

A Discussion on the Green Porcelain sub-semblage at St. Andrew's Cathedral (STA) site

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The large quantities and relative larger proportion of green porcelain to other Chinese porcelain in the STA's assemblage suggest that green porcelain was an item of high demand in 14th-century Singapore. A total of 1976 feature sherds was sampled in this study. These consist of rims, bases, full profile sherds (rim and base), lids, mouth of jarlets, and lugs (see Table 1 and Image 1). The majority of the sherds comprises rim sherds as they are more prone to breakage than bases; bases are often thicker and sturdier.

Features	Sherd Count	Percentage of the total amount
Rims	1570	79.29%
Bases	321	16.21%
Full profile of base and rim	22	1.11%
Mouths	33	1.67%
Lids	21	1.06%
Foot Ring	8	0.40%

Lug	5	0.25%
Total number of sherds	1980	

Table 1. Features found in the STA assemblage

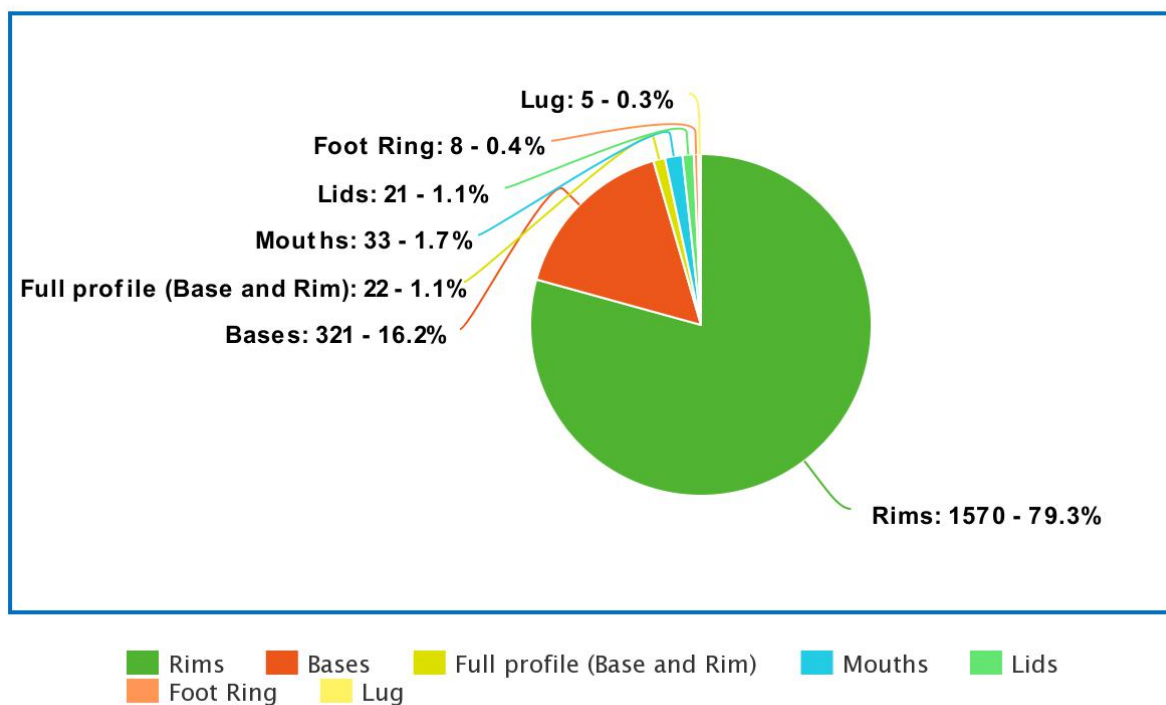


Image 1. Proportion of feature sherds in STA assemblage

The rim and base sherds have been classified into types and varieties according to their form. These categories highlight the contours of the vessels and hence indicate different vessel shapes (Shepard 1974: 226-7). Rim sherds are first classified according to the following categories: everted, inverted, straight, and folded. Bases are classified as follows: footed and non-footed, and then categorized into varieties by identifying characteristic points of their profiles.

Form

The everted, inverted, and straight rims have lips that bend outward, inward, and are vertical respectively. Foliated and scalloped rims can either be everted, inverted, or straight, and their lips are shaped in a leaf-like manner or circular scalloped shapes respectively. Rims with a protruding ridge are vessels with lips that have a protrusion from the exterior of the body that are connected to the lip of the rim. Rims with a triangular top have a straight lip on the exterior and a slanted lip on interior (see Image 2).

