

The Asian Comparative Collection

PRISCILLA WEGARS

The Asian Comparative Collection was established in 1982 in the University of Idaho's Alfred W. Bowers Laboratory of Anthropology. It is a repository of artifacts, slides, and bibliographical materials, particularly useful for the study of the Chinese and Japanese who immigrated to the West of the United States of America and Canada in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ongoing research is designed to identify and document most classes of Asian artifacts found both on American and Canadian archaeological sites and in American and Canadian museums and private collections. Researchers are encouraged to visit and work with the Collection and materials may also be borrowed for use elsewhere. In this paper Priscilla Wegars, a Research Associate at the University of Idaho, explains how the Collection is organized and provides descriptions of typical Chinese and Japanese artifacts to enable them to be more easily recognized when excavated from sites. Thus the paper has relevance for historical archaeologists in Australia and New Zealand, as well as for those in the western United States and Canada.

INTRODUCTION

The Asian Comparative Collection was established in 1982, as the Chinese Comparative Collection, at the Alfred W. Bowers Laboratory of Anthropology at the University of Idaho. Its stated objective is to obtain an actual example, or where that is not possible, a photograph, of every representative object of Asian manufacture which has been found, or is likely to be found, in an archaeological context in the western United States and Canada. The major artifact classes now represented include brown-glazed stonewares, porcelains, opium smoking paraphernalia, medicinal paraphernalia, gambling-related items, and miscellaneous hardware and implements. Although most of the artifacts are of Chinese origin, objects of Japanese manufacture have been present from the beginning, and Filipinos and other groups are also represented in the bibliographical and slide holdings. It was therefore decided, in 1985, to change the name to the Asian Comparative Collection.

The objects in the Collection have been acquired from excavation, purchase, or through donations from interested individuals. Bibliographical materials, such as books and articles, have been purchased, donated, or photocopied to form the nucleus of a reference library emphasizing site reports and artifact identification. More than 1000 slides, mostly of sites and artifacts, are also available for study. The eventual goal of the Asian Comparative Collection, now beginning to be realized, is to function as a clearinghouse for persons needing assistance with research on, and identification of, most classes of Asian artifacts. As such, the Collection has an international relevance and should be of particular interest to historical archaeologists investigating Chinese sites in Australia and New Zealand.

The underlying purpose of the Collection is to enable comparisons to be made between whole objects and excavated fragments, facilitating identification of the latter, and to provide researchers with supporting documentation for artifact analysis and report writing.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The following research design and methodology form the basis for the establishment and augmentation of the Asian Comparative Collection.

1. A mimeographed form, the Asian Artifact Inventory Record, has been developed on which to record individual artifact types, together with a photograph, dimensions, bibliographical references, occurrences of similar items elsewhere, and other information as appropriate. Forms are filled out for items owned by the Collection as well as for things which have not yet been obtained as examples, both artifacts that are known to have been found in archaeological contexts and objects that are so far known only from museums and private collections. The forms are filed in binders according to artifact function, thus enabling quick identification of similar material, and providing easy access to pertinent references.
2. Public institutions, such as the Idaho State Historical Society, have been contacted and have generously given some of their duplicate or unprovenanced items to the Collection.
3. Although relationships between private collectors and archaeologists are often tenuous at best, a number of private individuals have kindly donated items to the Collection. Many of the same people have allowed their personal collections to be documented and photographed.
4. Modern examples of Asian artifacts are purchased from shops dealing in Asian goods. These items, chiefly table ceramics and food storage vessels, are often nearly identical to objects that occur in much earlier archaeological contexts. Excavated artifacts are usually found in very fragmentary condition, so complete examples, even if modern, are extremely useful for comparative purposes.
5. All artifacts are marked with a catalogue number and descriptive information is entered into an artifact catalogue book.
6. Important reference works are purchased, where possible, or duplicated, if out-of-print; donations of hard-to-obtain in-house reports are especially welcome and encouraged. An extensive file of color slides enables color prints to be made for the inventory forms.
7. An annotated bibliography of books and articles relating to Asian sites and artifacts is continually being updated. Portions of it have been published and are available for purchase.¹
8. A network of correspondents has been established, with whom to exchange reprints and other information. Communications are maintained with researchers elsewhere in Idaho, and in Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Utah, the Southwest, North Carolina, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

