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Beyond the grey and into the blue: Growing scope and ambition of our Colloquium and its proceedings

Ilya Berelov and Shaun Canning

The 7th volume of the proceedings of the annual Colloquium marks yet another step in the maturation and continual advancement of this event and its participants. As an industry, we have witnessed the growing primacy of Aboriginal Victorians in the cultural heritage assessment process, the growth and development of individual practitioners, the widening of the scope of our endeavours, and a growing awareness of our various related disciplines in the wider community.

Our motivations when initially developing the Colloquium and subsequent publication of the proceedings lay in recognition of a need to bring together the different interest groups within the heritage community to improve interaction and co-operation. We feel that this has been well and truly accomplished, and that there is now a greater cross-pollination of ideas between heritage practitioners and stakeholders on all sides of the equation. Our audience now includes Traditional Owner groups, government regulators, consultants, academics and students.

The first steps to this lay in the annual presentation of data from excavations, surveys and various projects undertaken across Victoria. There was recognition that vast amounts of 'grey literature' were being generated by consultants, and that these data could form the basis of future studies to further assist our understanding of Victoria's past. This literature largely lay dormant in archives, as consultants' reports are seldom revisited.

The first colloquia and their proceedings presented much of these data to practitioners for the first time, as this information was generally not available to the public. Various co-operative projects have sprung up as a result, and important relationships have formed. These broader, collective endeavours continue to this day in the form of important contributions of a variety of new data including a new Aboriginal rock art sequence from Gariwerd (Gunn and Goodes); faunal remains from an early historical site in the Melbourne CBD (Biagi); a newly identified shipwreck in Port Phillip (Taylor); Chinese tablewares from a gold rush site in regional Victoria (Macgregor)—and information generated during Victoria's first heritage offset project (Cleary et al.).

And whilst this volume of *Excavations, Surveys and Heritage Management in Victoria* presents yet another collection of works that are testimony to the continued commitment to share new information, we feel that something deeper and more profound has also occurred. Whether one focuses on the exposition by Thomas and his colleagues of radiocarbon dates collected across the state to date, or considers the strictly geoarchaeological perspectives of Czastka's reconstructions of archaeological landscapes. Whether one ponders syntheses of environmental factors contributing to the condition of archaeological sites (Lawrence et al.); the need for more community archaeology (Dunk and Macgregor); unique perspectives on the archaeology of community-making (Morrison); or the rise of cultural mapping (McConachie and McAlister). What is certain is the deepening scope of these endeavours, and the collective strive for interpretation, synthesis, innovation and greater understanding—away from mere reporting of data.

We feel that this volume represents a tangible expression of our profession's desire to showcase the best of our work, moving away from basic compliance reporting, while striving towards shared meaning among and across our community of practitioners. This is a significant milestone for our discipline, leading to broader understandings of our past and a deeper appreciation for those who created it. We commend these papers to you, and look forward to what is shaping up to be an important period of growth for our field.

Once again thanks are due to all those involved in organising and in participating in the Colloquium and in the editorial and publication process, as well as to the Major Sponsors Ochre Imprints and ACHM; Sponsors Biosis, VicRoads and Heritage Insight and Supporters Extent, Ecology & Heritage Partners, and La Trobe University.

Finally the editors and authors acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land and heritage discussed at the Colloquium and in this volume and pay their respects to their Elders, past and present.

Chinese tablewares: The archaeology of illustration, and scratch analysis, at the Harrietville Chinese Mining Village, northeastern Victoria

Paul Macgregor

Abstract

During recent archaeological investigations conducted at the Harrietville Chinese Mining Village in October 2017, an assemblage of Chinese and European ceramics—including tablewares—was identified. Previous analyses of tablewares from archaeological contexts associated with the Chinese diaspora have largely focused on the types of wares present and their decorative features, and how these can be used to determine ethnicity and acculturation. This paper uses information derived from historical images of Chinese food practices and the results of scratch analysis on ceramics to provide a preliminary overview of how Chinese people used tablewares at the Harrietville Chinese Mining Village.