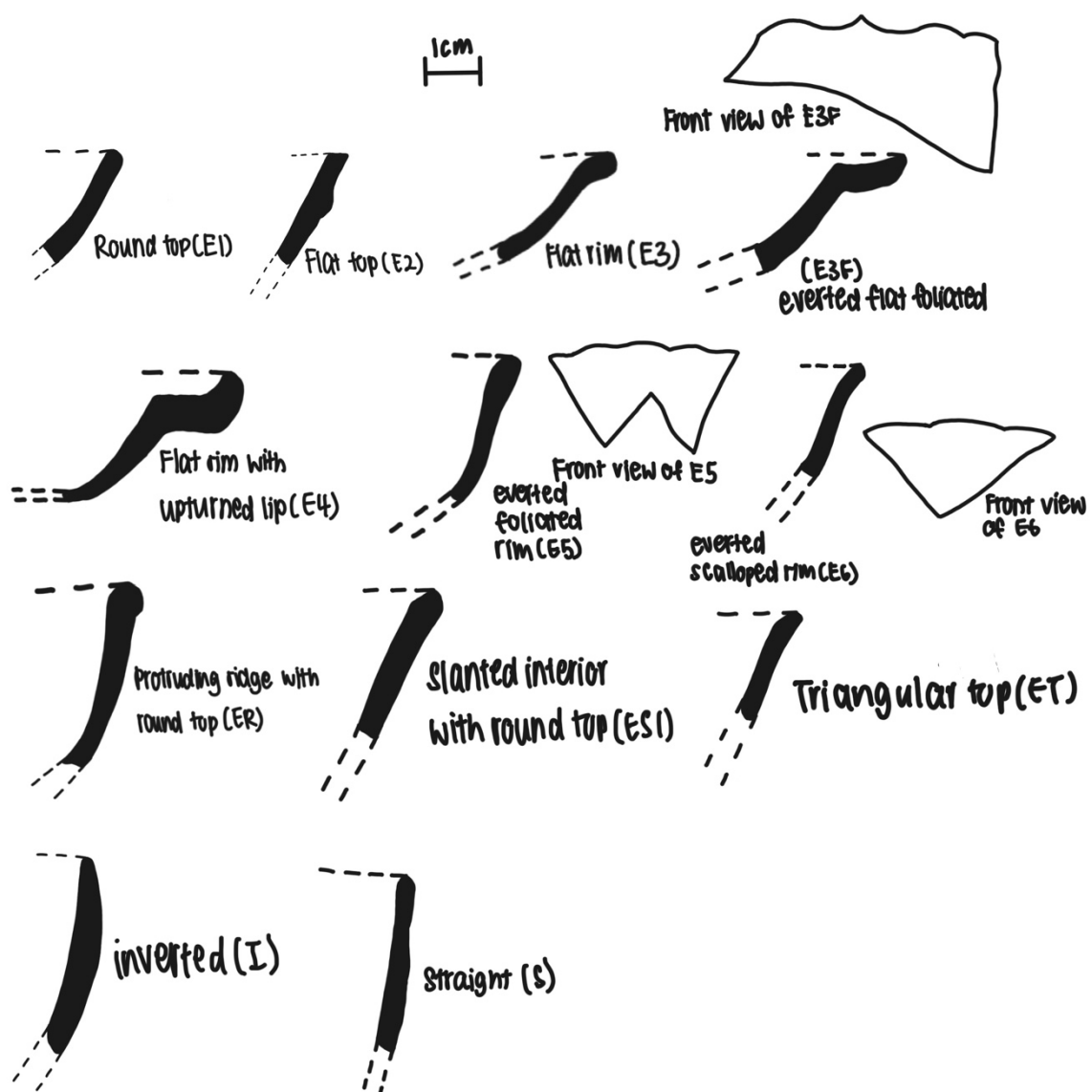


Image 2. Rim types

Footed bases have a protruding foot while unfooted bases do not. Within the types with a footed base, they are further categorized into the following: square, round, sloping, and rounded square (see Image 3).