9. Visits to sites and museums are an integral part of the research design for the Asian Comparative Collection. Invariably, every collection visited has proven to contain one or more artifacts which may be considered rare, sometimes even unique. To date, major collections have been seen in Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Montana, California, Canada, and New Zealand. Overseas Chinese archaeological sites in the course of excavation have been visited in Idaho and New Zealand, and unexcavated Chinese sites have been seen in Idaho, Oregon, California, and Canada.
10. Funding sources continue to be explored. Although the maintenance of the inventory forms, the slide file, and the correspondence are virtually a full-time occupation, at present the Collection has no assured funding whatsoever, neither for salaries nor for the purchase of artifacts, bibliographical materials, film and developing, or photocopying. Therefore, the Asian Comparative Collection *Newsletter* was begun in 1984 (as the Chinese Comparative Collection *Newsletter*). Appearing four times a year, it so far supports itself through subscriptions at \$US 5.00 yearly, plus sale of the back issues. Eventually it should generate enough money so that the surplus can provide a small source of income for the Collection, including funds for such urgent ongoing priorities as translation and metals conservation.
11. As Chinese and Japanese characters are translated, a translation file is maintained to avoid future duplication of effort.
12. The metal artifacts in the Collection are cleaned and conserved; other artifacts, such as those with paper labels, are subject to appropriate conservation treatments as necessary.

USING THE ASIAN COMPARATIVE COLLECTION

All items in the Collection, including books, slides, and artifacts, are available for loan to anyone interested. Artifacts from the Collection have previously been shown at the Sacajawea Interpretive Center in Pasco, Washington, the Nez Perce National Forest Supervisor's Office in Grangeville, Idaho, and to the Latah County Historical Society in Moscow, Idaho. Asian Comparative Collection artifacts were also featured prominently in the Palouse Asian American Association's 'living history' Centennial commemorative window in downtown Moscow, Idaho, on New Year's Eve 1987.

ASIAN ARTIFACTS

Many archaeological sites throughout the American West have been occupied by members of different ethnic and national groups but in general the artifacts recovered from such sites do not reflect ethnicity or nationality. Sites once occupied by Chinese and Japanese immigrants, however, produce artifact assemblages with readily identifiable ethnic origins. Because Asian artifacts are quite different when compared with their Euroamerican counterparts, it is useful for archaeologists to be able to recognize the types that occur most frequently on sites once occupied by people from China and Japan.

Although the first arrivals may have had to make do, in the beginning, with western substitutes for their usual items of consumption, the increasing numbers of Chinese arriving in the United States from the 1850s made it profitable for merchants to exploit preferences for familiar foods, beverages, smoking materials, and other items imported from the homeland. Ships regularly docked at San Francisco and other Pacific Coast ports with cargoes of Chinese merchandise, and these products made their way by boat, wagon, and pack train to smaller communities and isolated camps many hundreds of miles inland. While this sort of supply line was less true for goods from Japan, artifacts of Japanese origin such as table ceramics, sake bottles, and medicinal bottles, are being reported with greater frequency as they are becoming recognized.

Within the past few years an increasing number of these nineteenth and twentieth century Asian sites have been investigated. In most cases the artifacts comprising the Chinese components of the excavated assemblages bear a remarkable similarity to one another. Excavators are almost certain to find brown-glazed stoneware food and beverage containers, porcelain tableware, opium paraphernalia, glass bottles, gambling-related objects, and miscellaneous other items. While less work has been done on Japanese sites, artifact classes so far known are primarily utilitarian vessels and table ceramics. Inventory lists of potential Asian artifacts from archaeological sites are still far from complete. Besides the more usual items, nearly every site reported upon, or every collection visited, has proven to contain one or more artifacts which may be considered rare, sometimes even unique.

Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino artifacts have all been reported from sites in Australia. So far, the Chinese ones are known to include utilitarian and table ceramics, medicinal and cologne bottles, opium paraphernalia, coins, and temple artifacts; while the Japanese and Filipino examples are confined to beer bottles.² In addition, a number of overseas Chinese sites in New Zealand have been excavated. These, which have been fully reported upon,³ have yielded a wide variety of Chinese artifacts.

Chinese utilitarian vessels

Brown-glazed stonewares. Some of the most common artifacts found on overseas Chinese sites are brown-glazed stoneware sherds from food and beverage containers. These often represent alcoholic beverage bottles, which came in several sizes, and in both ordinary

