



# Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter

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## National Discovery Museum Institute hosts seminar in Bangkok

Founded last year in effort to jump-start the development of museums in Thailand, the National Discovery Museum Institute (NDMI) hosted a well-attended and inspiring seminar on museum development on 16-17 August 2005 at the Princess Sirindhorn Anthropology Center. The speakers contributed ideas to the themes of improving museum attendance and how to make museums into places where learning is fun. The NDMI itself will open several museums in a historic old section of Bangkok near the Royal Palace at Sanam Luang, beginning with renovated space in the old Ministry of Commerce building.

The institute arranged a program of six speakers, including executives from Lord, a firm of private consultants on museum development; seasoned executives from museums in Singapore; and management personnel from the Jorvik Museum of Viking culture in England.



Kenson Kwok (above), Director of the Asian Civilizations Museum, Singapore, talked about museums and finance.

## Sold at auction



AN ASSORTMENT of 15 ceramics on auction from six shipwrecks brought about US\$41,780 in bids at a gala dinner on 1st September that opened a 10-day sale of shipwreck ceramics in Kuala Lumpur. Held at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Center, the 'Treasures of the Nanhai' event also featured a symposium on trade ceramics on 2nd September. (See our August 2005 issue.) Shown above are Lot 5, a Sawankhalok celadon bottle from the Royal Nanhai (c. 1460) that sold for US\$2,122; Lot 6, a dish & bowl (inside & base are shown), Xuande (c. 1530), US\$1,856; Lot 7, a Sawankhalok covered box, Singtai (c. 1520), US\$1,591; and Lot 8, a Chinese blue & white covered jar, Wanli Wreck (c. 1620s), US\$3,448.

## Letter from the editor

FIRST OF ALL I would like to acknowledge Murray White as the photographer of the two photos of the late Professor Tran Quoc Vuong shown in our August 2005 issue. A letter from Peter Burns on page 2 offers a further short tribute to Vuong's contribution to Vietnamese ceramics study.

Readers will note that this is a 2-month issue for September-October. We will not be able to produce two full issues during this time because of a semester break here at Bangkok University in October. Even staff members will not have access to the museum offices because security and other support personnel will be off. So please note: **The museum will be closed, along with the university, from 14 October through 24 October.** Otherwise it is open, except on public holidays, Tuesday-Saturdays, 9-4 p.m.

We will be offering Thai-language courses on Thai ceramics history and identification in November. See page 4 for more information on this. RMB



Tran Quoc Vuong, photograph by Murray White, 1990.

## Letters to the editor

### Storage jar

I am emailing you with a question on behalf of my parents. My father has had this old pot in his living room forever. He told me that it was discovered in San Francisco Bay many years ago. It is approximately 17" tall; 4 1/2 at the top; 40" round; and 5" at base. The glaze is dark chocolate brown. Any information would be appreciated. Thank you.

— Sarah Peebles, Puyallup, Washington state, USA



*Editor replies:* This is a Chinese storage jar. Besides its bulky bulbous shape, the jar's brown glaze, flat slanted mouthrim, steeply sloped shoulder, and four handles are distinctive features. The shard below, from the Sunchi Reef, India, shows a Chinese character (probably a family name). A similar jar was excavated from the Wanli Wreck (circa 1620s) off Malaysia, but the type was long-lived for others appear to be from the 18th-19th centuries.