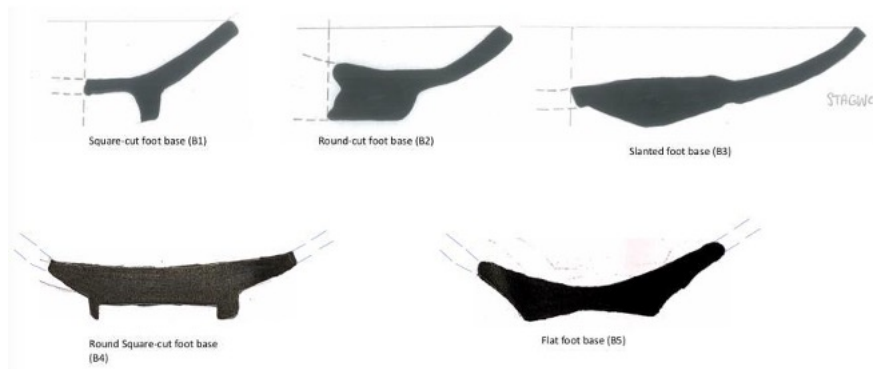


Image 3, Base profiles

An estimation of the number of vessels was then obtained from the sampled feature sherds using minimal vessel count (MNV).¹ It combines sherds of the same type and diameter as it is likely that they are derived from the same vessel. Since this is an estimate of the total number of vessels, the percentages of all the sherds within the same type will be tallied. If the measurement of the percentage adds to 250%, it will be rounded up to 3 vessels.

¹ This quantification method groups sherds that most likely form parts of the same vessel and measures the percentages of the sherds that are still intact. A rim chart is used to measure the radius of the sherds to determine the percentage of the entire circumference of vessel if the sherd was to have come from an intact vessel.

Rim forms

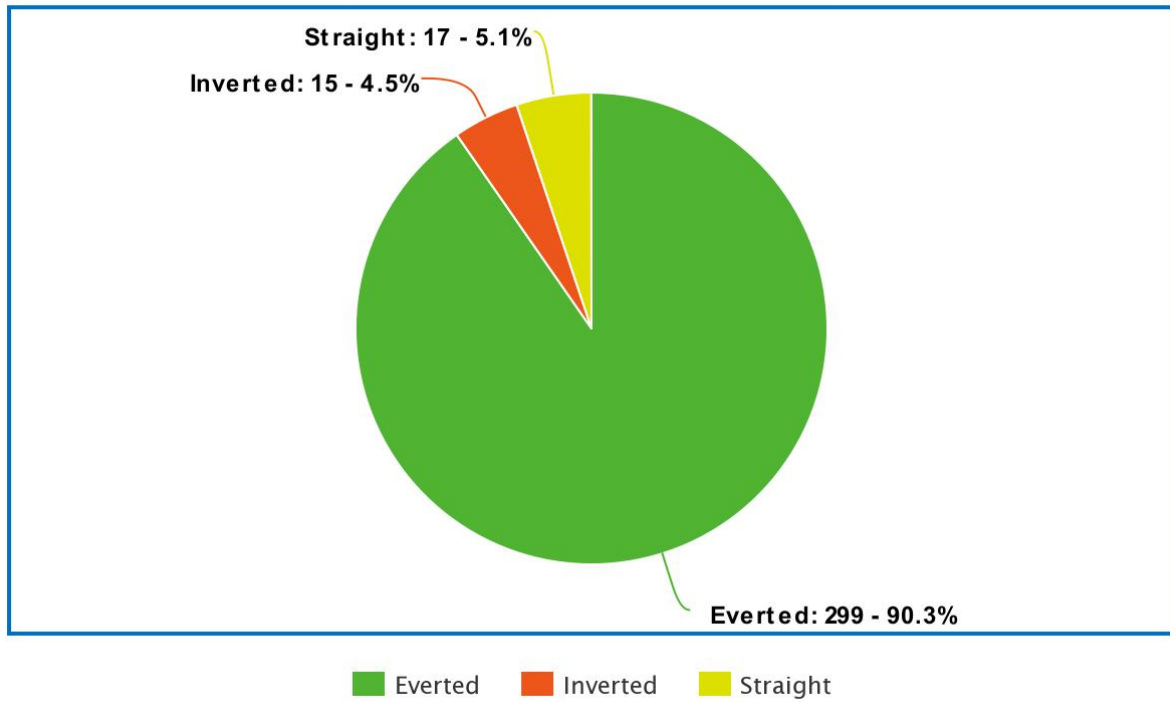


Image 4. Rim types

Among the 331 vessels estimated from the rim sherds, the largest proportion of rims, with 299 vessels, are everted (90.3% of total), while the smallest number of vessels have inverted rims (4.5% of total).