Introduction

The Harrietville Chinese Mining Village is located near the township of Harrietville in northeastern Victoria (see Dunk and Macgregor, this volume). The major period of occupation at this site was ca 1861 until the 1890s. Oral historical accounts from local sources indicate that European people undertook alluvial mining near the village in the 1930s (W. Jones pers. comm. 2017). Oral testimony and historical records suggest that only Chinese men lived at the village between the years 1860–1920, and that no women or children were present during this time period (Hoy ca 1967:2; Lloyd 2006:120–22; W. Jones pers. comm. 2017). A newspaper description of the village in 1884 states that there was a communal kitchen with five hearths, where all meals were cooked for the village inhabitants (*The Argus* 23 Aug. 1884:4).

In October 2017, The Uncovered Past Institute undertook archaeological investigations at the Harrietville Chinese Mining Village (Dunk and Macgregor, this volume). During these investigations, an assemblage of Chinese and European ceramics were identified, which included tablewares (i.e. pieces used for serving, eating and drinking at meal times).

This paper investigates how Chinese people used these tablewares at the Harrietville Chinese Mining Village. First, it compares the artefacts with similar pieces depicted in use in historical illustrations and photographs from the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Second, it tests the applicability of Esposito's (2014) hypothesis that European wares were incorporated into Chinese food practices. Third, it references the manufacturing and business practices of commercial kilns in the Guangdong province, and considers why these practices led to standardisation of a long-lived and narrow range of traditional Chinese tablewares. Lastly, this paper assesses whether scratches derived from metal eating implements can reveal whether tablewares were used for Chinese or European eating practices.

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The assemblage

During the archaeological investigations undertaken at Harrietville in October 2017, tableware fragments totalling 125 pieces were identified at two dwelling sites (West Camp 1, Stone Feature 1), and in the base of the water race (Water Race 1, Water Race 2) (Dunk and Macgregor, this volume).

Most of the tablewares are ceramics of the Winter Green ('celadon') style (**Figure 1**). Analysis of the Minimum Number of Vessels (MNV) permitted grouping of the Winter Green fragments into three bowls, three ceramic spoons, two teacups and two wine cups (**Table 1**). One small fragment of a Bamboo pattern bowl was also identified—although the rim diameter could not be determined.

The European tableware items included two Asiatic Pheasant plates and one Berlin Swirl bowl, which were all fragmented. Three fragments from different European plates or bowls were also identified—the first comprised a Willow pattern, the second a Rhine pattern, and the third an undecorated base fragment with plain glaze.

These varieties of Chinese and European tablewares were used commonly throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, and their use may have continued into the twentieth century.

Although it is possible that the European wares represent old items used by poor European miners during the 1930s, the lack of historical evidence for simultaneous Chinese and European occupation of the village, and the occurrence of vessels from both cultural backgrounds within the same contexts, suggest that Chinese people used the European bowls and plates. Reports on a number of other excavations of nineteenth century Chinese diaspora sites yielding European artefacts concluded that the presence of European wares indicates a possible adoption of European cultural practices by Chinese people—part of an assimilation or

