliberate design (Patron et al. 1981:428). However, it may be that vessels with straighter sides are tea bowls, rather than rice bowls.

Tea Bowl

In March 2000, The Flagstaff House Museum of Teaware in Hong Kong displayed several vessels similar to those in the collection of the Museum of Chinese Australian History. The

Museum stated these were tea bowls and that during the Qing Dynasty, the lidded tea bowl, or *Zhong*, was a popular vessel for brewing and drinking tea. A tea bowl is used in the absence of a teapot and is particularly suited for individuals. The tea is brewed in the cup and is drunk by pushing the lid back slightly to form a narrow gap that does not let the tea leaves through. Similar vessels are still used in teahouses in China. These vessels do not seem to occur in archaeological assemblages, although they may be difficult to differentiate from rice bowls.

The Museum has several examples of these small upright-sided bowls with fitted lids. They are 55 to 60 mm high and have a mouth diameter of 110 mm. They are made of consistently good quality porcelain. The lid has a rim on the top, and is frequently decorated on the underside, suggesting it may be reversible. The examples in the Chinese Museum have manufacturer's marks inside the rim on the lid, as well as within the foot-ring of the bowl. Ritchie (1986:212) observed similar marks on celadon rice bowls in New Zealand. He states that the general accord among researchers is that these marks may provide dates or places of manufacture, but many are degraded from their original form or have been made up by the manufacturer in imitation of traditional marks. The vessels in the Chinese Museum collection include two bowls that are blue and white glazed with a dragon chasing pearl design on the exterior of the bowl and the lid (Fig. 7). One of these also has a rice grain pattern on the interior surface. This decoration consists of small rice grain shaped holes which pit the surface of the porcelain and which fill with liquid when the vessel is glazed. Another example has human figures painted in polychrome overglaze and Chinese calligraphy. Vessels with a similar pattern are discussed by Hellmann and Yang (1997:174). They suggest that these vessels could be southern Chinese export porcelain and that the calligraphy is poetry.



Fig. 7: Tea bowl, Collection of the Museum of Chinese Australian History.

Teapots

The Chinese teapots in Victorian collections seem to be decorated with a fairly standard set of motifs, incorporating pheasants, butterflies, bees, peonies, and other floral motifs executed in pink and green overglaze enamels. The spouts of these teapots are always undecorated. The pots themselves are cylindrical, narrowing to shoulders and neck. They have a wire handle, often wrapped in red fabric. They range in height from 140 mm to 170 mm. Teapots are usually made of good quality porcelain. Serviceable and beautiful teapots were desired by southern Chinese people, and they could often be the most expensive and treasured kitchen item a family owned (Anderson & Anderson 1977:365). Quellmalz (1976:290) suggests that they were 'an indispensable item' for the overseas Chinese.

Teacups

These are small delicate thinly potted vessels, often decorated with pencilled underglaze or floral patterns. They are roughly 76 mm across the mouth and 36 mm deep, making them larger than liquor cups, but smaller than tea bowls. Although found individually, they are often found as elements of a teaset. The examples in the Chinese Museum both have roughly painted red underglaze dragons, with a diamond pattern around the mouth (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8: Teacup, Collection of the Museum of Chinese Australian History.

Tea Sets

The Chinese Museum has several sets that consist of a barrel shaped teapot, one or two cups, and a silk lined bamboo basket with a bronze latch (Fig. 9). In many cases these sets, made of good quality porcelain, appear to have been given as gifts from members of the Chinese community to Europeans. Blofeld (1985:153) states that these sets were designed for picnics, so that the Chinese could enjoy their tea 'in a forest, on the shores of a lake, or perched high upon a mountain side'.



Fig. 9: Teaset, Collection of the Museum of Chinese Australian History.

Small Sauce Dipping Dishes.

These are small flat dishes with a diameter of about 50 mm (Fig. 10). They were used to serve sauces or dips alongside main meals. They have also been associated with ceremonies where small pieces of pork and cups of wine are left on grave sites for the dead to eat. Many examples in Victorian museums are decorated with the flowers of the four seasons in enamel overglaze.