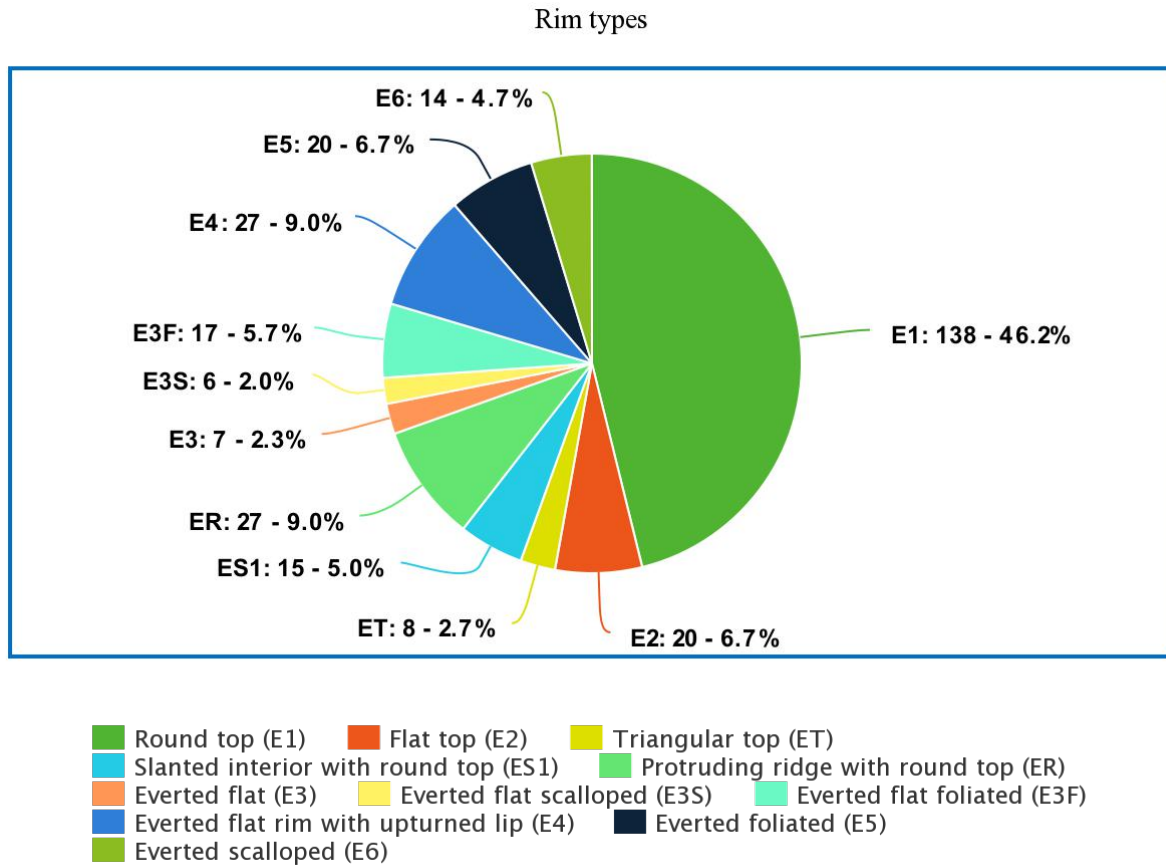


Image 5. Everted rim types

Among the 299 vessels that have an everted rim, there are varieties in the rim form. E1 has the largest proportion, with 138 vessels (46.2% of total), while ER and E4 have the second largest proportion, with both types totalling 27 vessels (9% of total) each. This is interesting as most studies do not represent vessels with a protruding ridge below the lip. Furthermore, the variety observed in the assemblage has not been observed in existing catalogues and studies (He 1997; Meitoku 1993: 77-9). The gaps that these comparisons reveal could be attributed to two reasons. Firstly, it may be due to limited research conducted on the variety of wares in existing scholarship. Secondly, it may indicate of the demand for these wares may be unique to 14th-century Singapore.