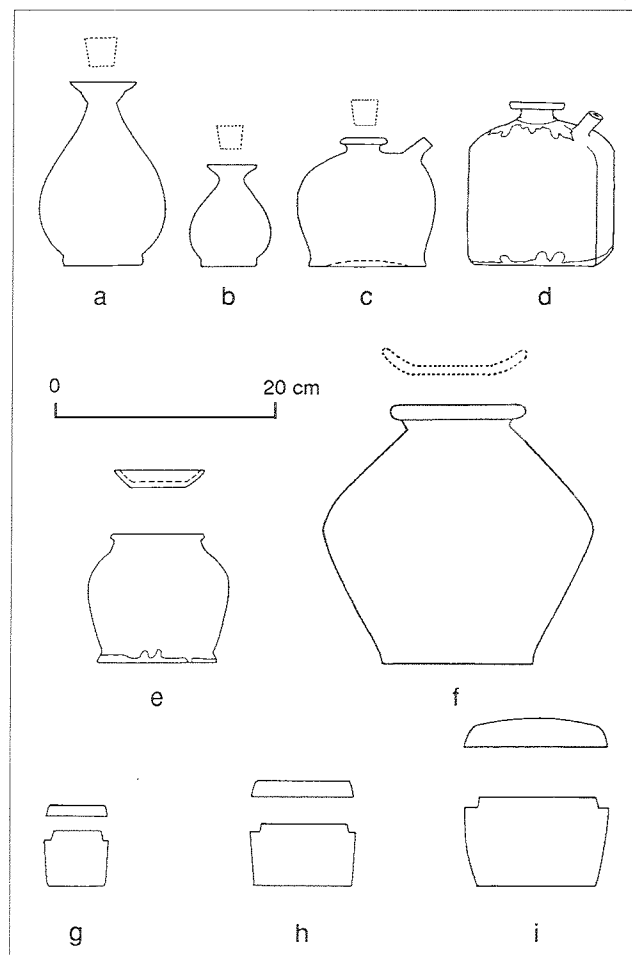


Fig. 1: Chinese brown-glazed stoneware: (a & b) Liquor bottles. (c & d) Soy sauce pots. (e & f) Shoulderered food jars. (g-i) Straight-sided jars. (After Mead.)

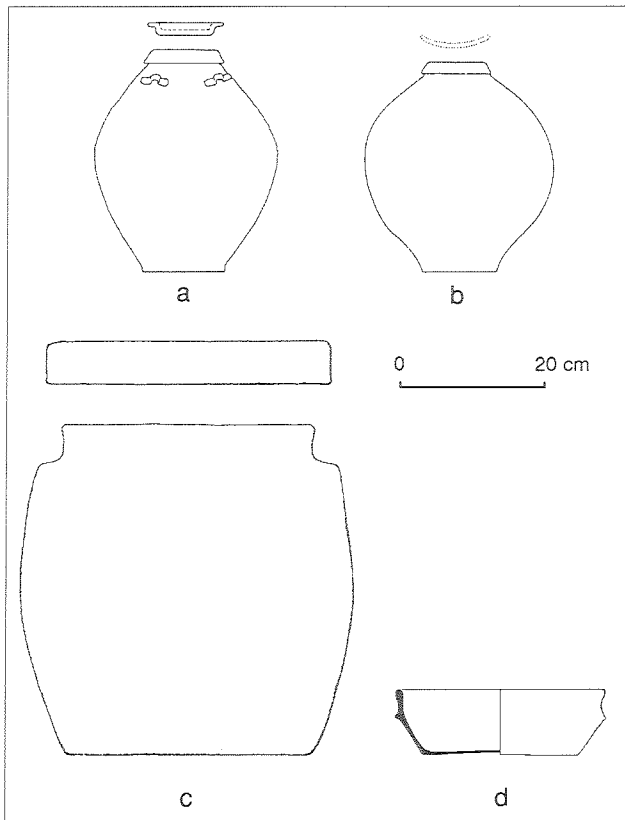


Fig. 2: Chinese brown-glazed stoneware: (a & b) Globular jars. (c) Barrel-shaped jar. (d) Pan. (a & b after Mead; c after Felton, Lortie & Schulz; d after Chace.)

and unusual shapes; the large flared-rim form of this vessel can still be purchased today (Fig. 1a & b). Another common item found on Chinese sites is a spouted jug, known in both a round and a square shape, and in several sizes (Fig. 1c & d). While it could have contained a variety of liquids, it most probably once contained soy sauce. Similarly-shaped modern vessels, containing soy sauce, can still be purchased in some Chinese markets.

Other food containers also came in a variety of shapes and sizes. The most common are the shouldered food jars, which are said to have held various kinds of preserved or pickled foodstuffs (Fig. 1e & f).

Straight-sided jars, while not so common as the shouldered ones, have been found on some sites. At least five sizes are known, all of which have vertical walls and glazed lids (Fig. 1g-i). Modern examples, all of the large size, contain maltose.