### More memories of Tran Quoc Vuong

Irascible, loveable, passionate nationalist, Tran Quoc Vuong was an accomplished scholar of Vietnamese history, archaeology and folklore and a famed palmist as well. For those of us from Australia, our relationship with Vuong and his colleagues at the University of Hanoi began with a pioneering study of Vietnamese ceramics. In 1981 Pham Huy Thong had invited me to Hanoi to meet colleagues in the Institutes of Archaeology and History. Then it was Vuong, whom I met at a Thai Studies conference in Bangkok in 1985, who made possible the Vietnam Ceramics Project, funded by the Australian Research Council. A 1986 conference in Hanoi was followed by field trips, site surveys and excavations in Hai Hung (where Vuong was born), Danang-Quang Nam, Binh Dinh and Lam Dong. It was characteristic of Vuong to imaginatively organise the 1986 conference so that each session was held in a different institute, museum or college, with interspersed visits to historic sites. There is no question that Vuong made history exciting and continuously relevant. It might be added that he paid visits to Australia and held a Rockefeller Foundation visiting fellowship to Cornell University's Centre for Southeast Asian Studies in 1991. — Peter Burns, Research Centre for Southeast Asian Ceramics, University of Adelaide

### Ceramics care

*Following are the last two questions posed by reader Timothy Trebbeck. For three earlier questions and answers, see our August 2005 newsletter at <http://museum.bu.ac.th>*

4) Some of the pieces I have are dirty - partly because they have been sitting on shelves for a long time, but some may have been burial objects and are thus dirty. Is there any good way to remove the dirt? Or should it be left there if it's part of the 'patina' of the piece (even if it dulls the object)?

*Bonnie Baskin answers:* Dirt can be a major problem, not only because dirt tends to attract and expand with water, but also because it may mask structural and surface problems requiring attention. Some dirt may in itself be damaging to ceramics. On the other side of the cleaning debate, dirt should usually be left on an artifact if it is part of that artifact's history, e.g. fire soot on a cooking pot. Some original burial dirt should, if possible, be retained in recesses or at least in the interior of an archaeological pot to provide specimens for future testing.

But storage dirt is something else. In most cases, I would try to remove or at least reduce it, so that the patina remaining is from natural aging alone. These are curatorial as well as conservation issues. Since dirt can't be put back, you need to decide

early on whether you prefer the natural luster of ceramics or the patina of dirty ones. Be aware that proper, gentle conservation cleaning may make no visible difference in the appearance of some ceramics — it won't change the color but will uncover some of the glossiness. Finally, beware of over cleaning, which may damage surfaces.

Again, I recommend that you consult a conservator. If you must do the work yourself, start by cautiously dusting with a soft brush. Stop if any flakes of glaze detach. Then, if the surface proves sound, and if the clay has been high-fired (i.e. stoneware, porcelain), then you can cautiously clean with a Q-tip moistened with de-ionized water. Change Q-tips frequently, as soon as they become darkened with dirt, and soak up any pooling water with the edge of a tissue. Never use water on low-fired clay — earthenware or terracotta — because it will slightly soften the clay, and even gentle subsequent rubbing with a Q-tip can readily abrade or remove the surface.

5) Are there optimal ways to store or display pieces?

*Bonnie Baskin answers:* Commonsense goes a long way. Guard against breakage. Handle and carry carefully, always with two (very clean) hands. Store in shelves at an easy-to-reach height. Keep ceramics away from new wood, which off-gases acetic acid that can form acetate salts in the clay. Photograph each piece and monitor its condition over time.

*Editor: Thank you, Bonnie!*



**Sukhothai shard at Angkor**

Cambodian archaeologist Chhay Visoth has sent photos of a Sukhothai shard from a surface collection near the southern part of Siem Reap airport. Shards were seen after earth about 50 cms deep had been removed from a former rice field and sold as land fill. Archaeologists happened to visit the site in August 2005 because there are plans to expand the airport and it is possible that staff from the Department of Monuments and Archaeology will be asked to survey and to conduct excavations if necessary before construction begins. Occasional 15th century Sukhothai shards have been found in the past; so far, however, there is no evidence for 16th-century Thai ceramics at Angkor.



Fragment, two views, from a Sukhothai underglaze black decorated stem dish, circa AD 1400-1450. The broken edges at the base of pedestal foot at left show the typical white-speckled gray clay of Sukhothai ceramics.