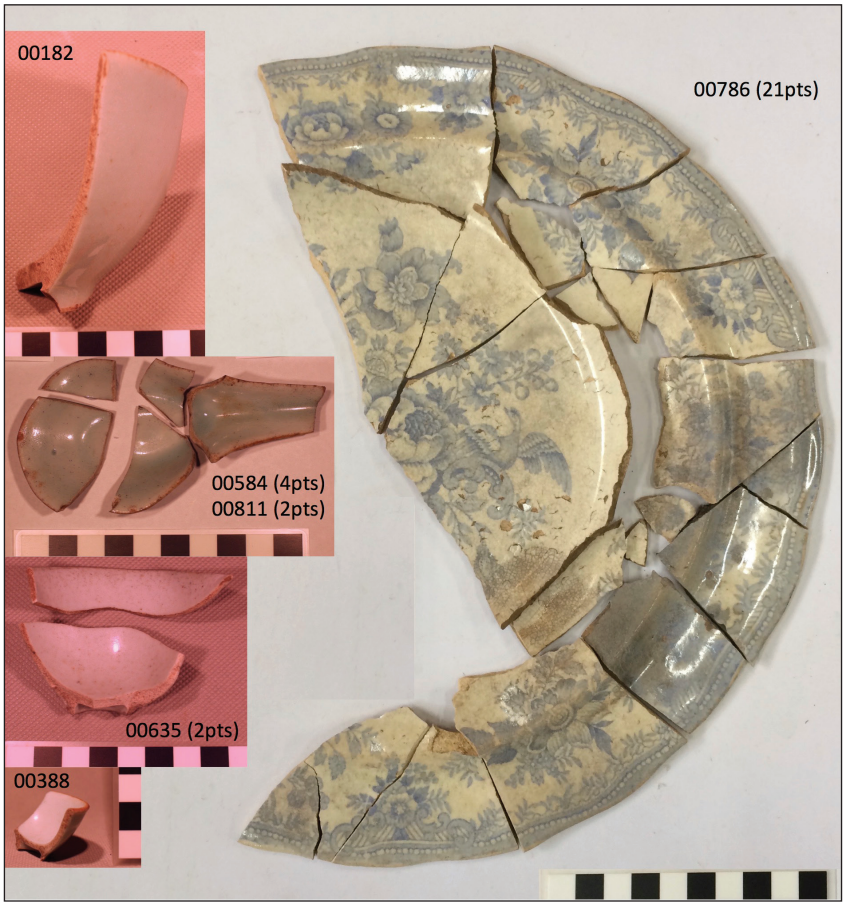

Figure 1: Examples of Winter Green tablewares found during excavation at Harrietville: eating bowl (00182), spoon (00584/00811), teacup (00635), wine/liquor cup (00388); along with European-made Asiatic Pheasant plate (00786) which may have been used as a serving plate in a Chinese eating context. All images have been resized so that all the scales match, and thus the relative sizes of vessels can be demonstrated.

Vessel type	**Rim diameter**	**No. of fragments**	**Minimum Number of Vessels**
Chinese vessels			
Winter Green glaze bowl	ca 130mm, ca 140mm	6	3
Winter Green glaze spoon	Not applicable	9	3
Winter Green glaze tea cup	ca 75mm	3	2
Winter Green glaze wine cup	ca 50mm	7	2
Bamboo pattern bowl	Not determinable	1	1
Subtotal		26	11
European vessels			
Asiatic Pheasant plate	ca 300mm	57	2
Berlin Swirl bowl	ca 300mm	27	1
Willow pattern plate or bowl	ca 300mm	1	1
Rhine pattern plate or bowl	ca 300mm	2	2
Plate or bowl - plain glaze, no decoration	ca 300mm	3	2
Subtotal		90	8
Total		**116**	**19**

Table 1: Ceramic tablewares found at Harrietville excavation, October 2017

acculturation to European culture by Chinese residents in white settler societies (Burke and Grimwade 2013:133; Dunk 2010:46; Dunk 2016:66; Ritchie 1986; Smith 2006).

Examining historical photographs for material culture

Historical illustrations and photographs of Chinese tablewares being used in context are an important source of information for inferring how Chinese people would have used tablewares in the past at the Harrietville Chinese Mining Village. Mueller (1987) investigated historical illustrations of Chinese table settings in America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, there has been a proliferation in online repositories of historical photographs in museums, libraries and archives over the past decade, which are increasingly available in high-resolution, making the analysis of historical images much easier. These high-resolution images can be a major boon to archaeologists, as they allow researchers to zoom into small details in photographs, permitting detailed examination of small artefacts. These photographs also allow researchers to view artefacts in their original context of historical use. The great number of photographs now available online enables large-scale comparison of the same type of artefact in a variety of contexts.

For the purposes of the current study, the most useful repositories were the Historical Photographs of China (University of Bristol 2018) and John Thompson (Wellcome Collection 2018) collections. Keywords such as 'Chinese', 'food', 'eating', and 'ceramics' were used to find relevant images, in addition to searching all individual images in an archive to find relevant images that were not tagged with these keywords.

By interesting coincidence, the earliest photographs of daily life in China date to ca 1869–1870, when the English photographer John Thomson travelled around China (Wellcome Collection 2018). This time period coincides with the main period of occupation at the Harrietville Chinese Mining Village.

Choy (2014) and Esposito (2014) have demonstrated that Chinese ceramics used in everyday life retained the same form, size and even decorative pattern for most of the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. This suggests that traditional Chinese food practices also remained much the same throughout most of China, and in the diaspora, during the same time period.

