

# **Drinking Practices in San Jose's Market Street Chinatown: A Study of Cups**

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CASA 103: Introduction to Laboratory Methods in Archaeology

March 17, 2004

## **Introduction**

The residents of the Market Street Chinatown in San Jose had a variety of different drinking vessels, from the traditional porcelain cups made in Asia to the Euro-American cups, mostly whitewares, which were more common in the American market. Among other factors, the different functions of these cups, their availability, and people's attitudes towards different drinking practices influenced which cups the overseas Chinese at the site used. This paper is an attempt to learn about their drinking practices from the cups they left behind.

The Market Street Chinatown was the first of four locations for the Chinese community in San Jose. It was located in the city's downtown, at Market and San Fernando Streets by the late 1860s (Yu 2001: 21). Discrimination and violence against Chinese in nineteenth century California caused them to live in segregated communities in cities throughout the state. These Chinatowns also acted as cultural centers for Chinese living in the surrounding region. The farms and fruit orchards of Santa Clara Valley relied on low-wage Chinese labor. The San Jose Chinatown, along with smaller Chinese communities in Gilroy, Milpitas, and Alviso, served these laborers. The economy and population of the Market Street Chinatown thus fluctuated with seasonal farm labor (Yu 2001: 19).

In 1870, fire destroyed the wooden settlement at Market Street, which caused residents to relocate to Vine Street, on the Guadalupe River. However, by 1872 the Chinese in San Jose had moved back to the Market Street site (Yu 2001: 22). By 1876, more than 1,400 Chinese lived in the Chinatown at Market Street (Allen and Hylkema 2002: 49). The community was home to single male laborers and mercantile families. It had a diverse range of businesses and other

institutions – grocery stores, a fish market, at least three restaurants, barber stands, general merchandising stores, a temple, and a large theatre. There were also establishments for prostitution and gambling (Yu 2001: 22). On May 4, 1887, amid rampant anti-Chinese rhetoric and plans for development of San Jose's downtown, an arson fire destroyed the settlement (Yu 2001: 29). The Chinese community then moved to two different Chinatowns on the outskirts of the city: the Woolen Mills Chinatown, which held mostly single men factory workers; and Heinlerville, which was a more established mercantile community with families (Allen and Hylkema 2002: 49; Yu 2001: 43).

Archaeological Resource Service, contracted by The San Jose Redevelopment Agency, excavated the Market Street Chinatown site in two segments in 1985 and 1986 prior to the construction of the Fairmont Hotel and Silicon Valley Financial Center on the site. After excavation, the collection of artifacts moved to San Jose Historical Museum's warehouse, where it remained inaccessible until 2002, when Stanford University received the collection. Researchers at Stanford then began analysis in conjunction with History San Jose and the Chinese Historical and Cultural Project (Market Street Chinatown Archaeological Project 2004). Professor Barbara Voss currently teaches a class on laboratory methods in archaeology that concentrates on cataloguing, research and analysis of this collection. The class is now in its second year. This paper is a product of this class and has benefited from the cataloguing work and research that the students of the class from winter quarter of 2003 performed.

## **Research Design**

This paper is a study of the cups represented in the 85-31 collection, the artifacts recovered during the ARS excavation in 1985 where the Fairmont Hotel now stands. I studied

the frequencies and attributes of different kinds of cups from the collection, using these cups to learn about the contexts of drinking and social attitudes towards alcohol consumption in the overseas Chinese culture of this site.

In this paper, I will consider three categories of cups: Asian tiny cups; larger Asian porcelain cups, which I will refer to as small bowls; and Euro-American cups, which were mostly whitewares. The tiny cups are those Asian porcelain cups with a rim diameter less than 5cm. According to literature describing ceramics from other overseas Chinese sites, these cups were used for consumption of rice wine (Meuller 1987: 269; Greenwood 1996: 72). In their translation of a Chinese store inventory from northern California, Sando and Felton call them “liquor cups” (Sando and Felton 1993: 153). My definition of small bowls includes all Asian porcelain drinking vessels with rim diameters between 5cm and 10cm, however they are listed in the artifact catalogue. Because there is ambiguity as to whether these vessels were used as cups for tea and other beverages or as small bowls holding broth, the researchers in last year’s class made a decision to catalogue them all as small bowls, though some were already listed as cups. For the purposes of this paper, I will call them small bowls but consider them in my study as drinking vessels larger than the tiny cups. The designation of Euro-American cups is a broad grouping denoting all drinking vessels of European or American origin. These include a variety of ware types, decorations, sizes, and vessel forms, but, as a category, the Euro-American cups can be seen as a local alternative to the porcelain cups produced in Asia.