**Indian rouletted ware discovered in Thailand**

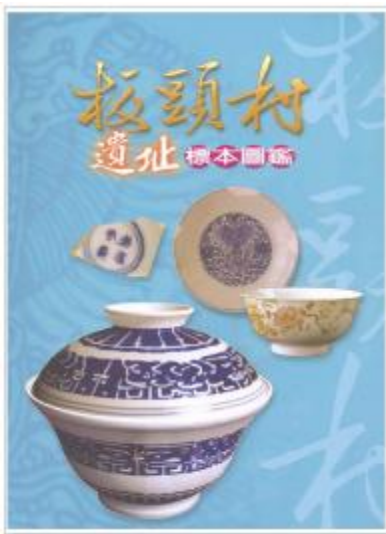
A newly identified site that appears to bridge the divide between late prehistoric and early historic periods in southern Thailand has yielded a rare fragment of rouletted pottery from India. The shard, shown at left, is evidence for contact between India and peninsular Thailand in the late centuries B. C. and early centuries A.D. The site, named Khao Sam Kaeo, is located on the east coast of peninsular Thailand in Chumphon province. It will be investigated as part of a 4-year survey that is a collaboration between several institutions including the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) represented in the field by Berenice Bellina, and Silpakorn University, represented by Praon Silapanth.

A description of the project appears in the latest *Southeast Asian Archaeology International Newsletter* (No. 19, August 2005; Elisabeth A. Baccus and Rasmi Shoocongdej, editors). Four radiocarbon results give approximately 200 B.C. as the age for lower levels at the site. Although the rouletted ware shard was found in a looter's pit, it was within a few centimeters of an excavated pit, and so gives hope that the excavators have indeed identified a site that will yield valuable new evidence for the earliest contact between India and Southeast Asia. Other than the single rouletted shard, trial excavation pits revealed bits of worked glass and carnelian that represent either Indian workmanship or imported Indian technology.



**Shard Archive gets help**

With a little help from museum volunteer Melody Rod-ari, an English-language database on shards in the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum collection is beginning to take shape. A PhD candidate in the Art History Department at University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), Melody spent a month during the summer university holidays in Bangkok. She is seen here measuring northern Thai shards that were donated to the museum by Robert L. and Carol Kim Retka and by Allison Diem. In addition to a couple hundred fragments from the Sukhothai, Sawankhalok/Si Satchanalai, and Khmer kiln sites in Thailand given to the museum by its founder and primary donor, Surat Osathanugrah, these shards will be available for study to anyone who needs hands-on experience in order to learn ceramics identification. The museum continues to welcome any and all donations of further examples for the Shard Archive.



Ho, Chuan-kun and Liu, Ke-hung, 2004. *Illustrated Catalogue of Specimens from the Bantou Village Site*. Taichung: Anthropology Department, National Museum of Natural Sciences. In Chinese. ISBN: 957-8503-87-3 (pbk) NT\$: 150 (about US\$ 5; Euro 4; UK£ 3), iii+109 pages of colour pictures.

Bantou Village nowadays is a small, quiet village in central Taiwan, but 200 years ago it was an important seaport connecting Taiwan and mainland China. After various natural disasters in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the area reverted to agricultural uses. Successful salvage archaeology was conducted here in 1999, and the finds include buildings, a rubbish pit, a child burial, and a range of daily objects. The archaeology, as well as written records, suggest a site from about AD 1730-1820. The fieldwork report was published in 1999, in Chinese, and this catalogue offers some of the most important discoveries. The ceramics are mostly blue-and-white wares mainly from Anxi and Dehua in Fujian. Instead of reign marks, which are few, there are more than 30 marks thought to represent potters or merchants. The catalogue also shows the range of non-ceramic material from the site. The evidence profiles a comfortable lifestyle in central Taiwan during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

— Summary review by Chang Kuang-Jen, PhD student, Institute of Archaeology, University College London

The museum houses an initial collection of 2,050 ceramics donated by Mr. Surat Osathanugrah. With few exceptions, these ceramics were all found in Thailand. There is pottery from as early as about 3,000 BC and as late as the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

There are ceramics from production centers in Thailand as well as ceramics that were imported in olden times from neighboring countries.