A squat, bulbous form of food jar was also made. While a modern version of it was readily obtainable in Chinese markets until recently, it is gradually being replaced with a plastic container of identical shape. These are filled with 'preserved vegetables', usually pickled cabbage.

Other forms of brown-glazed stoneware include large globular jars of varying heights, which may or may not have four lug attachments through which a cord could have been passed to tie down the lid (Fig. 2a & b). Along with large barrel-shaped jars (Fig. 2c), in several sizes, these were used for shipping bulk quantities of foodstuffs. Lids for the barrel-shaped jars were also brown-glazed stoneware, with vertical sides and flat tops.

Ceramic lids for both globular jars and shouldered food jars were made of unglazed earthenware or stoneware, and are found in a variety of sizes comparable to the diameters of the vessels' mouth openings. They also came in two shapes, one shallow and similar to

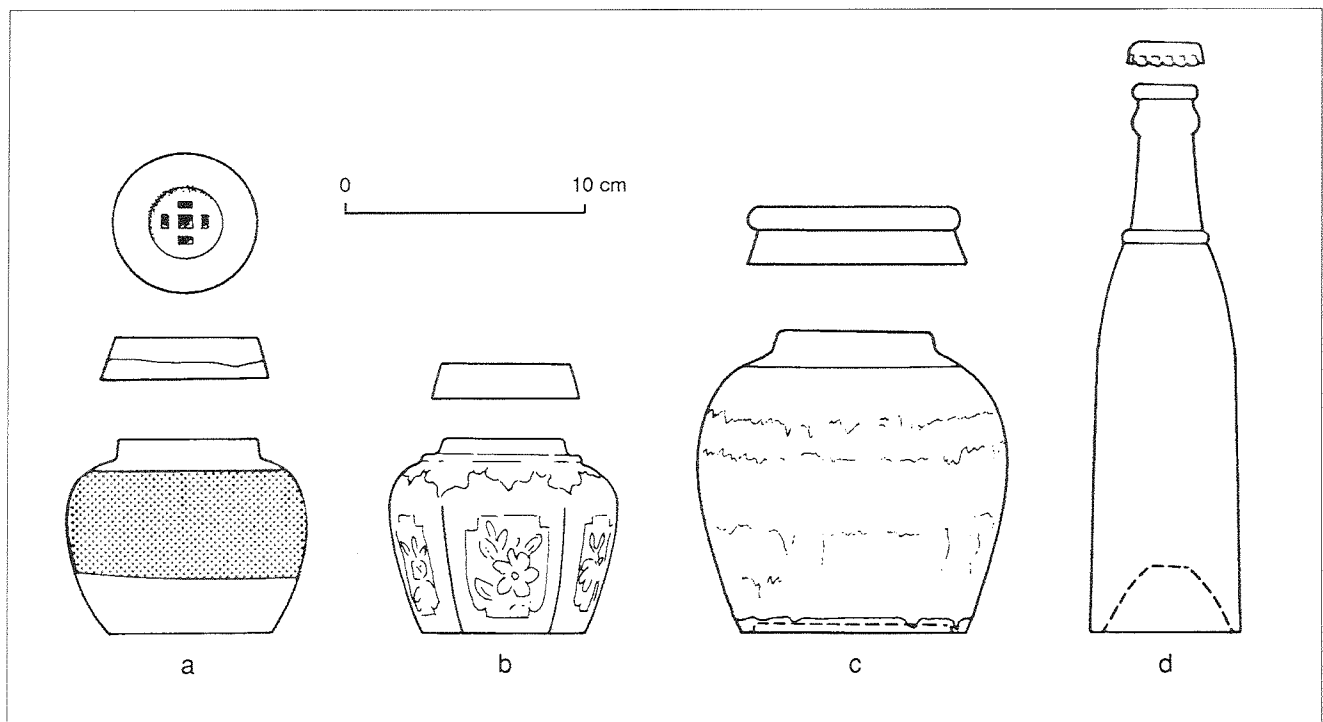


Fig. 3: Chinese green-glazed stoneware, and glass: (a) Round ginger jar. (b) Hexagonal ginger jar. (c) Blue-on-white ginger jar. (d) Glass liquor bottle. (After Mead.)