My initial purpose in studying the cups in this collection was to study the issue of alcohol consumption at the site. Whereas the tiny cups were specifically for drinking alcohol, the larger Asian porcelain cups do not have as clear of a designation and probably held a variety of liquids, including tea. I planned to study the frequency of the different types of cups within Feature 18

and the trends in decoration types between different cup sizes. Sando and Felton show that different Asian decorations were more expensive than others. At the Kwong Tai Wo store, Celadon and Four Seasons vessels were the most expensive, selling for 6.5-8.7 cents per bowl, whereas bowls with Bamboo, Double Happiness, and other cheaper designs cost 2-5 cents (Sando and Felton 1993: 161). I was interested to learn if the different frequencies of decorations for tiny cups and small bowls gave an economic distinction to one type. In contemporary society, we view alcohol as a special drink, separate from other beverages. I became interested in the cups of Feature 18 as a way to examine whether this was also the case for the residents of Market Street Chinatown. Whether or not the liquor cups are distinguished from the other cups provides insight into whether drinking was primarily a social or a domestic activity.

### **Contexts for Drinking at the Market Street Chinatown**

Market Street Chinatown had a variety of contexts in which people drank. Yu states that there were at least 3 restaurants (Yu 2001: 22). The Chinese Business Directories from the 1870s and 1880s also listed several general merchandizing stores, grocery stores, and other businesses, many of which doubled as sites for gambling (Laffey 1993: 17). As social gathering places, gambling establishments would have provided another location for social drinking. In the later Heinlenville Chinatown in San Jose, many mercantile families lived in the same building as their stores (Yu 2001:40). If this was also the case in the Market Street Chinatown, commercial areas would also have held homes in which people would have drunk tea and alcohol domestically. Market Street Chinatown also contained tenement houses where domestic drinking would have occurred (Michaels 2003: Figure 3.1). One would thus expect to find cups from a variety of



contexts at this site – both domestic and commercial, with drinking as a social or a personal activity.

### **Research Methods and Materials Analysis**

I originally planned to limit my study to the cups from Feature 18 and 18B from 85-31, two large, adjacent, wood-lined pits (Flynn and Roop 2004: 1). Last year Professor Voss's class catalogued the ceramics from these features, which was the priority for research this year. However, I found that the collection of cups from 18 and 18B was not large enough for the quantitative analysis I needed to carry out. To expand my research, I used the database of catalogued artifacts from 85-31 to study the distribution of cup types in different features. From the database, I decided to include Features 13 and 24 in my materials analysis. I chose them, because they had very different proportions of cup types. Feature 13 contained a mixture of Asian porcelain cups, whereas Feature 24 had a majority of British whitewares. Because my database search showed no common pattern in the number of different cups in each feature, it made sense to analyze features representing this diversity.

In analyzing these cups, I first separated them by size, using the categories defined above. For the category of small bowl, I included Asian vessels listed as either cups or small bowls. In some cases, artifacts had been catalogued incorrectly, such as one tiny cup in Feature 13 that was listed as a small bowl. Some fragments with separate catalogue numbers in a feature cross-mended, in which case I considered them as one cup. I recalculated the Minimum Number of Vessels for Features 13, 18/18B, and 24, since the MNV counts based on the catalogue numbers were too large. For these reasons, the numbers in Figure 1 do not match those of the database.

The data in Figure 2 shows the distribution of cup types in each feature of 85-31. The data differs from the catalogue data in a few ways. As in Figure 1, small bowls are all Asian

“cups” or “small bowls.” I included the corrected MNV counts for Features 13, 18, 18B, and 24 from my physical analysis, but I calculated the MNV counts for every other feature by adding the individual MNV counts from each catalogue number. It is likely that some of these counts are therefore larger than they should be. However, this chart is still useful as an indicator of the distribution of cups between different features.