Image 4 illustrates that there were also vessels with either inverted or straight rims brought to Singapore during the 14th-century comprising 17 and 15 vessels respectively (4.53%

and 5.14% of total respectively). The presence of these rim types, which are presently absent in existing studies show a potential direction for further research. It would be useful to determine to whether the author's observation was due to limited scholarship on the wide range of porcelain export wares, or that it is indicative of a unique consumption pattern in 14th-century Singapore. Comparison can be made between the STA assemblage and assemblages of other sites to determine if specific vessels were imported due to demand or were limited by the items traders brought to Singapore.

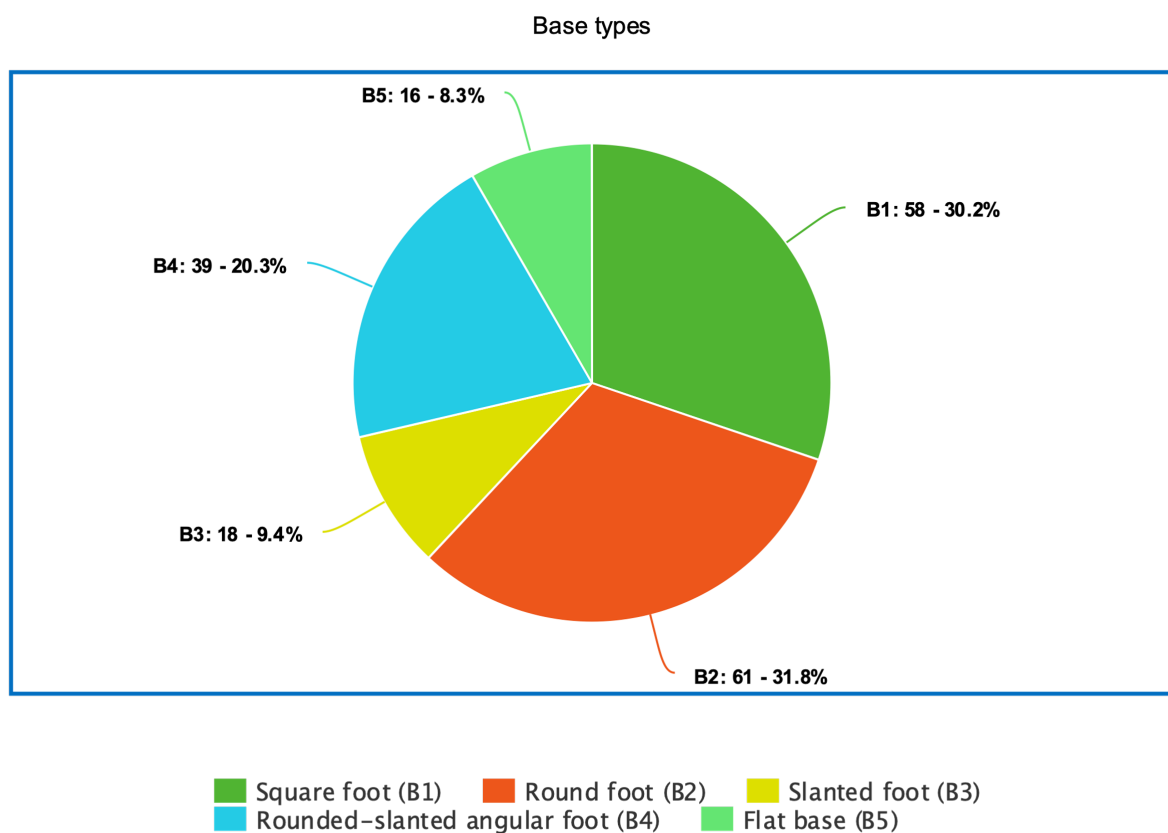


Image 6. Base types

Of the 192 estimated number of vessels, the largest proportion of bases have a round foot, with 61 vessels (31.77% of total). Various reasons may be offer for this observation: consumers might have requested for these types for specific usages, or Chinese kilns only produced these forms, restricting the choices 14th-century Singapore consumers had.

Motifs

Many motifs have been observed on the exterior and interior of the green porcelain sherds, with a range of different permutations. The motifs have been classified into geometric and floral designs. For the footed base sherds, the geometric designs consist of incised lines (Image 7a, b). Floral designs consist of incised lotus leaf designs (Image 8), and floral designs (Image 9a, b). The floral designs consist of leaves, vines, chrysanthemums and/or peonies might appear in any permutation. For the unfooted sherds, they either have no motif or have vertical lines radiating from the base (Image 10). Some sherds also have flutes on them (Image 19a, b).