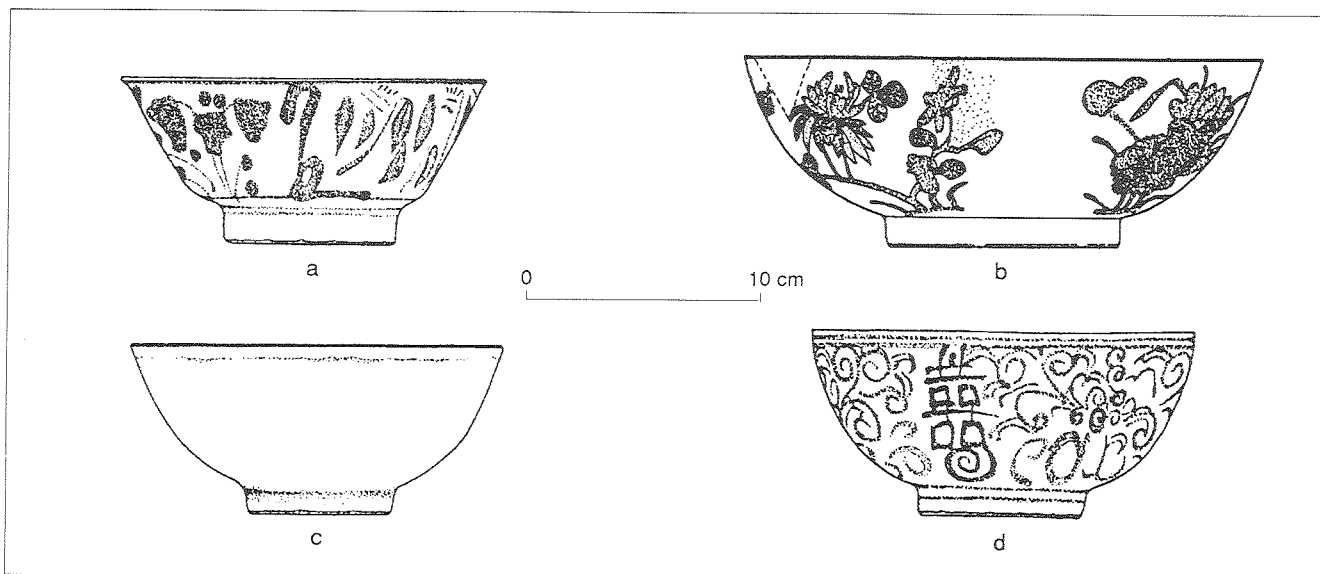


Fig. 4: Chinese tablewares: (a) 'Bamboo' rice bowl. (b) 'Four Flowers' serving bowl. (c) Celadon rice bowl. (d) 'Double Happiness' rice bowl. (After Felton, Lortie & Schulz.)

a saucer, and the other with a rim. For transport they were held onto the jars with a hard plaster-like substance, traces of which can sometimes still be seen around their edges.

Several sizes of brown-glazed stoneware shallow dishes have been most often interpreted as pans for cooking and storage (Fig. 2d). Still other utilitarian vessels have not yet been found in sufficient numbers to be reported upon here.

Green-glazed stonewares. Foodstuffs were also packaged in green-glazed stonewares, although this color is much less common than the brown. A green-glazed jar having the same form as the barrel-shaped brown-glazed jar is sometimes seen. Ginger jars, so-called because they may have contained preserved ginger in syrup, might also have been imported containing a variety of other preserved foods. Round ones with wide or narrow mouths (Fig. 3a), and hexagonal ones in several sizes (Fig. 3b), are known. In fact, hexagonal ones can still be purchased today containing preserved ginger; they have straight-sided unglazed ceramic lids. Small straight-sided jars in several sizes could be green-glazed too.

Other utilitarian ceramics. Ginger jars are also seen with blue-on-white (Fig. 3c) and blue-on-beige designs. These would have had straight-sided lids with flat tops.

Glass food and beverage containers. Chinese 'fruit jars' are occasionally reported archaeologically. These most commonly contained 'bean cake', a product which was perhaps similar to modern bean curd. Typically, the fruit jars and their contents were manufactured in San Francisco in the 1920s.

The same highly-alcoholic Chinese 'tonic' which came in the flared-rim ceramic vessel, was also available in glass bottles (Fig. 3d). These have so far appeared only in twentieth-century contexts.

Japanese utilitarian containers

Ceramic sake bottles. Japanese sake bottles are typically opaque white porcelain, in marked contrast to the brown-glazed stoneware which characterizes the comparable Chinese alcoholic beverage container. Except for this type of vessel, which was available in several sizes, Japanese utilitarian ceramic vessels are so far not known from archaeological sites in the United States.

Glass beverage bottles. Japanese bottles which once contained beer, cider, and soda water, were found during excavations at Walnut Grove, California.⁴ Some were imported from Japan, while others were made and/or filled by local and nearby Japanese firms.