For Features 13, 18/18B and 24, I also sorted the cups by decoration type. For the Asian porcelain cups, I found that Celadon and Four Seasons were the only two common styles represented in the features I analyzed. There were also several unique Asian cups, which I will discuss further in the next section of this paper. Some fragments were too small to definitively state their decoration type. Because the greenish blue color of Celadon ceramics is recognizable for very small pieces, most of the indeterminate fragments were white with a polychrome overglaze. It is possible that they are Four Seasons cups, but there was not enough of the decoration to say so confidently. Because I was more concerned with the comparison between different Asian cups in this study, I chose not to differentiate between different Euro-American decorations and ware types in Figures 3-5, but to lump them in one category. I thus sorted by the following decoration categories: Four Seasons; Celadon; Other Asian Decoration, for styles that were distinct; Indeterminate Asian; and Euro-American.

## **Findings and Interpretations**

Each feature I studied had a substantially different collection of cups, but there were some trends. The only common Asian decorations present were Four Seasons and Celadon – the two most expensive and, according to Sando and Felton, of similar value (Sando and Felton, 161). There is thus no economic distinction between tiny cups and small bowls in these features

based on known design prices. However, the decorations between these two vessel types are different. The majority of small bowls were Celadon, whereas tiny cups were more likely to be decorated with Four Seasons. This distribution of these common designs seems to reflect their availability for the different sizes of cups. In the Kwong Tai Wo store inventory that Sando and Felton translated, the vast majority of “tea cups” were celadon – 445 Celadon compared to 60 Four Seasons. For “liquor cups,” it was the reverse – 10 Celadon and 450 Four Seasons (Sando and Felton 1993: 155). Also, except for one unique small bowl in Feature 24, all one-of-a-kind cups were tiny cups. This was especially true in Feature 13, where the one-of-a-kind tiny cups outnumbered the Four Seasons decorations.

From Features 18/18B, these unique tiny cups include one plain white cup with a flared rim (Figure 8) and one white cup with four Chinese characters painted in black, one on each side (Figure 9). According to Praetzellis and Praetzellis, calligraphy on ceramics is a significant marker of value, as the cup must have been decorated by a literate artisan (Praetzellis and Praetzellis, 174).

Feature 13 contains three unique tiny cups. The first has no decoration except possible white splotches on a blue background (Figure 12). It has thick walls and is badly burnt. The glaze is highly cracked. There are also two octagonally paneled tiny cups. One is white with a multi-colored flower painted in every other panel (Figure 13). The other is also white, with flowers and Chinese characters in alternating panels (Figure 14). The writing ends with red circles hand-painted below the characters. Analyzing a similar polygonal tiny cup from the Sacramento Chinatown, Praetzellis and Praetzellis describe the main writing as part of a poem and the red mark as a “chop mark,” or the author’s mark (Praetzellis and Praetzellis, 174). According to the database catalogue, the two fragments of the cup present translate as

“Springtime” and “Wealth and Dignity.” The regularly spaced flowers in polychrome overglaze on these cups resemble the Four Seasons design, but the special form of these cups and the greater elaboration of decoration suggest that these were more expensive, high-end cups than the Celadon and Four Seasons. Greenwood states that, in general, the one-of-a-kind ceramics had a higher price and status (Greenwood 1996: 67).

The Euro-American cups from these features also provide insight into drinking at each location. The whiteware cups from Features 18 and 18B display a remarkable variety. Among others, there is one flow blue whiteware (Figure 10), an orange- and brown-banded annular whiteware, a pearlware handle fragment hand-painted with green and black underglaze, and a plain blued ironstone cup fragment (Figure 11). There is also one rim fragment from a large, thick-pasted, plain white mug. Three of the six Euro-American cups include handle fragments, showing one of the most distinctive differences in form between the Euro-American and Asian cups. The variety of whitewares represented in these units suggests that these cups were individually owned, as opposed to being the property of a more institutional setting such as a restaurant. Also, some of these cups, such as the flow blue and the blued ironstone cups, were some of the more expensive whitewares. Thus Euro-American cups were not simply used as a cheaper alternative to Asian porcelain cups. Perhaps individual families used them along with, or instead of, Asian cups. Feature 18 appears to have been near stores (Michaels 2003: Figure 3.1). These cups may have been merchandise sold to individual customers or the property of storeowners.

