Comparing the Material Lives of Asian Transmigrants through the Lens of Alcohol Consumption

Douglas Ross, Simon Fraser University

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/douglas_ross/4/
Comparing the material lives of Asian transmigrants through the lens of alcohol consumption

DOUGLAS E. ROSS

Department of Archaeology, Simon Fraser University, Canada

ABSTRACT

Historians commonly use the twin concepts of transnationalism and diaspora in exploring the lives of overseas Asian migrants, but such analyses are only just emerging among archaeologists. These concepts forefront processes of culture change and identity formation that consider simultaneously socio-economic and cultural influences from home and host countries. They also present an interpretive framework and common axes along which scholars can compare distinct groups of migrants. This study compares patterns of material consumption among Chinese and Japanese migrants at a salmon cannery in British Columbia through the lens of social drinking. Results indicate both groups consumed a range of western-style alcoholic beverages, influenced by local working-class life combined with processes of modernization occurring in the homeland. Nevertheless, both also consumed indigenous Asian beverages, which played a key role in maintaining distinct ethnic identities.
INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, historical scholarship on Asian migration to North America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has increasingly focused on its transnational character, emphasizing the multiple intersecting strands of thought and behaviour connecting migrants with their homeland and with their newly adopted countries (e.g. Azuma, 2005; Chan, 2007; Hsu, 2000; Ngai, 2006). Archaeologists are beginning to recognize the value of this approach (Voss and Williams, 2008), but as yet few detailed studies have explored the implications of transnational connections in understanding the material record of life within Asian migrant communities. This is true in the field of archaeology more broadly. Such an approach, favouring multiple competing (rather than single dominant) identities and loyalties, affects scholarly interpretations of consumption patterns evident in the archaeological record and has the potential to transform the archaeology of all migrant communities.

This study explores the implications of an archaeological framework rooted in transnationalism and the related concept of diaspora, by comparing evidence for alcoholic beverage consumption among Chinese and Japanese labourers at a turn of the twentieth-century salmon cannery in British Columbia. Compared with food habits and opium smoking, alcohol consumption among Asian migrants receives only modest attention from archaeologists and historians and, despite evidence that it was a common activity in migrant communities, no in-depth analyses currently exist on this subject.

TRANSNATIONALISM AND DIASPORA

Glick Schiller et al. (1992: 1–2) define transnationalism as:

. . . the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. Immigrants who build such social fields are designated ‘transmigrants’. Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political – that span borders. Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously.
A related concept is diaspora, which has been theorized in many ways, but at its core incorporates communities of people from a single ancestral homeland who have been dispersed around the globe, but who maintain collective identities linking them to that homeland (Butler, 2001). Recent work by Lilley (2004) highlights the value of a diasporic framework for archaeology, and forms the foundation of the approach adopted here. Lilley endorses the kind of polythetic definitions of diaspora proposed by Clifford (1994), Cohen (1997), and Safran (1991), which cast diaspora as a general rather than narrowly specific phenomenon. He also agrees with Anthias (1998) and Butler (2001) that scholars should focus on the social processes through which diasporic groups are created rather than viewing diasporas as a series of descriptive typological categories. For Anthias, this perspective highlights the roles of the place of origin and the place of settlement in creating diasporic identities rooted in syncretism and hybridity, and for Butler it emphasizes shared aspects of diasporas that create common ground for systematic comparison.

Diaspora and transnationalism are twin concepts that highlight what Hall (1990) refers to as the ‘becoming’ of ethnic identity resulting from the simultaneous influence of, and dialogic relations between, cultural continuity and rupture. Transnationalism is particularly valuable in conceptualizing and exploring relationships between the home and host countries that are core elements of diaspora. This is especially true where migrants maintain physical as well as psychological and emotional ties with that homeland, as was the case for Chinese and Japanese migrants to North America. For Azuma (2005), Japanese migrants exhibited a transnational character because they were caught between the national ideologies of Japan and the United States. They tended to accept the legitimacy of both ideologies, and thus their strategies of assimilation, adaptation, and ethnic survival involved reinterpretation rather than rejection of either nation’s bounded identity constructs. Arising from this need for reconciliation and refusal to make a unilateral choice, ‘their ideas and practices were situational, elastic, and even inconsistent at times, but always dualistic at the core’ (Azuma, 2005: 6). Likewise, Hsu (2000: 3–4) argues that transmigrants between South China and the United States maintained a ‘doubly marginal status’, and did not really belong wholly to either nation between which they moved. Traditional concepts of identity ‘privilege the territorial boundaries imposed by nation-states while falling far short of describing the complex realities and potential significance of people who move from place to place’. These transmigrants forged a community that was both Chinese and American, drawing on conditions and opportunities in both countries.