Image 7a Incised vertical lines



Image 7b Incised vertical lines



Image 8 Incised lotus leaf designs



Image 9a Floral medallion – chrysanthemum with scalloped petals around cavetto and chrysanthemum floral band around vessel below lip



Image 9a Floral designs



Image 9b Floral designs



Image 10 Vertical lines radiating from base

There are more motifs and permutations observed on the rims, both geometrical and floral. The geometric motifs also comprise horizontal lines (Image 11). Motifs that resemble foliage are also found on the rim sherds, and are either rendered in single or combed curved lines (Image 12a, b, c). Another type of geometric design is crows' feet, usually incised on the exterior of the rim sherds (Image 13a, b).



Image 11 Incised horizontal lines

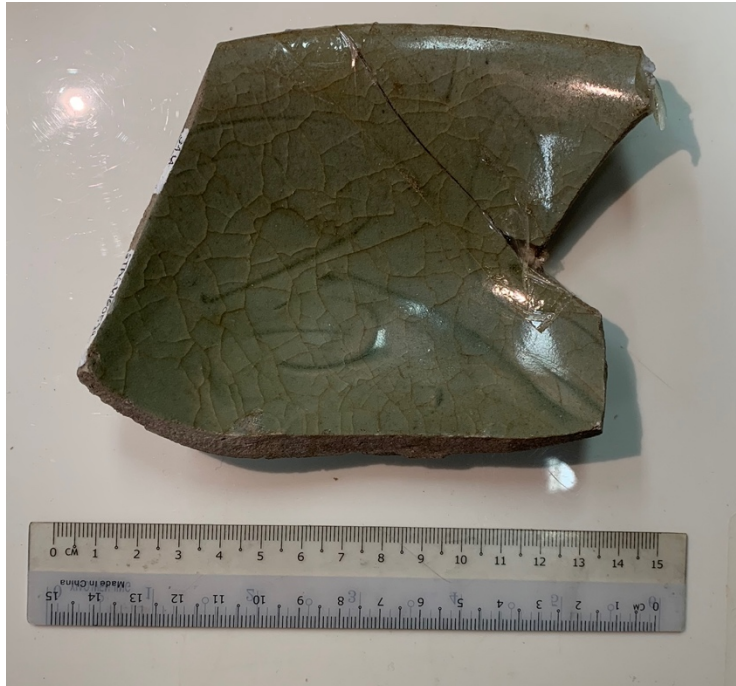


Image 12a Incised foliage (single curved lines)

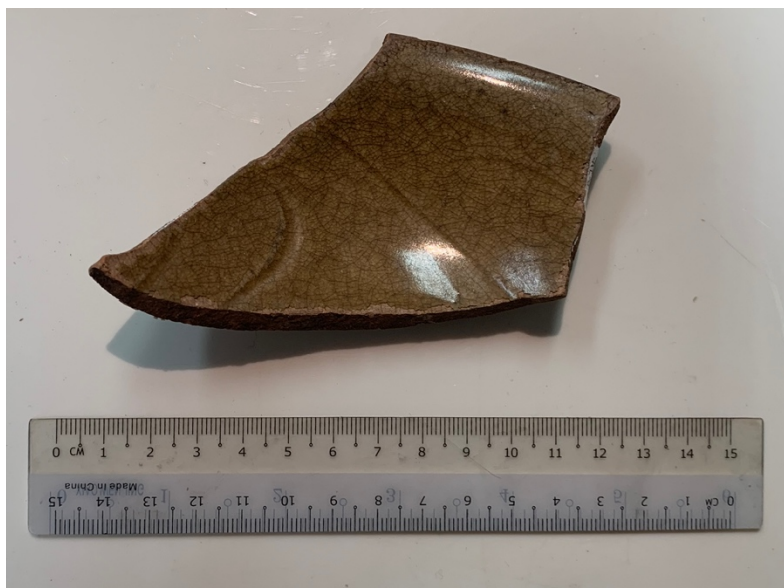


Image 12b Incised foliage (single curved lines)