Besides the high number of one-of-a-kind tiny cups from this feature, Feature 13 is distinct in that there are no Euro-American cups present. The unique, expensive octagonal cups from this feature suggest that the people at this location privileged traditional drinking practices.

The absence of Euro-American cups is understandable in this context. Feature 13 was located near Feature 18 and 18B and was also a wood-lined pit associated with stores, according to the Sanborn fire insurance map for the Market Street Chinatown (Michaels 2003: Figure 3.1)

Unlike in Features 13 and 18/18B, the vast majority of cups from Feature 24 are whitewares. In fact, there is only one Asian cup – a unique small bowl with a blue dragonfly and circles hand-painted on a white background. The feature has a MNV of five large whiteware mugs. In contrast to the diversity of Euro-American designs in the assemblage from Features 18 and 18B, these cups are all very similar. They are large, thick-pasted mugs with no painting or transfer print design. All white, their only decorations are molded patterns: some are smooth, while others have vertical or horizontal grooves. Figure 15 is an example of these vessels. Their large number and basic similarity suggest that they were used in a communal context, such as a restaurant.

Flynn and Roop of ARS describe Feature 24, a wood-lined trash pit, as American, not Chinese, because of the concentration of Euro-American ceramics found here (Michaels 2003: 3.1). The feature is in an area south of the majority of features in 85-31. This separate location would support the hypothesis that it was not a part of the Market Street Chinatown. However, in her research on gambling in Market Street Chinatown, Camp has shown that there is a higher concentration of Chinese gambling artifacts in Feature 24 than in others at the site (Camp 2004: in-class presentation). It thus seems premature to assert that the feature was not Chinese based only on ceramics.

It is possible that this feature was the disposal pit for a gambling establishment that served drinks in these uniform cups. In this context, beverage consumption, including alcohol, would have happened in a social, communal environment. The choice of cups at this

establishment might reflect a weaker emphasis on traditional drinking practices, the clientele's lower economic status, or both.

It is also possible that the cups and the gambling artifacts were not related. Although Laffey also calls Feature 24 American and not Chinese, she provides the following chronology for nearby Features 26, 30, and 33:

1846-1860	Washington Inn, including 1849-1851 State legislatures
1860-1875	American and Hispanic residential
1876-1887	Chinese gambling, woodyard, residential
1887-1900	vacant, unknown uses
1900-1920	Borcher's woodyard, agricultural implements (Laffey 1994: 17).

Laffey explains Feature 24's ceramics as possible trash from the Washington Inn and American and Hispanic residential period (Laffey 1994:17). Perhaps the uniform cups came from the Inn, and the gambling artifacts are from the later Chinese occupation of the site. Because the excavators did not record any more context for these cups than their feature number, we cannot know the relationship between these objects in the feature, so splitting the ceramics and gambling artifacts into different time periods is only speculation and is not more likely than the cups' being in use simultaneously with Chinese gambling. The fact that one of the whiteware fragments from Feature 18 closely resembles the cups from Feature 24 suggests that these cups' deposition was concurrent with Chinese gambling and occupation of the other features in the more central area of the Chinatown.

## **Conclusions**

The variable distribution of cup types throughout the site, as shown in Figure 1, and the substantial differences in the cups from the four features I analyzed show that there were a variety of contexts in which people drank at the Market Street Chinatown. Instead of there being

one domestic or commercial setting, the cups appear to differ based on a number of characteristics: the socio-economic status of the drinkers and the establishment or home in which the cups were used. Because I only analyzed three features, my conclusions are based on speculation rather than statistics. But the high variability of the cups in Features 18/18B and 13, compared to the uniformity of cups in Feature 24, may indicate personal ownership or use of cups in the former versus communal use of the later in a social setting.