Chinese, and to a lesser extent Japanese, migrant communities of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have often been referred to in diasporic terms in recent years, although some scholars debate the value of this concept (Azuma, 2005; Chan, 2007; Hsu, 2000; Mackie, 2003). Their
concern is that diaspora carries with it the essentialist notion that migrant communities are homogeneous and unified by a set of inherited cultural traits. However, these challenges are ameliorated if diaspora is seen as a process rather than a fixed identity, and is approached in a comparative manner that seeks to explore difference and interrogate categories as well as highlight similarity.

Diaspora and transnationalism offer a valuable interpretive framework allowing researchers to identify key factors influencing the nature and responses of migrant groups in new socio-economic and cultural environments, and to define common axes along which they may be productively compared. For Asian migrants these include linked histories and cultural traditions, movement dominated by male labour migration, direct and continuing connections with the homeland (including possibility of return migration), maintenance of regional identities, racial discrimination, and emergent nationalism and westernization in the homeland. It is important to acknowledge the role of both local and non-local influences in community formation, including ethnic tradition and acts of exclusion in the host country. However, although diaspora and transnationalism aid in understanding the multiple interrelated processes involved in Asian migration to North America, they do not in themselves offer a theoretical means of linking the material objects recovered from archaeological sites to identity and social and economic relations between homeland and adopted country. For this purpose, I draw on consumption theory developed by Miller (1987) and Mullins (2004), combined with Silliman’s (2001) use of the concepts of ‘practical politics’ and ‘acts of residence’, which I explore in detail elsewhere (Ross, 2009).

**TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANT COMMUNITIES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

Fieldwork for this study was conducted on Don and Lion Islands, located along the Fraser River approximately 20 km southeast of downtown Vancouver, where the Ewen salmon cannery operated between 1885 and 1930 (Figure 1). Salmon canning began in the early 1870s in British Columbia, and dominated the West Coast fishing industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Newell, 1988). Canneries typically included segregated, multi-ethnic work camps housed in seasonally occupied wooden buildings perched over the shoreline. Chinese men comprised a large part of the workforce inside the canneries, while Japanese men worked almost exclusively as fishermen; in both cases a segmented labour market rooted in racism permitted Asians to be paid less than whites for the same work. Most Chinese and Japanese migrants were poor peasants
who sought work in Canada to support families back home, many of whom travelled back and forth between home and host countries (Adachi, 1976; Li, 1998). A number of factors, including racist legislation, discouraged Chinese women from migrating to Canada, resulting in a predominantly bachelor society. Although they suffered from similar anti-Asian sentiment in Canada, the Japanese were not subject to the same exclusionary legislation and families were common by the turn of the twentieth century, although sex ratios remained imbalanced in favour of men.

The Chinese bunkhouse (accommodating around 100 men) was located near the western end of Lion Island adjacent to the canning complex, and

Figure 1 Map of the Vancouver area showing the location of Don and Lion Islands. (Drawing by author, 2009)
a Japanese fishing settlement was established on neighbouring Don Island. Little archival information on the bunkhouse or its residents survives, but a history of the Japanese community indicates a Japanese entrepreneur named Jinsaburo Oikawa founded it in 1901, recruiting workers from his home prefecture of Miyagi (Nitta, 1998). Chinese cannery workers were hired on a seasonal basis and provisioned by a contractor, but the Japanese organized labour recruitment and provisioning internally and maintained a year-round presence on the island. This community reached a maximum population of 70–100, including women and children, but was abandoned around the time the cannery closed. All buildings have since been removed from both islands, which are now protected by the municipal government as wildlife habitat. Fieldwork was conducted between 2005 and 2006, and included surface survey and test excavations of domestic refuse deposits associated with the Chinese and Japanese camps. This case study begins by outlining the recent history of alcohol consumption in China and Japan and among overseas Asian migrants, followed by comparison of archaeological evidence recovered from Don and Lion Islands.

■ ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN THE HOMELAND

Alcohol in Japan

Although western wine and liquor were introduced to Japan as early as the fifteenth century by Portuguese and Spanish traders, prior to the Meiji period (1868–1912) the principal alcoholic beverage consumed by Japanese was sake (Laker, 1975: 48). Prior to the Tokugawa period (1603–1868), sake consumption was largely restricted to ceremonial gatherings and formal parties, and was not common in everyday life (Ishige, 2001: 264). However, with increased urbanization in Edo and other centres, especially the development of entertainment districts, sake became a commercial commodity available in shops and taverns, moving beyond its traditional communal associations to become a daily beverage (Ishige, 2001; Kanzaki, 2003). Kanzaki (1989: 66–70) notes that among ordinary people in Edo everyday consumption of alcohol was uncommon until the late nineteenth century and in rural Japan until the early twentieth century. Despite the rise of large urban sake brewing firms in the Tokugawa and Meiji periods, small-scale rural production for local consumption, including home brewing, remained widespread (Tanimoto, 2006).