Chinese tablewares

Dishes for serving and eating were usually of porcelain or porcellaneous stoneware. The pattern most often encountered archaeologically, on nearly every Chinese site examined in the United States, is a blue-on-white one that is now known as 'Bamboo'. A rice bowl is the only form known for this design, elements of which include three circles, a longevity character or dragonfly motif, and floral decorations with both round leaves and thinner, pointed leaves (Fig. 4a).

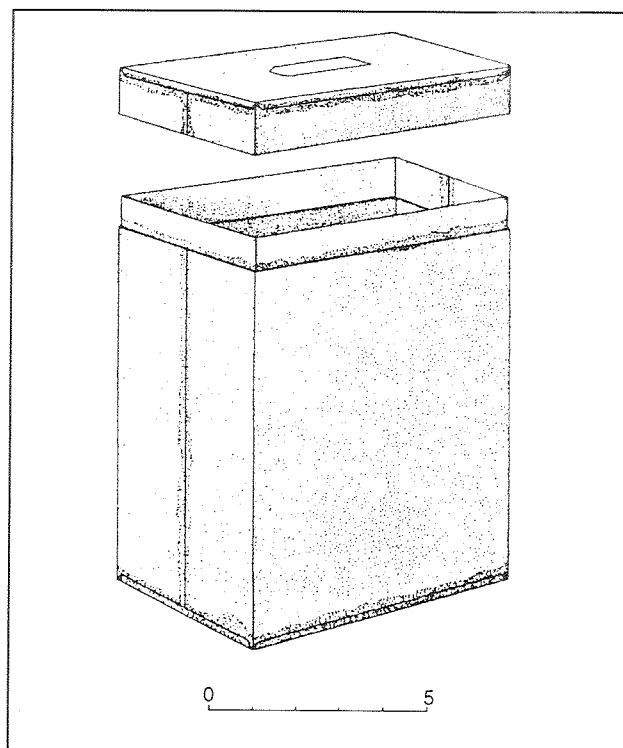


Fig. 5: Chinese opium can. (After Felton, Lortie & Schulz.)

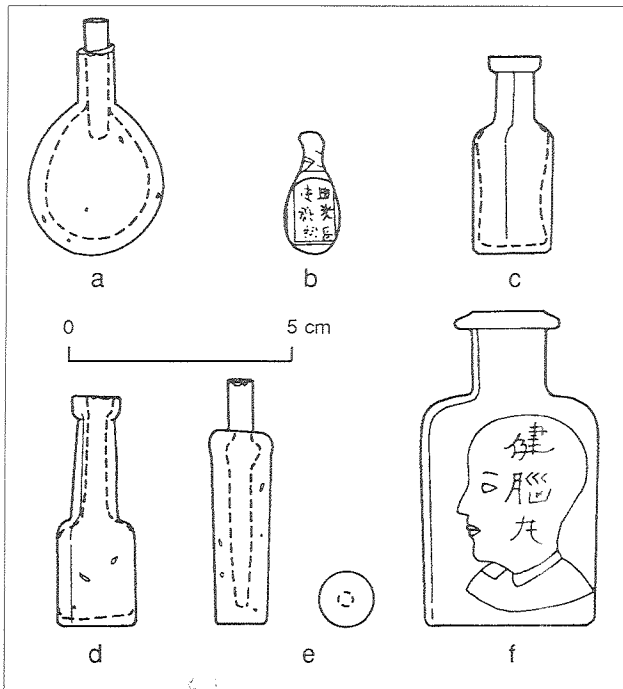


Fig. 6: Glass medicine bottles: (a–e) Chinese. (f) Japanese.

Porcelain vessels with the polychrome enamel 'Four Flowers' pattern are often found on overseas Chinese sites in the western United States. This pattern occurs in a large variety of shapes and sizes, and serving bowls are the most common forms on which it is seen. Design elements represent the flowers of the four seasons (Fig. 4b).

Pale green celadon is another type of Chinese porcelain that is frequently excavated. While it does not come in quite so many shapes and sizes as the 'Four Flowers' pattern, it is perhaps equally as common, particularly as rice bowls and wine cups (Fig. 4c). However, we must be careful here in ascribing celadons to a 'Chinese' suite of ceramics, as recent research is providing evidence that at least some of them appear to possess glaze characteristics having more in common with Japanese than Chinese wares.⁵

Other, less common, designs on Chinese table ceramics include the blue-on-white 'Double Happiness' pattern, generally seen only on rice bowls, and only on early sites (Fig. 4d); the twentieth-century 'Attributes of the Eight Immortals' pattern, a few blue-on-white designs, and a variety of enamelled and handpainted miscellaneous motifs.