This does not mean that the cups of Features 18/18B and 13 were not used socially. In fact, it seems likely that the more expensive, traditional tiny cups in these features would have had a social value as a display of wealth and traditional culture. Although the variability in these cups might suggest domestic use, these features were in an area near stores and, probably, restaurants (Michaels 2003: Figure 3.1). The presence of these more expensive and traditional cups at this site may reflect the greater wealth of the merchants and store owners, as opposed to the tenement residents at Feature 24.

It is significant that the most unique cups in the collection were the tiny cups that held liquor. Whereas all but one of the small bowls I analyzed fell in one of the mass-produced, commonly found decoration categories, people around Features 18/18B and 13 were using specially produced, one-of-a-kind cups for alcohol consumption. The tiny cups were also the only cups to feature traditional calligraphy, some of which may have been part of a poem. It was thus the tiny cups that most represented the traditional Chinese culture. The special nature of the decorations on these cups points to liquor consumption as the privileged drinking activity for expressing traditional culture. Drinking alcohol was thus an important, special activity that held social significance in Market Street Chinatown.

## **Suggestions for Further Study**

There are several other questions about the assemblage from this site that relate to my topic. One important aspect of research to continue is the comparison of site distributions of different artifacts. The location of gambling artifacts that Camp has studied provided a completely different picture of Feature 24 than the cups I studied and led me to rethink my interpretation of those cups (Camp 2004, in-class presentation). A more detailed and comprehensive study of these intrasite relationships will lead to a better understanding of the contexts in which these different artifacts were used.

More directly related to the question of drinking practices at Market Street Chinatown, it would be useful to carry out a more comprehensive physical analysis of the cups from 85-31. As I learned by studying the materials from Features 13, 18/18B, and 24, there is a substantial amount of information that one cannot know from the catalogue information alone. It was not until I saw the tiny cups from Features 18/18B and 13 that I realized how distinctive some of them are, and I needed to see the cups from Feature 24 to realize their level of uniformity. Incorrect cataloguing and inflated MNV counts make the information in the database insufficient for analysis. Because the features of 85-31 have such different mixtures of cup types, analyzing the materials at a greater number of them would be a valuable priority. Although I have noticed some trends in the decorations of tiny cups and small bowls, my sample size was too small for my observations to have statistical weight. Expanding the materials analysis would help to confirm or contradict the findings in this paper.

In doing materials analysis and research on other archaeological assemblages, I concentrated on the Asian ceramics. I did not expect the trends in the whitewares to be as interesting and informative as they appear to be. But the Euro-American cups in the assemblage



can provide additional information on contexts of features, as well as having been an important part of the drinking practices at this site. This paper would have benefited from more research into the pricing and dating of different whitewares.

It is also important to remember that this paper is a study of the cups present, not the liquids they held. Although the cups from Features 13 and 18/18B show an emphasis on the traditional rice wine cups for alcohol consumption, they did not necessarily hold that liquid primarily. In their in-class presentations, Clevenger and Matthews both described a scarcity of the stoneware liquor vessels that would have been used to transport traditional liquor from China (Clevenger 2004: in-class presentation; Matthews 2004: in-class presentation). This leads to the question: what alcohol were people drinking? If the Chinese at Market Street were not importing their liquor from China, they may have consumed European and American spirits, instead. The relationship between the cups in the assemblage and the alcohol storage containers thus leads to fascinating questions surrounding drinking practices and what constitutes tradition. There are many ways in which we can still learn from the cups of this site.

**Figure 1: Cups by Type in Features Analyzed**

Feature	Tiny Cups	Small Bowls	Euro-American Cups
Feature 13	4	3	0
Feature 18/18B	9	4	6
Feature 24	0	1	5