Anthropological studies of Japanese villages in the early 1950s revealed that consumption of alcohol amongst young women was rare, and intoxication amongst young men and older women was infrequent (Sargent, 1979). In contrast, adult male drinking parties were common, where drunkenness was expected and even required. Heavy drinking, then, was
confined to certain social groups in certain well-defined situations, and functioned in ritual and ceremonial contexts and as a means of strengthening social bonds and identities, a process that continues today (Ben-Ari, 2003; Moeran, 2005). As Laker (1975: 34–5) argues, by the time western alcohol began appearing in Japan, a strong sake tradition had developed, which played a central role in ceremonies, business deals, labour contracts, settling quarrels, and celebrating important occasions. This entrenched cultural significance presented a considerable obstacle to those attempting to market new products. However, Meiji industrialization and westernization offered an increasingly mobile population the opportunity (and often required them) to try new foods, as they entered the military, enrolled in universities, and travelled to find work. There was also a desire amongst the upper classes to emulate western behaviours as a means of achieving elevated social status. Such physical and social mobility and the development of military, business, and government institutions promoted broader patterns of social intercourse providing increased opportunities for social alcohol consumption, including both sake and western-style beverages (Kanzaki, 1989: 67; Laker, 1975: 38–9).

Production and consumption of beer in Japan is a product of Meiji industrialization and westernization, and is closely related to broader processes through which western foods were introduced and accepted into the Japanese diet. The first commercial brewers in Japan were an American and a German operating out of the Yokohama foreign settlement at the beginning of the 1870s, and these and other foreigners were responsible for teaching local merchants how to brew beer and helped them open their own breweries (Laker, 1975). It was not until after the turn of the twentieth century, however, that beer gained widespread popularity in Japan, and companies approached self-sufficiency by sending technicians abroad and gaining increasing control over production of machines, bottles, and raw materials. A number of beer companies also expanded into production of soft drinks and other non-alcoholic western beverages, which had begun appearing in Japan in the 1870s.

Production of other western style alcoholic beverages was more sporadic and somewhat delayed in Japan (Asai, 2003). Initial entrepreneurial attempts at wine making were made in 1873 and continued with government efforts in the 1870s and 1880s, but were largely unsuccessful in creating local demand. Western style liquor production began in 1871 as an attempt to adapt existing raw materials and methods by adding sugar and herbs to shochu, a local beverage distilled from rice, barley, or sweet potatoes (Asai, 2003). Because these early experiments were simple to achieve, economically profitable and much emulated, little attempt was made to acquire precise western techniques for several decades.
Alcohol in China

In China, the word *jiu* refers to all fermented and distilled beverages (Simoons, 1991: 448–54). Finer distinctions are made by adding a prefix to this root word to describe a particular type of alcohol based on colour, origin, contents, function, or transliteration of a foreign name (Smart, 2005). Millennia before emigrating to North America, the Chinese produced both fermented and distilled beverages, using similar raw materials and methods as in Japan (Hanai, 2003). By the nineteenth century, fermented beverages (*huang jiu*) were being made from a variety of grains and other plants, especially rice, but also from millet and sorghum, and with an alcohol content of 10 to 25 per cent and a flavour and colour resembling sherry (Simoons, 1991: 50). The most common type of distilled liquor (*bai jiu*) is made from sorghum, although it is also produced from rice, millet, wheat, potatoes, grapes, sugar cane, and other raw materials. It comes in a number of flavours and regional varieties, but generally resembles vodka in colour, flavour, and strength (30 to 50% alcohol). Although there are regional variations in consumption patterns, distilled liquors have tended to be far more popular than fermented ones (Hanai, 2003; Nishizawa, 2003).

Grape wine (*putau jiu*) has also been made in China for at least two millennia, but was only popular among the elite and was uncommon when Europeans started importing it in the seventeenth century (Godley, 1986; Simoons, 1991: 449–52; Smart, 2005: 110). Godley (1986) argues that, while wealthy Chinese in treaty ports were consuming western wine, beer, and liquor by the 1880s, they were not available to most consumers until the twentieth century. Europeans and Chinese endeavoured to make grape wine locally in the late nineteenth century, but it did not become popular and Chinese continued to prefer traditional alcoholic beverages. Godley (1986) notes, however, that western-style carbonated beverages sold very well from the 1880s. The first commercial beer (*pijiu*) brewery in China was established in the northern coastal city (and German naval base) of Qingdao in 1903 as a German–British co-venture intended to supply Europeans living in China (Yang, 2007). Within ten years, it was expanded to other cities with western businesses and diplomats. However, after Japan defeated the German garrison in 1914, it took over the brewery, but was later required to surrender it to the Chinese government after the Second World War.

In China, alcohol has traditionally served a variety of purposes: as a beverage at regular meals, feasts, and festivals; in cooking; as a ritual offering; and as a medicinal remedy (Simoons, 1991: 452–4; Smart, 2005). Over time, a set of normative codes have developed around alcohol consumption, restricting its use to social contexts and proscribing excessive consumption (Smart, 2005: 111–12). Smart (2005) emphasizes that the focus of drinking is rarely about the physiological effects of alcohol, but rather
that it is an important tool for maintaining social solidarity and hierarchy, and in the proper performance of ceremony and ritual. Women and children are not excluded from drinking, but men have traditionally consumed alcohol far more frequently and in larger quantities than women (Singer, 1979). Medicinal alcohols (yao jiu) are distilled liquors infused with herbs, animal parts, insects, fruits and seeds, and flowers, and can be used for a range of ailments, although they may also serve as flavoured beverages (Anderson and Anderson, 1977: 342–3; Smart, 2005: 110–12).

■ ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AMONG ASIAN MIGRANTS

While the dominant Euro-Canadian and American society attributed a number of negative stereotypes to Chinese and Japanese migrants, drunkenness was generally not among them. If nothing else, the Chinese were remarked on for their sobriety (Matsui, 1922: 97; Seufert, 1980: 113; Ward, 2002). Lister and Lister (2001: 77) note, however, that drinking is not granted much attention in literature on the overseas Chinese, and archaeological evidence suggests it was far more extensive than eyewitness accounts indicate.

The most directly relevant testimony comes from Japanese migrant Ruichi Yoshida, who worked in a series of logging camps in British Columbia between 1913 and 1919. Yoshida recalls that there was very little alcohol in these camps and workers had to travel to town to get it:

> When I could get it I drank sake. At the time Japanese sake was thirty-five cents for a quart bottle but there were only two stores that sold it. I drank a lot. Whenever I came to Vancouver I used up my money drinking. I went to work and came back to town again and drank until I was broke. That was my life. When I was in Japan I didn’t drink that much. I started to drink a lot after I came to Canada. There were no other pleasures. (Knight and Koizumi, 1976: 22)

A former Japanese railroad and sawmill worker in Washington and British Columbia during the 1910s recalls evenings lying in a makeshift bed in a freight car:

> There was no place to go for recreation. It was in the bleak fields or in the middle of the mountains. Most of us climbed into our always-ready, never-made beds, and smoked Bull Durham and drank cheap whiskey straight out of the bottle. The interior was crawling with tobacco smoke and smelled of cheap liquor. The cheapest was from 90¢ to $1 a quart. Besides whiskey, in the gangs or in the sawmill camps the drinkers drank muscat or claret which was only $1.50 or $2 a gallon. In British Canada, I remember that scotch whiskey was about 90¢ a quart. (Ito, 1973: 330)
This account, and another cited in Tamura (1993: 66), are rare references to regular consumption of alcohol other than imported or home brewed sake (e.g. Ito, 1973: 379, 405, 496, 512), which may reflect an emphasis on traditional practices important to maintaining ethnic identity. Curiously, these citations are the only references to alcohol in Ito’s entire volume of more than one thousand pages of first-hand accounts from Japanese migrants, suggesting respondents were not asked to comment on it or chose not to. Likewise, Tamura (1993) includes only a handful of references to alcohol in her collection of oral histories of Japanese settlers in Oregon’s Hood River Valley. It is possible informants avoided the subject of alcohol because of its negative associations in modern society, or because it was not relevant to the community history they wished to preserve. In 1921, in response to arrests of Japanese in Portland and The Dalles for breaking prohibition laws, members of the Japanese Farmers’ Association in Hood River agreed to control their alcohol consumption, avoid public drinking, and stop making sake at home (Tamura, 1993: 118). Despite an acknowledged role in their customs, limits on alcohol production and consumption were an important part of deflecting mounting anti-Japanese sentiment. One of these important customs was celebrating the New Year, when men would socialize with friends and relatives by feasting and drinking sake together (Tamura, 1993: 131). Women were excluded, and remained home to cook for the men and care for the children. This is an important observation in interpreting the demographics of alcohol consumption in archaeological contexts.

Ethnologist Stewart Culin (1890) generalized that Chinese in America preferred their native beverages, which they only consumed at meals to aid in digestion, although they occasionally drank western whiskey and gin. Seufert (1980: 113) recalls that Chinese workers at his family’s Oregon salmon cannery drank two kinds of Chinese alcohol: one the colour of red lacquer that came in one-pint crocks and another that was clear and came in one-fifth bottles. Seufert also mentions he only ever saw one Chinese worker drinking western liquor. Chinese cannery workers in Alaska made ‘Chinese gin’ (a distilled rice beverage known as sam shu), which was sold to indigenous people and other local residents and labourers for a profit (Friday, 1994: 80; Munsell, 1885; Nash, 1976: 276). Gong Yuen Tim, a San Francisco laundry worker, began selling homemade ‘rice wine’ in the early 1930s (probably distilled bai jiu) to local shrimp camp workers and Filipinos to earn extra money (Gong, 2006). Chow (1996: 125) interviewed an elderly Chinese Canadian man in Prince George, BC, who told her that early Chinese migrants often drank as a means of forgetting their homesickness and poverty.