Japanese tablewares

Japanese table ceramics generally take the form of a porcelain rice bowl, most often with a blue-on-white transfer-printed design. Japanese rice bowls are typically somewhat smaller than the Chinese ones, and their patterns are much more varied.

With table ceramics of Japanese manufacture, however, one must be careful to differentiate between those forms and patterns that actually represent Japanese occupation of a site, and those that were imported and sold to Euroamericans in large quantities beginning in the early years of the twentieth century.

Opium-smoking paraphernalia

Chinese archaeological sites are often recognized by the presence of opium-smoking paraphernalia. Highly sensationalized by the dominant white culture, opium-smoking by the Chinese is still

imperfectly understood. Evidence now indicates that of those Chinese who used the drug, most did so in moderation, much as today many of us enjoy a beer or a drink after work. After all, opium could be legally imported into the United States until 1909. Many whites also smoked opium, a fact which is now largely ignored.

Opium came in rectangular brass cans, most of which have what is probably a brand name stamped into the lid and sometimes another stamp, perhaps the name of the manufacturer or shipper, on the bottom of the can (Fig. 5). The identification of the brand or manufacturer becomes important when one tries to establish trade patterns for opium importation. Although importation was legal, opium for smoking was heavily taxed. As a result, a brisk smuggling trade grew up, centered on the two British Columbia cities of Vancouver and Victoria, where smoking-opium was manufactured for the Canadian and American markets.

Other opium-related items usually found on sites include ceramic opium-pipe bowls, in dark gray stoneware or reddish orange earthenware. Plain ones are most common but occasionally very ornate ones are recovered. Racks to hold such bowls, and other types of Chinese pipes, are known mainly from private collections. The opium-pipe itself, most often being bamboo, would not usually survive archaeologically, but several kinds of brass fittings for it have been found. Metal implements, pointed at one end and spatulate at the other, about 15 cm long, were used to remove the opium from the tin, soften it over the opium-lamp, and transfer it to the pipe.

Lamps, or parts of them, are sometimes found, as are cut-down portions of bottles which have been made into lamp covers. Bowl scrapers and other tools and accessories complete the smoker's 'outfit'.

Chinese glass medicine bottles

Small Chinese medicine bottles come in a variety of shapes (Fig. 6a–e). Often erroneously called 'opium bottles', they would have held a single dose of medicine, in pill, powder, or liquid form. Apart from the fact that opium is too gummy to get in or out of the small aperture, numerous bottles have been found with intact paper labels; the Chinese characters, when translated, invariably indicate that medicinal products were contained in the bottles.

Japanese glass medicine bottles

Japanese medicine bottles tend to be larger in size than the Chinese ones, and often have the manufacturer's name or a description of the contents embossed in Japanese characters on the bottle itself (Fig. 6f). A Japanese medicine bottle was found during excavations at Walnut Grove, California,⁶ and others are discussed elsewhere.⁷

Gambling paraphernalia

Various objects from Chinese gambling games are known from American sites and museums. Small hemispherical white and black glass gaming pieces are seen quite frequently. The black ones are usually found less often than the white ones, probably because the black ones had a higher value, much like different colors of poker chips. Under special conditions of preservation, wooden dominoes have been found, as have portions of paper lottery tickets.

Another item associated with gambling is a brass object shaped like an inverted bowl with a handle. Called a 'spreading-out cover', it was used in the game of *fan tan*, while bets were being placed, to cover a portion of the coins used as counters.⁸

Miscellaneous Chinese objects

Writing implements, or portions of them, such as ink grinding blocks, dishes, and ink bottles, are occasionally found on American archaeological sites. Chinese combs and jewelry have been recovered,

as have metal cooking utensils, cleavers, and other tools. Other small objects which are sometimes found are brass Chinese buttons, locks and keys, and portions of scales and their ivory rules.

DATING

Chinese artifacts

While some Chinese artifacts are very easy to date, they are not necessarily useful for dating sites. Coins, for example, which were minted during the reigns of certain emperors, still circulated more than 200 years later. Those which are most commonly found on sites in the western United States, in fact, are those of Emperor Ch'ien Lung, who ruled from 1736 to 1796.

Some Chinese ceramics have reign marks on their bases and these can be useful for dating purposes to a certain extent. Unfortunately such examples are not commonly found on archaeological sites and when they are they are often so faded as to be illegible. Marks which are much more common, and almost always legible, such as the 'Eternal Knot' often seen on 'Four Flowers' vessels, and the blue base marks on celadons, have not yet yielded any meaningful dates.