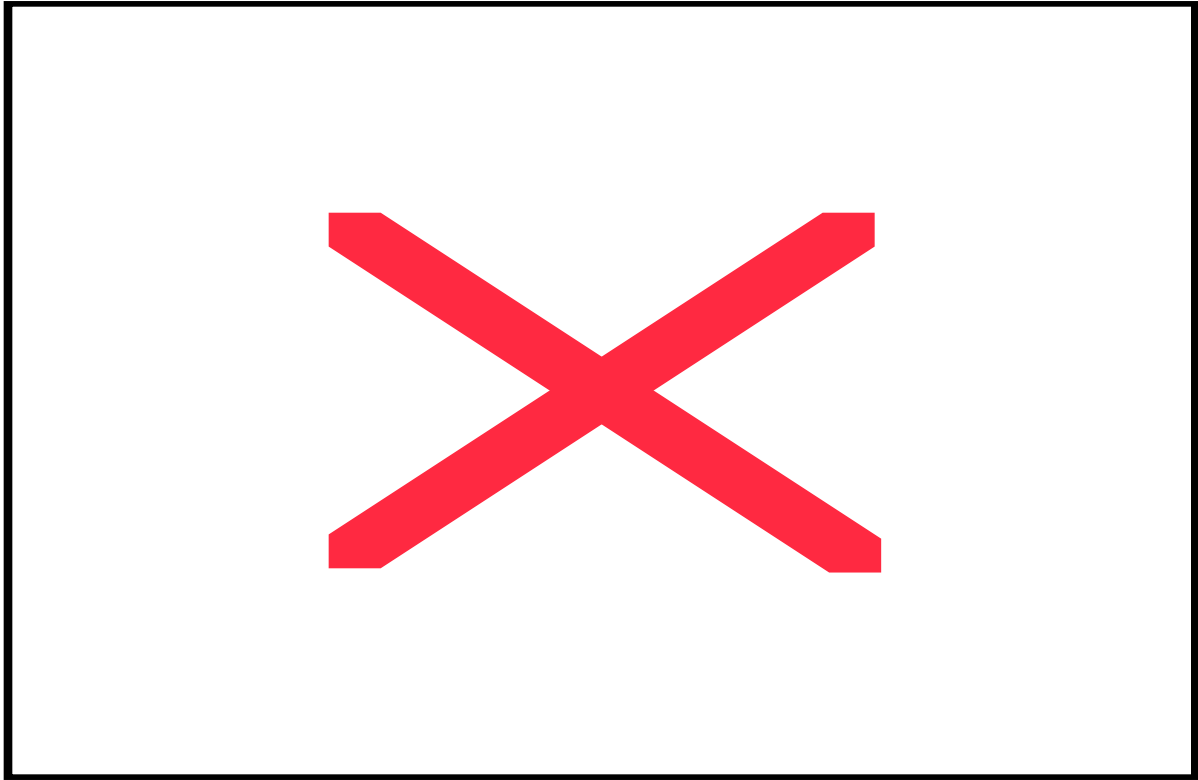


Figure 3: Decorations by Cup Type for Feature 13