Previous archaeological evidence of migrant Japanese alcohol consumption is limited, because of the rarity of research on Japanese sites.
However, Japanese beer, soda, and sake bottles have been reported from sites associated with Chinese and/or Japanese in the western United States, British Columbia, and the Pacific Islands (Armstrong, 1979; Costello and Maniery, 1988; Dixon, 2004; Greenwood, 1996; King and Parker, 1984; Muckle, 2001; Ross, 2009; Schaefer and McCawley, 1999; Slaughter, 2006). At most of these sites, samples are too small for meaningful interpretations or deposits cannot be attributed solely to Japanese inhabitants. It seems possible, though, that Japanese beverage bottles recovered in small numbers from Chinese sites (e.g. Lovelock, Nevada, Los Angeles Chinatown) reflect Chinese consumption of Japanese products, and vice versa. The presence of Japanese beverage containers on overseas sites indicates imported beer and sake were contemporary with the earliest Japanese arrivals. Furthermore, beer had become popular enough in Japan by the turn of the century that it was a desirable commodity amongst migrant communities.

Data from Chinese sites are more abundant, although highly variable in detail and depth of analysis (Table 1). Results from rural labour camps indicate most sites contain a range of western-style beverage bottles in addition to the classic Chinese stoneware liquor bottle. Based on his work at a Chinese railroad camp in Texas, Briggs (1974) concludes Chinese and western alcohol was consumed only in limited quantities, but that Chinese beverages were dominant. He argues that conflict with the dominant society stemming from racial discrimination limited the degree to which Chinese were able to or desired to adopt western habits. In contrast, LaLande (1982) notes that most Chinese sites excavated to date, both urban and rural, had produced large numbers of Euro-American alcohol bottles. In addition to archaeological material from mining sites in Oregon, LaLande presents data from a rural store ledger from 1864–5, indicating that over 80 per cent of Chinese miners purchased liquor during that period and approximately 60 per cent were ‘steady drinkers’. The most common purchases were whiskey, brandy, and gin, with ‘Chinese liquor’ purchased only rarely. Nevertheless, LaLande concludes that most alcohol was probably served in small quantities at meals following the traditional pattern, and does not reflect acculturation. Ritchie’s (1986) study of nineteenth-century Chinese mining sites in southern New Zealand reveals that a large proportion of alcohol consumed by miners was of European origin, although they also consumed imported Chinese liquor. He concludes that Chinese in New Zealand consumed large quantities of European alcohol, albeit inconspicuously, and in greater amounts than Chinese imports. According to Ritchie, the fact that European alcohols taste quite different from Chinese varieties is clear evidence of acculturation in drinking habits (Ritchie, 1986: 657–8).
Table 1  Beverage bottles from Chinese labour camps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>CBS liquor bottles</th>
<th>Beer</th>
<th>Liquor</th>
<th>Wine/Champagne</th>
<th>Soda</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CA-Sie-707-H, CA</td>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>ca. 1860–1890s</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Markley, 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS-27–03–05 &amp; 665–6, NV</td>
<td>Railroad</td>
<td>1869</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Wroblewski, 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierce 10-CW-159, ID</td>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>1870s</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Stapp and Longenecker, 1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carson City, NV</td>
<td>Railroad</td>
<td>1872</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Rogers, 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miller Gulch, CA</td>
<td>Sawmill</td>
<td>1872–1876</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Douglass, 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gin Lin’s Camp, CA</td>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>ca. 1875–1885</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>LaLande, 1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrendale Cannery, OR</td>
<td>Canning</td>
<td>1876–1930</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Fagan, 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langtry, TX</td>
<td>Railroad</td>
<td>1882</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Briggs, 1974</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: CBS = Chinese brown stoneware
ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA FROM DON AND LION ISLANDS

Beverage consumption on Don Island

One of the first buildings erected on Don Island in 1901 was a brew house, operated by a professional Japanese brewer and cooper who produced and barrelled sake, soy sauce, and miso for domestic use and sale to local Japanese (Nitta, 1998: 71–92). By 1911, sake production had increased dramatically as a cheap alternative to imported alcohol, and Don Islanders were supplying the wider Japanese community and some local Euro-Canadians. In that year, the sake brewery was raided by local police and thereafter it is likely sake production was discontinued or seriously curtailed.

Archaeological material recovered from Don Island was concentrated in a single core midden adjacent to Oikawa’s family home and the all-male bunkhouse, and a secondary midden comprised largely of bottle glass associated with the community hall. Because of ambiguities in attributing specific contents to unmarked and fragmentary bottles, data are presented here according to most likely contents given available data on shape, size and closure type derived from diagnostic fragments (Society for Historical Archaeology, 2009). In some cases, it was not possible to attribute a single beverage type to a given bottle, and these were categorized according to the two most probable candidates. Furthermore, the influence of bottle reuse can never be entirely ruled out. However, while the lack of sealed stratigraphic deposits on Don and Lion Islands precludes the potential for time-lag analysis on the bottle assemblages, archival and archaeological evidence support consumption of a range of local and imported beverages (see Ross, 2009).