Twenty-six images were identified during the online search, which include depictions of food-serving and consumption vessels. A selection of these is presented in **Figures 2** and **3**. These images are dated between the 1860s and 1960s. Sixteen of them are discussed in more detail below. Most of these photographs were taken in China. Only four photographs show Chinese people in Australia consuming food, and these date to 1902 (*The Australasian* 20 Dec. 1902:29), ca 1905 (Photographer unknown ca 1905) and World War II (Photographer unknown ca 1939–1945, ca 1940s). There are striking similarities in the features of the vessels, and how they were used during this time period. The only noticeable development in these images is the introduction of straight-sided mugs with handles and lids (either ceramic or enamelled metal) as an option for drinking tea (Photographer unknown 1958).

Contexts of food consumption

The historical photographs indicate four different contexts in which food was prepared and/or consumed. Context 1 comprises people eating out of one bowl only, and either squatting or sitting, without a table (**Figure 2**). The use of chopsticks or a ceramic spoon in one hand, with the other hand holding the bowl, made this style of food consumption workable. The shape of this eating bowl, with the deep footring and single-curved side, was designed to be held balanced between the thumb (on the rim) and the fingers (on the footring), with the depth of the footring somewhat dissipating the heat of the bowl, while also allowing the one hand to move and angle the bowl with ease. This style of eating is also evident in a photograph of farm workers (Morrison ca 1933–1946c), and in an image of a boat crew on the Yangtze River (Thomson ca 1871). In both cases, only one type or dish of food is being eaten, and it was probably served directly from the cooking vessel to the eating bowl. The bowls were large enough to hold sufficient food for one meal per person, but they were not too large to prevent them from being held comfortably.

Context 2 comprises a simple meal being served at a table, with one or two serving dishes being used (Morrison ca 1933–1946b, 1933–1946d; Riboud 1957; Thomson 1869, 1870–1871), and bowls of two different sizes which, as with Context 1, could be held in one hand off the table (**Figure 2**). The serving dishes are wide and shallow bowls or plates, with shouldered rims.

Context 3 is an expanded version of Context 2, with a larger variety of cooked foods present on the table (up to seven dishes) (**Figure 3**). The number of people occupying these tables is greater (four or more people), and these people appear in communal cooking or consuming contexts such as monasteries, or cheap restaurants or cafes (Morrison ca 1933–1946a; Thomson ca 1869). The consumption bowls are smaller, and small, shallow dishes are used for condiments or sauces, or for resting spoons. The vessels are of fairly plain shape and decoration.

Context 4 is an elaboration of Context 3, but depicts formal, high-status dining (Lai ca 1859–1890s, Thomson ca 1870) (**Figure 3**). The serving and consumption vessels appear to be finer types of wares—probably porcelain—with intricate, finely worked decoration. Like Context 3, people are eating from small bowls, or small and shallow dishes. Wine cups smaller than tea cups, as well as tea cups, are sometimes also present at the table.

In all of the photographs, and in contrast to some modern Chinese table settings, there are no metal implements for serving or eating. Food taken by diners from the serving plates is scooped up with a ceramic spoon, or picked from the serving dish with chopsticks. Chopsticks are usually wooden—although in high-status contexts, they can be made of bone, ivory, ebony or silver.

Figure 2: Chinese food eating, contexts 1 and 2—one or two dishes of food, eating with large bowl, with or without a table. Image 021: Boatmen on Upper Yangtze River, 1871 (Thomson ca 1871). Image 009: Farmworkers eating, near Beijing, ca 1933–1946 (Morrison ca 1933–1946c). Image 013: A poor family, Canton, 1869 (Thomson 1869). Image 008: Woman eating at food vendor's stand, near Beijing, ca 1933–1946 (Morrison ca 1933–1946b)

Dominance of ceramics originating from China

The ceramic vessels in the historical photographs appear to have been made in China, with one possible exception. This exception is a photograph of Manchu ladies eating in a Christian mission in Peking, where the serving dishes appear to be a set of transfer-printed, shouldered European plates (Thomson ca 1869). British and European ceramic manufacturers are renowned for developing cheap mass production technology during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, yet their wares appear to have made few inroads into the Chinese market—with the exception of European contexts in China, such as religious missions, European traders' homes and offices, and diplomatic offices.