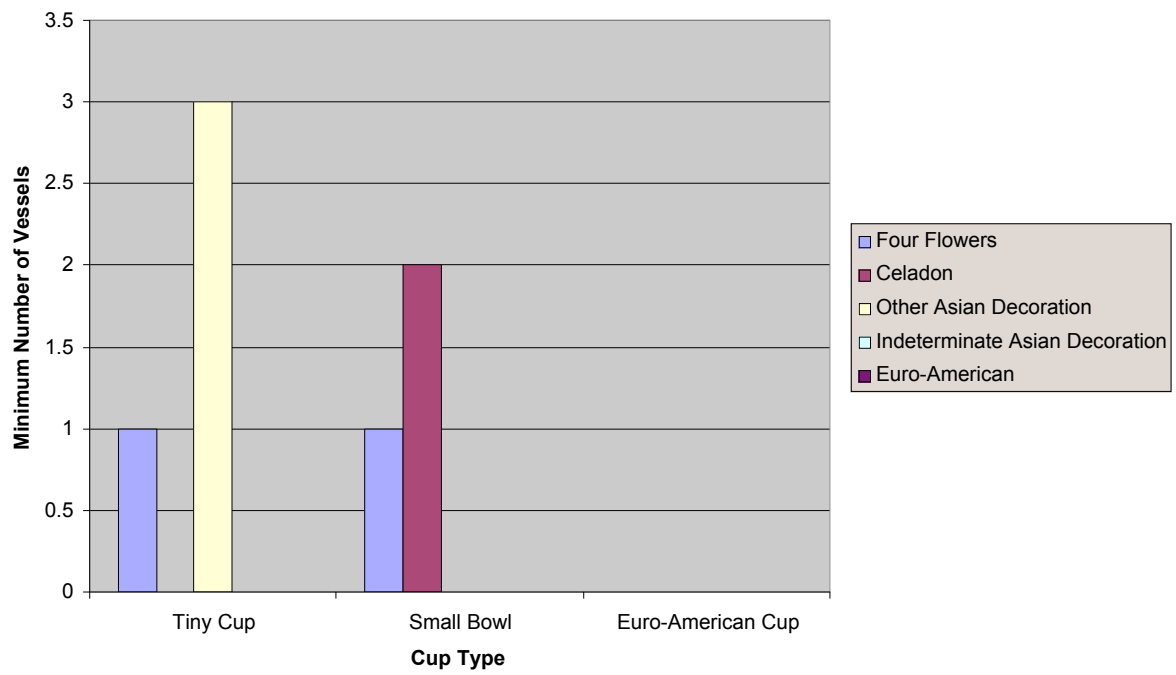
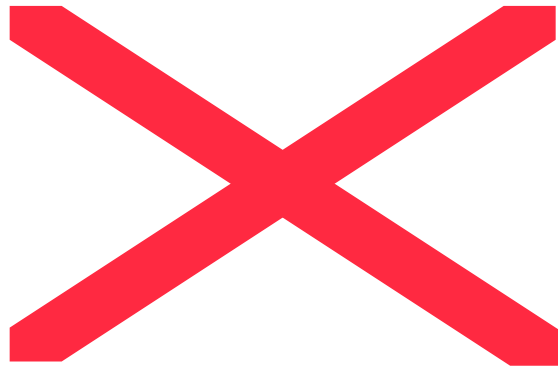
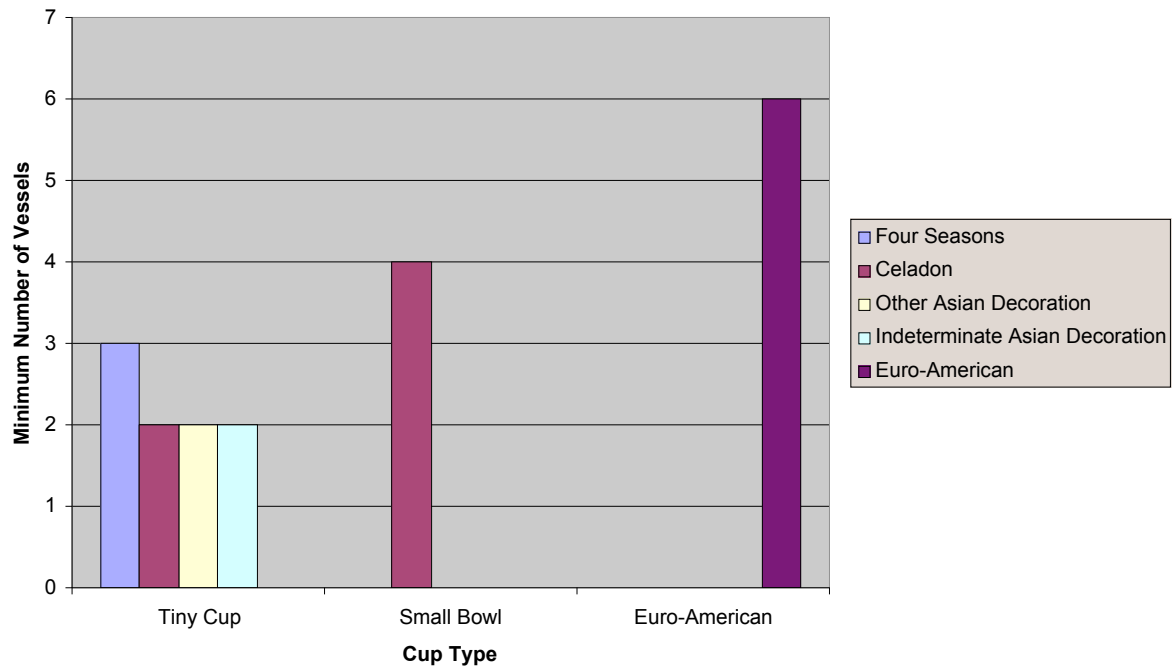