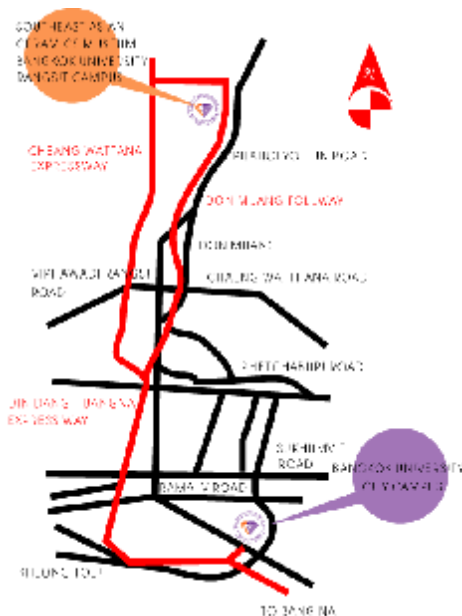
Khmer ceramics from old kilns presently located within Thailand are represented. There are also Vietnamese ceramics, a great variety of Chinese ceramics, Burmese, Lao and Japanese ceramics.

Display galleries show all the types of ceramics found in Thailand and the technology involved in local Thai production. The museum collections include kiln site wasters and fragments that are essential for teaching ceramics dating and identification.

It is also home to one of the largest collections of ceramics from the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries Tak-Omkoi sites of western Thailand.

The museum formally opened to the general public on 11 May 2005.

## Interior museum views



## Training courses

The Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum will soon hold special training courses in Thai. The first course, *History and Identification of Thai Ceramics*, is scheduled for 5-6 November 2005. It is designed for archaeologists, museum personnel and other professionals.

The second course, also called *History and Identification of Thai Ceramics*, is scheduled for 12-13 November 2005. It will be aimed at students, guides, collectors, and the general public. There will be practical experience handling actual ceramics as well as lectures on the history of Thai ceramics.

Registration fee: 2,500 baht (about US\$62) per person for each course. For more information, e-mail [museum@bu.ac.th](mailto:museum@bu.ac.th).

Photograph, upper left: a museum display of storage jars found in Thailand, including Thai, Burmese, Vietnamese and Khmer examples.

The Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum is located at the Rangsit campus of Bangkok University.

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Open (except university and public holidays)  
Tuesday—Saturday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

# Shippen on traditional Southeast Asian village earthenware

**Mick Shippen, *The Traditional Ceramics of Southeast Asia*. London: A & C. Black Publishers Ltd. Hardcover, 2005. Soft cover by Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005.**

A visual *tour de force*, this publication takes the reader on a journey to some 20 villages that still produce traditional earthenware in five Southeast Asian countries. The author steps into the lives of the potters and shows how the products serve local society. The craft is drastically waning however, so the scenes convey a nostalgic sense of long history but a precarious uncertain future. Yet, perhaps the future is not so dire as the author predicts. Thailand has become designer-crazy, with young people designing homes, interiors, clothes, advertising, everything with talent and verve. Stacks of earthenware pots in endless shapes can be seen for sale in some 40 garden/designer shops on Kampaengphet Road beside Bangkok's Chatuchak weekend market. Earthenware does have loyal fans, and this account will likely create more. The book is a refreshing personal account that provides a professional potter's insight into the techniques and lives of fellow potters and a threatened craft.

**Cover, upper right, shows water bottles from Laos and northern Thailand. Pottery sheds at New Nyein, Burma are shown at upper left. Villagers prepare to fire pots in Cambodia, lower right, and a rice whisky distiller makes use of earthenware in rural Thailand, lower left.**