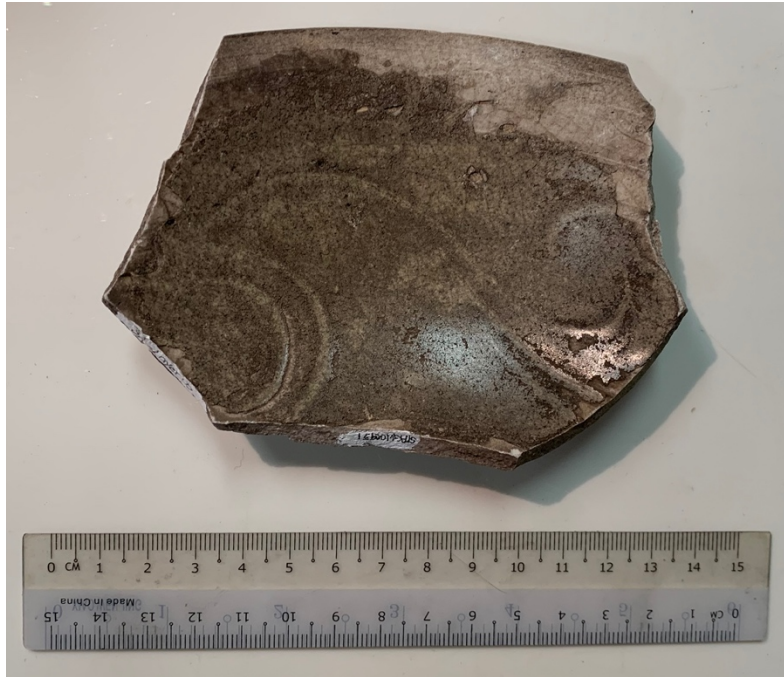


Image 12c Incised foliage (combed curved lines)



Image 13a Incised crows' feet



Image 13b Incised crows' feet

The other group of floral motifs usually contain lotus leaves and/or petals (Image 14), cloud scroll designs (Image 15), floral designs with leaves, vines, chrysanthemum, peonies, and small flower (Image 16a, b), floral scrolls, and scalloped scrolls that resemble flower petals (Image 17).