Figure 4: Decorations by Cup Type for Features 18 and 18B



**Figure 6: Celadon Small Bowl from Feature 18**



**Figure 7: Four Seasons Tiny Cup from Feature 18**



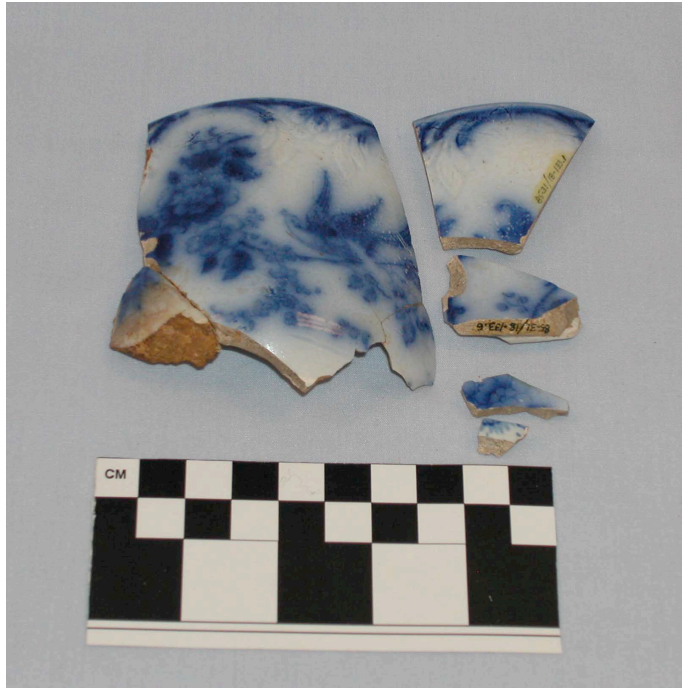
**Figure 8: Undecorated Tiny Cup from Feature 18**



**Figure 9: Tiny Cup from Feature 18B with Calligraphy**



**Figure 10: Flow Blue Whiteware Cup from Feature 18**



**Figure 11: Plain Blued Ironstone Cup from Feature 18**



**Figure 12: Burnt Tiny Cup from Feature 13**

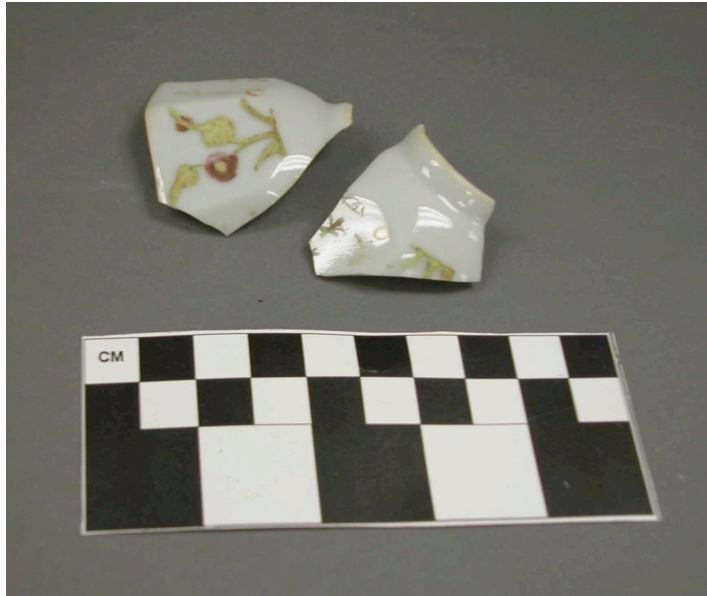


**Figure 13: Octagonal Tiny Cup from Feature 13**





**Figure 14: Octagonal Tiny Cup with Calligraphy from Feature 13**



**Figure 15: Large Whiteware Cup from Feature 24**





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