The continued dominance of Chinese-made tablewares in China would have been partly due to the specialised forms suited to Chinese eating practices, and also to the Chinese system of industrial-scale ceramic manufacture that developed in China well before the British Industrial Revolution. This manufacturing system was based on large volumes of production, the use of 'dragon kilns' that could fire thousands of vessels in one firing, and highly specialised division of labour, with up to 170 skilled workers involved in production (Massachusetts Institute of Technology 2018).

Mass production also encouraged the use of standardised decorative patterning. Most of the decorated tablewares in the historical photographs have hand-painted decoration, as is also the case with Chinese tablewares associated with the Chinese diaspora. Typically, these tablewares exhibit one colour only, and are

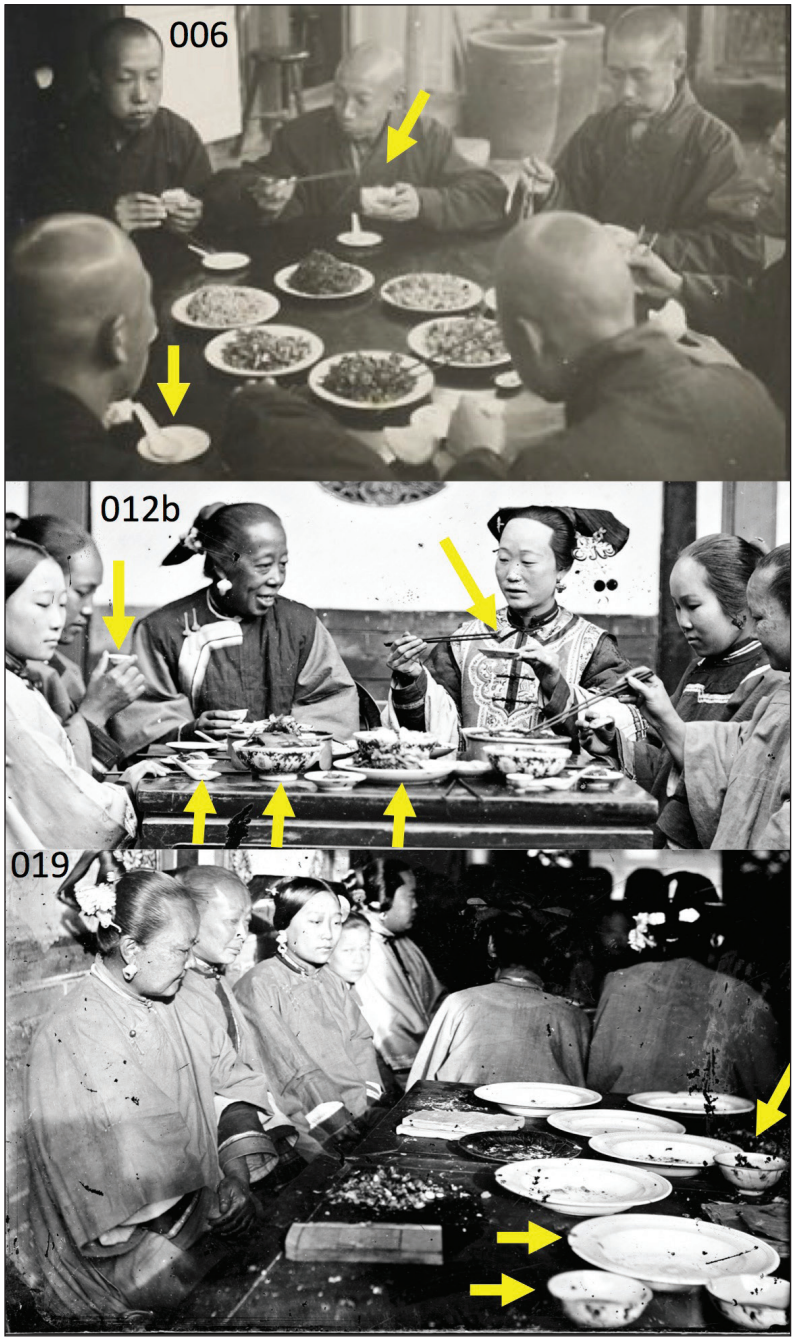

Figure 3: Chinese food eating, contexts 3 and 4—several dishes of food on a table, with smaller bowls and small plates for eating. Image 006: Monks at a table eating on Miaofeng Mountain, North China, ca 1933–1946 (Morrison ca 1933–1946a). Image 012b: Manchu ladies at meal table, Peking, ca 1870 (Thomson ca 1870). Image 019: Manchu ladies mission party, Peking, 1869 (Thomson ca 1869)

executed with a very loose and flowing style. In diasporic contexts, the majority of tablewares are from one of four decorative styles: Winter Green (undecorated); Bamboo; Double Happiness; and Four Flowers/Seasons (Dunk 2010:36–38; Sando and Felton 1993; Wegars 1988).