Image 14 Lotus leaves and/or petals



Image 15 Cloud scroll designs

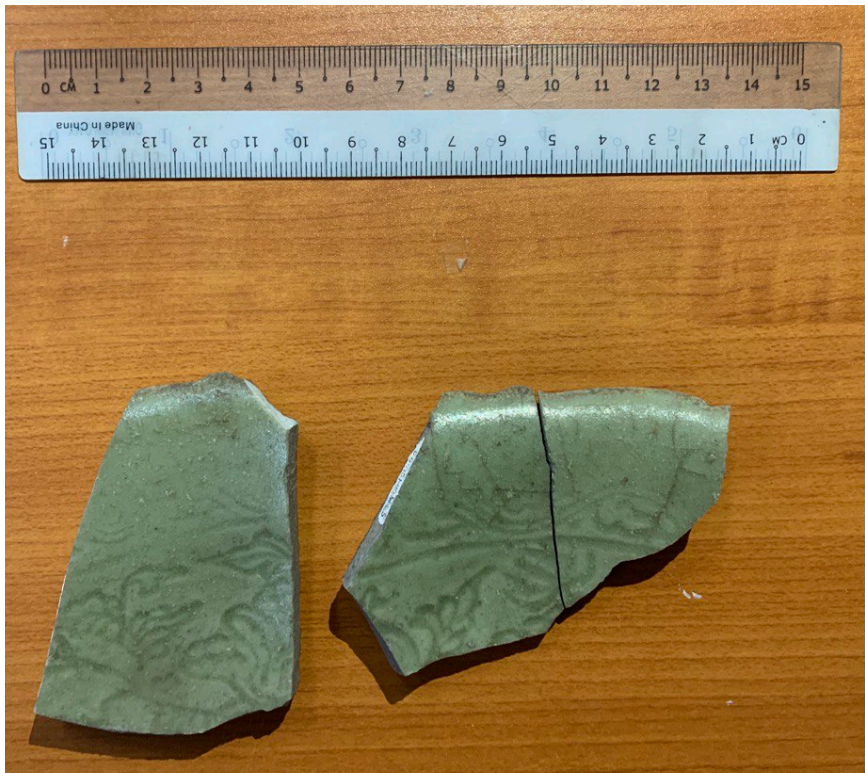


Image 16a Floral designs



Image 16b Floral designs

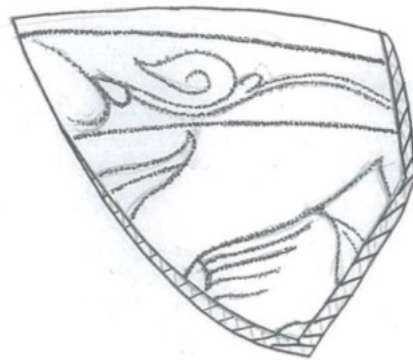


Image 17, Floral scrolls



Image 18 Scalloped scrolls



Image 19a Flutes



Image 19b Flutes

An analysis of these motifs show reveal that existing scholarship rarely discusses vessels with these motifs. Many sherds in the assemblage display the crows' feet design, which are mostly used as a decoration near the lip of the rim sherd. Existing scholarship tends to focus

more unique motifs, neglecting motifs like the crows' feet that might have been common in mass produced wares.

There are unique motifs observed in the STA assemblage too. There is a sherd with a moulded fish motif in the centre of the base on the interior. It is part of a double-fish motif common to Longquan ware. It is usually regarded as high quality ware (Image 20). The presence of this vessel in the context of the STA might be indicative that vessels with this motif could be used by elite as well as non-elite communities.

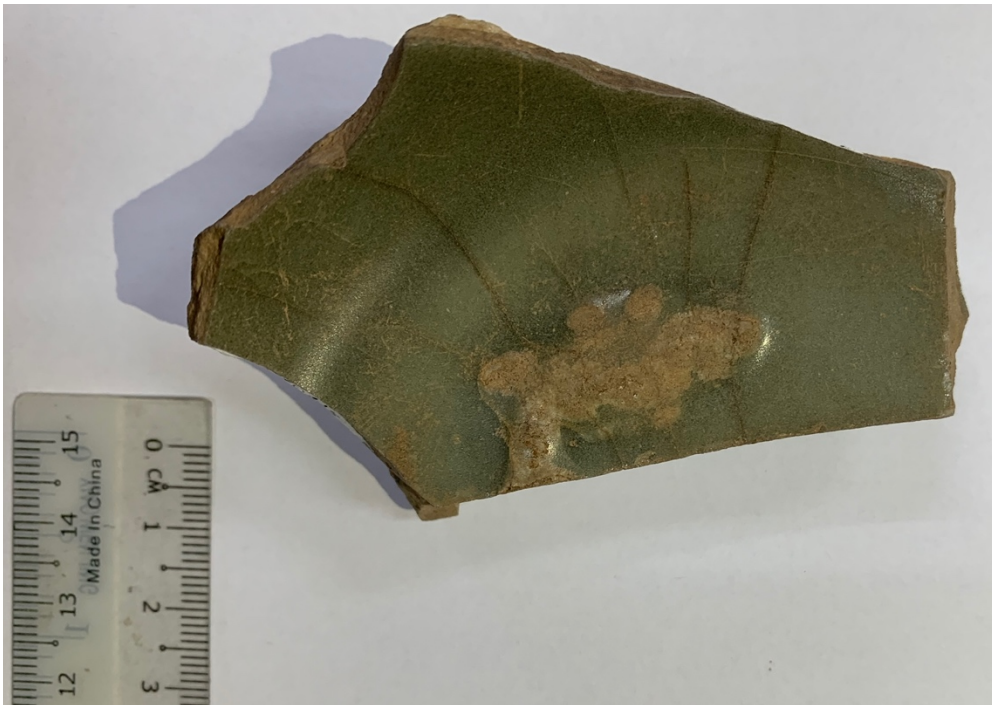


Image 20 Moulded double fish motif

Another sherd of interest is a straight rim with intricately designed overlapping lotus petals (Image 21). This is a unique find. A vessel with such a design has not been observed in the catalogues the author consulted. The presence of such a sherd may be indicative of the preferences of the inhabitants of 14th-century Singapore.



Image 21, Intricate overlapping lotus petals

The wide variety of forms and motifs observed in the STA assemblage can be used as an indicator of the inhabitants' preference for different vessels of different kinds. Comparisons of these forms and motifs with assemblages from other sites within and/or beyond Singapore can reveal other observations regarding potential consumption or trading patterns at these sites. It may also be indicative of the types of porcelains which were exported to Singapore and the region from specific Chinese kilns which supplied the markets here. Studies like these can fill existing gaps in scholarship, as a study of the forms and varieties may provide useful observations which can provide a more comprehensive view of the trade in Chinese ceramics.

Bibliography

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