Ceramics marked 'China' occur on later American sites. Generally such pieces date to 1891 or after, when the McKinley Tariff Act decreed that imported goods must bear the name of the country of origin written in English.⁹

Some preliminary work has been done on the dates of introduction to America of the various ceramic patterns. Chace has determined that the 'Double Happiness' pattern is the earliest, since it occurs on pre-1870 mining and railroad sites in the absence of any of the other ceramic patterns.¹⁰ The more common 'Bamboo' pattern occurs only on sites dating after 1870.

Japanese artifacts

Japanese ceramic marks are more helpful for dating purposes than are most Chinese ones. In America, 'Nippon', the English transliteration of the Japanese' own name for their country, appears on ceramics dated 1891 to 1921.¹¹ In 1921 the United States Treasury ruled that 'Japan' must be used instead of 'Nippon', therefore ceramics marked 'Made in Japan' date from at least 1921 to about 1940,¹² when World War II halted imports. Archaeological evidence, however, now suggests that 'Made in Japan' may be even earlier than 1921. Ceramics so marked were found sealed below 1915 deposits at Walnut Grove, California.¹³

CONCLUSIONS

Archaeological sites occupied in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by people of Chinese and Japanese ancestry are easily identified, once archaeologists know how to recognize objects both brought over and imported by immigrants from China and Japan. The wide variety of such artifacts points to the persistence of preferences, particularly on the part of the Chinese, for familiar foods, beverages, smoking materials, and other items. Unfortunately, the resulting artifacts, even if marked, are often of little absolute dating value. Researchers with problems of identification and documentation of Asian sites and artifacts, can obtain assistance from the Asian Comparative Collection at the University of Idaho's Alfred W. Bowers Laboratory of Anthropology, at Moscow, Idaho, 83843.

NOTES

1. Ehrenreich et al. 1984; Wegars 1985.
2. Jack et al. 1984: 56-7; Reynolds 1986.

3. Ritchie 1986; Ritchie & Park 1987.
4. Costello & Maniery 1988: 86-7, 90-1.
5. Stenger 1986: 5-6; 1986: pers. comm.
6. Costello & Maniery 1988: 88-9.
7. Kaukali 1974.
8. Culin 1891: 2.
9. Stitt 1974: 149.
10. Chace 1980: 4.
11. Stitt 1974: 149.
12. *ibid.*: 176.
13. Costello & Maniery 1988: 27.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CHACE, P.G. 1980. Archaeological perspectives on the overseas Chinese in America. Unpublished paper presented at the 1980 National Conference on Chinese American Studies, San Francisco, 9 October.

COSTELLO, J.G. & MANIERY, M.L. 1988. Rice bowls in the Delta: Artifacts recovered from the 1915 Asian community of Walnut Grove, California. *Occasional Paper* 16, Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles.

CULIN, S. 1891. The gambling games of the Chinese in America, *Series in philology, literature, and archaeology* 1(4), University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Reprinted in 1972 by the Gambler's Book Club, Las Vegas, Nevada.

EHRENREICH, D., WEGARS, P., HORN, J. & SMITH, K.E. 1984. An annotated bibliography of overseas Chinese history and archaeology, *Northwest Anthropological Research Notes* 18(2): 125-211.

JACK, I., HOLMES, K. & KERR, R. 1984. Ah Toy's Garden: A Chinese market-garden on the Palmer River Goldfield, North Queensland, *Australian Journal of Historical Archaeology* 2: 51-8.

KAUKALI, E. L. 1974. Japanese embossed medicines, *Old Bottle Magazine* 7(7): 10-12.

REYNOLDS, B. 1986. *Report on Atherton Chinatown, North Queensland. I. Site Survey*, (by G. Grimwade and B. Reynolds). *II. Artefacts of Hou Wang Temple*, (by G. Grimwade). Material Culture Unit, James Cook University of North Queensland, Townsville.

RITCHIE, N.A. 1986. Archaeology and history of the Chinese in southern New Zealand during the nineteenth century: A study of acculturation, adaptation, and change. Ph.D. thesis, University of Otago, Dunedin.

RITCHIE, N.A. & PARK, S. 1987. Chinese coins down under; their role on the New Zealand goldfields, *Australian Journal of Historical Archaeology* 5: 41-8.

STENGER, A. 1986. Japanese ceramics from Chinese 'sojourner' sites. Unpublished paper presented at the 19th Annual Meeting of the Society for Historical Archaeology, Sacramento, California, 8-12 January 1986.

STITT, I. 1974. *Japanese ceramics of the last 100 years*, Crown, New York.

WEGARS, P. 1985. An annotated bibliography of opium and opium-smoking paraphernalia, *Northwest Anthropological Research Notes* 19(2): 169-200.