Ceramicist O'Hoy (1976, 1978; D. Hoy pers. comm. 2015) visited traditional industrial-scale potteries still operating in China in the 1970s. He observed that an individual artist would specialise in decorating in one style only, completing the painting in a matter of minutes. The fluid style of brushwork meant that the actual rendering would vary slightly on every vessel with the same decoration. At this stage, it is unclear if the dominance of the four decorative styles is because they represented the key patterns in South China tableware production, or because they were the dominant patterns for cheap wares only, or because the particular set of commercial relationships in existence during the period of diasporic emigration meant that particular manufacturers were favoured for supply.

Historical evidence demonstrates that Chinese tablewares, along with traditional Chinese foodstuffs,

were imported directly from South China, via Hong Kong, to diasporic communities in Pacific Rim countries. Chinese exporters in Hong Kong or the Pearl River delta cities managed this trade via Chinese importing firms located in key diasporic ports, such as Melbourne. A network of Chinese stores located in various towns on the mining fields then distributed the Chinese tablewares to Chinese mining communities (Macgregor 2012).

Harrietville included two Chinese stores known as Tung On and Wing On, which operated from as early as 1871. The Tung On store closed in 1902, but it is unclear when the Wing On store closed (Talbot 2016:210–212). The larger Chinese community centre in the town of Bright, located 22 km north of Harrietville, also included Chinese stores.

European tablewares in Chinese eating contexts

While the Chinese miners of Harrietville had access to Chinese tablewares from their local stores, the photograph of Manchu ladies eating Chinese food from European plates used as serving vessels (Thomson ca 1869) raises the possibility that Chinese miners in Australia used European plates in the same way. Esposito (2014:176–186) found evidence for this behaviour in her investigation of artefacts identified during Lindsay Smith's 1996–2006 excavations of 189 Chinese buildings grouped into nine settlement systems in the gold mining regions in southeastern NSW (Lawrence and Davies 2011:170–173; Smith 2006:287–786).

Esposito eschews the theory that the adoption of European vessels by nineteenth century Chinese-Australian settlers demonstrates acculturation or assimilation to European cultural food practices. Drawing on Mueller's (1987) analysis of the ratio of serving to consumption vessels in typical nineteenth century Chinese versus European food-consumption practices, Esposito assessed assemblages of Chinese and European tablewares identified at each hut excavated by Smith (2006) for which historical evidence exists regarding the occupants' ethnicity (i.e. Chinese only, European only, or a mixture of Chinese and European—such as a Chinese husband and a European wife).

Esposito's findings supported Mueller's view that European vessels identified in Chinese contexts were probably used according to Chinese food practices. A household following Chinese food practices would contain primarily eating bowls and serving plates, regardless of whether the vessels were of European or Chinese manufacture. Esposito speculated that the substitution of European vessels for Chinese purposes would have been due to the closure or distance of Chinese stores in a mining locality, or the largescale dumping of large volumes of cheap 'seconds' (flawed) vessels on the Australian rural market by importers of British tablewares.

The variety of Chinese eating contexts displayed in the historical photographs discussed above could have also been practiced at the Harrietville Chinese mining village. The presence of a communal kitchen at the village with five cooking hearths (*The Argus* 23 Aug. 1884:4) suggests large volumes of cooking. Working miners may well have eaten simple meals on a daily basis out of a cooking pot or wok, using one bowl only, and without a table. More varied meals may have been consumed on special or ceremonial occasions, with a number of dishes served on plates.

The relatively small MNV for both the Chinese and European tablewares identified during the October 2017 archaeological investigations reflect a small sample of ceramics recovered from a small sample of dwellings in the village—only two dwelling sites out of a potential 19 dwelling sites identified during the survey. These sample sizes are too small to make inferences about how these wares were used. Future archaeological investigations at the village may provide more conclusive evidence.