Of 5908 fragments of glass recovered from Don Island (including a small number of whole bottles), 3782 (64%) were identified as container glass. From these container fragments, a minimum of 166 beverage bottles was identified for the site. Based on morphological attributes, these bottles originally contained a range of beverages including beer, wine or champagne, liquor, sake, and non-alcoholic soda and mineral water in quart, pint, and half-pint sizes. Data indicate that beer and liquor are the most common beverages, comprising at least 106 of the 166 identified vessels (at least 64%) (Figure 2). Given the number of bottles that could contain either beverage, however, it is not possible to determine relative abundance. The remaining beverage types are less abundant, with soda a possible third. If ambiguous pairs are eliminated from site totals or divided evenly between their possible contents, the distribution shows liquor and beer clearly dominating the assemblage followed by much smaller numbers of the remaining beverages (Figure 3).
Bottle size and alcohol content are important variables in this analysis. Liquor typically came in quart-sized bottles, whereas beer was commonly marketed in both quarts and pints. The fragmentary nature of the assemblage makes it impossible to quantify beverages by volume but, given equal numbers of beer and liquor bottles, the total volume of liquor would tend to be greater. More significantly, liquor averaged 43 per cent alcohol by volume versus 5 per cent for beer during this period (Popham and Schmidt,
transforming a modest difference in total volume into a dramatic difference in volume of absolute alcohol. As an intoxicant, then, liquor was by far the most important beverage on Don Island. For example, if all values in Figure 3 are hypothetically treated as quart-sized bottles, the quantity of absolute alcohol in liquor bottles becomes approximately 25 quarts in contrast to three quarts for beer. A similar calculation for wine, which averaged 16 per cent alcohol, does not produce as dramatic a change (approximately 1 quart of absolute alcohol), and it remains far less abundant.

Embossed marks indicate at least 13 bottles originally contained beer from local breweries, and at least nine case bottles are from the Dutch Blankenheym & Nolet gin distillery. Based on morphology and embossed marks, a minimum of 17 bottles contained Scotch whisky and 10 others Japanese beer, including Dai Nippon and Kirin brands. Also found were a complete bottle base with the embossed name and mark for Mitsuya (‘Three Arrows’) cider, a Japanese soda, along with remains of at least 11 imported sake bottles. Aside from glass containers, ceramic evidence of alcohol consumption includes fragments of seven Japanese porcelain sake cups (sakazuki) and three grey stoneware sake bottles (tokkuri). There are also fragments from a minimum of five Chinese brown stoneware liquor bottles, which typically contained high-alcohol Chinese medicinal liquor. It is possible Japanese used it for cooking or medicinal purposes, or as a recreational beverage, but the small numbers suggest Chinese liquor was acquired in very limited quantities.

**Beverage consumption on Lion Island**

A total of 4444 glass fragments were recovered from the Chinese camp, the majority from surface collection and two subsurface middens located on either side of the bunkhouse. Of these fragments, 3113 (70%) were identified as container glass, representing a minimum of 116 glass bottles with a similar range of contents as Don Island (Figure 4). Values are presented in the same general order as Don Island for comparison, and they indicate beer is statistically more abundant than liquor ($x^2 = 8.07, p < .001$), but that liquor, soda and wine/champagne are all present in lesser quantities. If Chinese and western liquor are combined it becomes the second most abundant beverage, and is no longer statistically distinct from beer. Embossed marks from the site indicate at least six beer bottles and six soda bottles are Japanese and five beer bottles are English, with only one marked bottle from a local brewery.

If vessels with two or more possible functions are divided evenly amongst their likely contents, it appears beer was the most common bottled beverage consumed at the bunkhouse and there is probably little to choose between the others (Figure 5). However, values for beer and soda include both North American and Japanese varieties together, and if liquor is...
likewise combined, the difference between beer and liquor becomes less clear. If these numbers are considered with respect to volume of absolute alcohol in a similar manner to Don Island, the value for beer becomes approximately three quarts and liquor becomes approximately 19 quarts. In terms of intoxicating properties, then, liquor was considerably more abundant in the bunkhouse community. Other alcohol-related artifacts from the site include three Chinese porcelain liquor cups and one porcelain liquor warmer.
In comparing bottles and related artifacts from Don and Lion Islands, it is apparent the inhabitants of both communities consumed a combination of western, Chinese, and Japanese beverages, both locally produced and imported from Europe and Asia. There are important distinctions, however, and the following discussion addresses these similarities and differences in the context of local circumstances and events taking place in the migrants’ homelands. The most striking similarity is that beer and liquor appear to be the most common bottled beverages consumed in both communities, with wine and soda also present at both sites, but in considerably smaller quantities. Sake bottles occur on Don Island in similar numbers as wine and soda, but archival evidence of sake brewing on the island until at least 1911 suggests it may have been at least as important as liquor or beer. At neither site is beer, liquor, or soda exclusively western or Asian in origin, but a combination of both. On Don Island both Japanese and local beers and sodas were consumed, along with liquor distilled in Europe and China. Likewise, on Lion Island local, English, and Japanese beers and sodas have been identified, as well as Chinese and western liquor.