Sauce Pot

These vessels are similar in shape to ewers that have been identified as liquor warmers. They are cylindrical, with a gentle

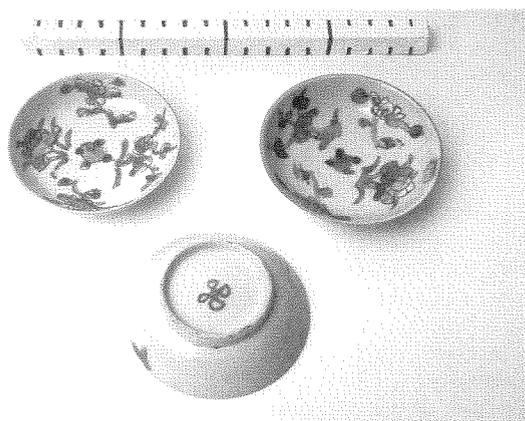


Fig. 10: Small sauce dipping dishes, Collection of Burke Museum, Beechworth.

slope from the mouth to the shoulder. They have a curved spout. They are glazed inside and out, except for the base, which is left unglazed to prevent sticking in the kiln. The difference appears to be that a liquor warmer has a handle, while a saucepot does not (Wegars 2000:2). Most examples of these vessels, with or without the handle, are decorated with 'Simple Flower' design.

Spoons

These are common items, and are still found unvaried in design in shops and restaurants (Fig. 11). They are porcelain and used for eating soups, and possibly for serving food. The bowl of the spoon is oval shaped with high sides, and the handle juts out at a 45-degree angle. They are usually decorative, coming in a range of different patterns. The examples at the Chinese Museum (pictures only) are decorated with celadon and 'Four Flowers' design. The spoon with the 'Four Flower' design has the flowers in the bowl of the spoon with foliage also creeping up the handle.



Fig. 11: Spoon, Private Collection.

CONCLUSIONS

Although it is inadvisable to extrapolate from one collection, an examination of the Chinese Museum collection does allow some observations to be made. There may be some regional variations within Australia. For example, celadon vessels do not appear to dominate the tableware assemblages in Victoria to the extent they do elsewhere. Collections found in a rural context, such as Beechworth or Bendigo are more likely to have substantial amounts of blue and white vessels in them. Celadon is still present. City sites, such as Cohen Place and Little Lonsdale Street do have considerable amounts of celadon present, but these are supplemented by blue and white patterns. Although further research and excavation may turn

up more of this ware, so far celadon does not appear to be as common as would be expected considering research in nearby regions. In the Rocks area of Sydney (Lydon 1999:214) and New Zealand (Ritchie 1986:279) celadon ware seems to be commonly found. In addition to this, some patterns, such as 'Double Happiness' and 'Bamboo' which are either rare or absent in Sydney and New Zealand, are found in Victoria. This situation may be refuted by further research, or it may be indicative of trade patterns. It has been observed (Cronin 1982:31) that Chinese people preferred to visit shops run by merchants from their own home village. Perhaps this patterning is reflecting Chinese merchants in Australia selling wares from a local kiln from their own district in China. Some of the decorations recorded by Jane Lydon in the Rocks have not appeared in this collection. These include 'Om', 'Peach and Fungus' and 'Chrysanthemum and Conch'. There are also forms referred to in previous research that do not appear here. These include plates and large barrel-shaped jars. Whether this is a true indication of the absence of these vessels or a lack of research remains to be seen, but their absence may be indicative of regional variations.

There may also be some differences between the Australian and overseas assemblages. Some patterns, such as the dragon chasing pearl painted in red or blue underglaze, that are not referred to in American literature, are present the Museum's collection. Dragon images are found on *Kitchen Ch'ing* in an Asian context (Willets & Lim 198:87; Chace 1976:527) records an overglaze red dragon on a spoon from Ventura, California and it is not unlikely that more will appear given the importance of the dragon in Chinese culture. I have located only two references in the American literature to vessels with a design similar to the Museum's figurative tea bowl. One is in Hellmann and Yang (1997:174), where the authors discuss several vessels with calligraphic patterns, including a spoon and a dish. Pastron et al. (1981:442) mention two teapots with what they term a 'Character with Figures' pattern. The calligraphy on these teapots represents a story illustrated by the polychrome figures. The calligraphy on the Museum's teabowl has not been translated.

Further research is required to examine the extent of regional variations, both within Australia and overseas. I will be able to address these issues during the course of my Masters thesis. After a catalogue and terminology of these wares has been developed, I will use it to analyse assemblages from excavations of Chinese occupation sites carried out in inner city Melbourne, such as the 1999 excavation at Cohen Place, opposite the Chinese Museum. The ceramics of the overseas Chinese also have the potential to answer more theoretical questions: as the most solid and material evidence for Chinese foodways in Australia, domestic ceramics would appear to be a useful tool to examine cultural identities within the Chinese population. Changes in the items used over time and space, in the home, in shops, in restaurants, and even as gifts may reveal much about how the Chinese perceived themselves, and how they wanted others to perceive them.

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