Using scratches on tablewares to identify use

The use of wooden chopsticks and ceramic spoons as the predominant eating implements provides an additional opportunity to investigate how Chinese and European tablewares were used by Chinese people at the village. This is because these chopsticks and spoons are less likely to scratch the glaze on the vessels, compared to the European practice of using metal knifes, forks and spoons.

To investigate the applicability of this theory, all tablewares in the author's kitchen were investigated for evidence of consumption using metal implements—the predominant type of eating implement used in the household. Evidence for glaze scratching was identified in the middle of the centre of each plate and bowl. The older the vessel, the greater the amount of scratching, with increasing concentrations of scratches located towards the middle of the centre.

The European and Chinese tablewares in the assemblage identified at the Harrietville Chinese Mining Village were also inspected for evidence of scratching. The Chinese bowls, both of which included centre fragments, did not contain any scratches. Three of the European vessels included centre fragments, and two of these (Asiatic Pheasant plates) did not contain any scratching on their centre. One of the European vessels (Berlin Swirl bowl) contained scratches on the centre.

To investigate whether these scratches were due to site formation processes (e.g. grit abrasion), the prevalence of scratching above and below each surface was assessed for all vessels and fragments, regardless of the part of the body from which they originated. General scratching on the tableware vessels was minimal. Furthermore, there was a distinct concentration of scratching on the upper part of the centre of the Berlin Swirl bowl, focused on the middle. This suggests that metal knifes, forks and spoons were not used to consume food from the two Asiatic Pheasant plates, whereas they were used for food consumption from the Berlin Swirl. As the historical photographs clearly demonstrate that chopsticks were used for food consumption, it is likely that the two Asiatic Pheasant plates were used to serve food only—probably for a Chinese table setting. However, the scratches on the Berlin Swirl bowl demonstrate that someone was using

metal implements to serve or consume food from it.

The irony is that the two Asiatic Pheasant plates, though European in design, decoration and manufacture, are of a style developed as a Chinoiserie adoption of Chinese decorative motives. Yet, it seems that the Chinese occupants of this dwelling selected them to serve Chinese food perhaps because the décor of these vessels appealed to a Chinese aesthetic.

Another possible explanation for the lack of scratches on the plates is that they were used to hold offerings of food placed on an altar for the benefit of the deity of a joss house or temple. Oral testimony in Harrietville suggests that the village contained a joss house (Talbot 2016:228; W. Jones pers. comm. 2017). However, the excavation site where the Asiatic Pheasant plates were identified (Stone Feature 1) has not yielded any clear evidence for the existence of a joss house or a temple. The oral and documentary histories in Harrietville refer to the term 'joss house' only, rather than a temple. Macgregor (2015) argues that the term joss house, as used in historical English language sources in Australia, does not necessarily denote a temple, and that it could also describe social club houses (which may have contained a shrine room). Macgregor also argues that Europeans mistook joss houses for purely religious buildings. Future archaeological investigations may clarify whether there was a joss house in the East Branch Chinese settlement, and whether it was purely religious, or had more complex social purposes.

Discussion and conclusion

This preliminary overview of the potential uses of Chinese and European tablewares identified at the Harrietville Chinese Mining Village demonstrates that historical photographs and scratches on vessels can provide useful information about the potential uses of these tablewares.

As discussed previously, the small number of vessels identified during the archaeological investigations undertaken in October 2017 makes it difficult to determine at this stage whether Chinese people used the European wares, and, if they did, whether this reflects vessel substitution or the adoption of European food practices by Chinese miners in the village. Future archaeological investigations at the Harrietville Chinese Mining Village will likely increase the sample size of vessels to test the hypotheses proposed in this paper.

It would also be fruitful to review tableware artefacts identified during previous archaeological investigations of Chinese diaspora sites in Australia and elsewhere, both to compare the tableware assemblages with historical photographs of their usages, and also to inspect eating vessels for signs of scratching by metal implements.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Ely Finch for the suggestion that investigating scratch markings would help determine whether tablewares would have been used for Chinese or European practices of food consumption. My thanks also to Melissa Dunk for providing advice and comments on this paper.

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