In linking drinking habits on the islands with practices in Japan and China, it is no surprise that Chinese bai jiu and Japanese sake were common, being the most popular alcoholic beverages in their countries of origin. In contrast to oral accounts that emphasize sake drinking among Japanese migrants, both assemblages contain a range of western beverage bottles. Of the western-style beverages, beer and liquor were the most popular, and it may be no coincidence that beer was also the earliest western alcohol to be produced and distributed widely in Japan and (to a lesser extent) China. In this sense, the popularity of certain western beverages amongst Asian migrants is part of a broader process of western influence already begun at home, which would ultimately result in the transformation of certain beverages into distinctly Japanese and Chinese drinks. This ongoing process makes it difficult to identify particular elements of material culture as exclusively Asian or western and the use of them by particular groups as evidence of fundamental changes in behaviour that are solely a response to life abroad.

However, these interpretations are complicated by data from other Chinese sites, which indicate consumption of grape wine was common in labour camps, highlighting the importance of local contextual factors. Data on province-wide consumption of spirits, beer, and wine in British Columbia between 1872 and 1893 indicate wine was consistently the least popular of the three beverages by volume and beer the most. If these numbers are converted into volumes of absolute alcohol, beer and liquor are reversed (Popham and Schmidt, 1958: 22–3; Sessional Papers of the Dominion of
Canada, 1895: 24). These results closely match data from Don and Lion Islands, suggesting Asian migrants consumed alcohol in proportions similar to the population at large, albeit including Asian imports. Indeed, despite racist legislation around the turn of the twentieth century prohibiting Asian migrants from holding liquor licenses and serving liquor in saloons, documentary evidence indicates they continued to buy and sell alcohol in contravention of these laws (Ajzenstadt, 2002). Chinese may have circumvented legislation in part by marketing their liquor as medicinal. Even during provincial prohibition between 1917 and 1921, Asians had similar access as the rest of the population to a legal loophole allowing medical practitioners to prescribe alcohol to patients (Campbell, 1991: 24).

The connection between archaeological data and the pattern for the province as a whole suggests influences from both home and adopted countries affected beverage consumption amongst island residents. It is likely sake retained its social and cultural significance within the Japanese community, and likewise Chinese liquor continued to serve medicinal and culinary functions. However, the number and diversity of alcohol bottles at both sites suggest Asian migrant labourers were influenced by local circumstances in British Columbia, where much of the largely male population worked in temporary labour camps and often had little access to recreational activities aside from drinking and gambling. In the social context of work camps, the tradition of Japanese male drinking parties was encouraged and Chinese moderation was relaxed. All residents of the Chinese bunkhouse were men, but on Don Island it is possible some alcohol was consumed by women, although oral histories suggest drinking continued to be largely a male prerogative as in Japan. This interpretation is supported by striking similarities in beverage consumption patterns between the Japanese and Chinese sites, which stand in stark contrast to dining customs.

Data on ceramic tablewares and food reveal greater diversity of both Asian and non-Asian goods on Don than Lion Island, and a heavier reliance on Asian-style meals at the Chinese camp. Analysis suggests profit-maximizing tactics of labour contractors, in conjunction with demographic and historical factors, had a considerable impact on the material distinctions between these two communities (Ross, 2009).

Similar beverage diversity between the islands indicates that, unlike dining, Chinese workers had a significant amount of choice as consumers in what they drank and contractors were not responsible for recreational provisions. Two of three Chinese porcelain liquor cups recovered from the site had marks of ownership pecked into the surface, whereas none of the 54 rice bowls did, suggesting social drinking was more personalized than dining and individuals might have owned their own cups even if bowls were contract provisions. In sum, oral accounts in combination with archaeological data from these and other sites support the conclusion that both Chinese and Japanese migrants, most separated from their families, drank
alcohol in quantities uncommon at home. This pattern of regular alcohol consumption has been observed at other work camps with a predominantly non-Asian male workforce (e.g. HARD Work Camps Team, 2007: 49; Van Bueren, 2002), indicating that it is as much a class- and gender-based phenomenon as an ethnic one.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Returning to transnationalism and diaspora, it is apparent from the Don and Lion Island assemblages that material consumption patterns among Asian migrants reflect influences from home and host countries, including hybrid social identities rooted in both class and ethnic tradition. Straightforward assumptions of static and unified ethnic identities rooted in cultural tradition are challenged by imports like Japanese beer and soda present on both sites. Both beverages are of western origin, but were in the process of becoming indigenized in China and Japan in the early twentieth century. Neither is a symbolic marker of cultural continuity but rather of emerging industrialization and modernity in the homeland. The presence of these beverages indicates migrants kept in touch with such changes via transnational connections, rather than relying on incomplete memories of a permanently alienated homeland. In this sense, changing consumption patterns were influenced not only by proximate influences in the adopted country but also from abroad through family connections and merchant networks.

The social significance of alcohol use also indicates multiple competing influences. On Don and Lion Islands and in western labour camps more broadly, daily alcohol consumption was a practice that cross-cut ethnic differences and is more closely linked with social class. In this sense, the culture of male working-class life played a more important role in behaviour patterns in this sphere than did ethnic tradition. The striking similarities in material assemblages between the two sites and their close correlation with patterns for the province as a whole suggest local influences were the primary model for this behaviour. However, political animosity and racial hostility between China and Japan largely prevented these commonalities from promoting class-based unity of identity and political action (Meggs, 1991).

In spite of this emulation of local working-class habits, both assemblages indicate retention of indigenous practices from the homeland, exemplified in the presence of Japanese sake and Chinese liquor. These beverages served a number of functions that were probably retained among migrant groups, but most importantly in overseas contexts they acted to cement social bonds (including labour contracts) and forge collective identities.
rooted in links to a common homeland. This is supported by historical evidence that alcohol was generally consumed in social contexts outside of regular mealtimes. The numerical dominance of men in labouring contexts, combined with evidence indicating men were the principal consumers of alcohol, suggests such bonding took the form of all-male drinking parties, both daily and on special occasions. This powerful socio-symbolic association is why sake is so predominant in Japanese Canadian oral histories and in the history of Don Island. Although it lacks the same prominence in oral accounts, Chinese liquor probably played a similar role. In fact, Williams (2008) argues that among Chinese migrants it was used to express a particular kind of masculine identity rooted in Chinese history.

From a broader archaeological perspective, this case study demonstrates that patterns of material consumption among migrant groups are influenced as much by social class and contextual factors in the home and host countries as by ethnic identity. Such patterns do not reflect gradual change from one monolithic identity to another, but rather multiple simultaneous identities that are themselves in dynamic flux. Regardless of the degree to which ethnic minorities adopt the behaviours of their neighbours, they are able to retain distinct identities. For visible minorities like the Chinese and Japanese, ethnic distinctiveness was maintained not only by racist attitudes and policies of the dominant society, but also by iconic symbols of collective diasporic identity like alcoholic beverages. As Upton (1996) argues, ethnicity is not exclusively the product of tradition, but a unique synthesis of imposed and adopted characteristics. Another important conclusion emerging from this study is that observations drawn from alcohol-related material culture are not representative of either assemblage as a whole with respect to meaningful patterning in the acquisition and use of consumer goods. Contrasts between dining and social drinking indicate that different aspects of a social group’s material world are influenced by distinct sets of forces and invested with unique meanings. This highlights the interpretive value of separating assemblages into functional categories for analysis and comparison. Ultimately, an approach rooted in the twin concepts of transnationalism and diaspora exposes the complex and nuanced reality of migrant lifeways, incorporating multiple competing identities and external influences rather than assuming migrants had to choose between them.

Acknowledgements

This article is part of my PhD research, for which I incurred a multitude of debts, both intellectual and personal. Here I would like to recognize those individuals who played an important role in shaping this particular part of my study, especially Ross Jamieson and Dana Lepofsky for guiding and responding to early drafts of this work. I am also grateful to Edward González-Tennant, Bill Lindsey, Trelle Morrow,
Bob Muckle, and Priscilla Wegars for sharing ideas and data with me, and to members of the local Japanese Canadian community for drawing my attention to these islands in the first place. Thanks also to the three anonymous reviewers, whose constructive comments helped considerably in improving the arguments presented here. This research was funded in part by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Doctoral Fellowship.

Notes

1 The term beer as used here should be understood to include ale and other western-style beverages fermented from grain. Likewise, the term soda includes all non-alcoholic carbonated beverages such as mineral water. North American cylindrical quart bottles ranged from about 22–30 oz. (650–887 ml), pints 11–16 oz. (325–473 ml), and half-pints 6–8 oz. (177–237 ml) (Society for Historical Archaeology, 2009). Large and small Japanese beer bottles correspond to the range for North American quarts and pints, but sake bottles typically come in 1 sho (1.8 L, 61 oz.) and 4 go (720 ml, 24 oz.) sizes, the latter corresponding to the quart size (Gauntner, 2002: 78–80; Laker, 1975: 88).

2 Unfortunately, functional ambiguity limits statistical evaluations. Green pint-sized bottles with crown finishes and a champagne body style were used for Japanese and North American beer and soda, and for Chinese liquor. Bottles of this style from Lion Island include examples that could be North American or Asian in origin, as well as Asian specimens with embossed neck rings that could have contained Chinese liquor or Japanese soda.

References


**DOUGLAS E. ROSS** completed a BA in Archaeology at Wilfrid Laurier University, Ontario, an MA in Anthropology at the College of William and Mary, Virginia, and a PhD in Archaeology at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia. His current research interests focus on historical archaeology in western North America, particularly ceramic analysis, material consumption, and comparative studies of minority ethnic groups in the context of industrial labour.

[Email: drossa@sfu.ca]