



Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter

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China trade being re-discovered

Chinese trade ceramics in S. E. Asia are increasingly bringing scholars in China & S. E. Asia together. The latest 'Symposium on the Chinese Export Ceramic Trade in Southeast Asia' was organized by the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore on 12-14 March 2007. The wide range of papers showed how diverse are the areas of research within this field. Several papers discussed the ceramics from specific shipwreck sites in S. E. Asia, while Le Jianan (Fujian Museum) reviewed the beginnings of shipwreck archaeology in China. Several other papers discussed Tang dynasty trade ware but there was no discussion aimed at setting an exact date for the beginnings of the bulk trade in Chinese ceramics. While researchers tend to say 'late 8th to 9th C', the earliest datable archaeological context for bulk ceramics is the Belitung (c. 826 AD) shipwreck. In fact a highlight of the meeting was the invitation to the speakers to visit a storage place for Belitung ceramics at Haw Paw Gardens. The display of dozens of very large Dusun jars (all with a tiny spout at the shoulder) was stunning, as were the shelves upon shelves of wine pots and



cover boxes. About a dozen of the speakers and organizers then went on a visit to Jakarta where Adi Agung of P.T. Paradigma Putra Sejahtera helped to organize a visit to a warehouse full of ceramics and other artifacts from the recently excavated Cirebon wreck that, because of coins, is believed to be 10th century. Qin Dashu (Beijing Univ), however, offered his opinion that the ceramics could be early 11th C. In contrast, he and the other China visitors present thought the bronze mirrors could be 100 years older. Above (J. Miksic photo): Qin Dashu at post-viewing discussion of Cirebon finds.

Letter from the editor

PLEASE NOTE our workshop in planning [far right] with a professionally trained conservator. Probably we will limit attendance to 10 persons each day. Please let us know if you are interested!

It was a great honor to have Director of the National Museum of Bangkok Somchai Na Nakornphanom [right] observe our Touch identification workshop (p. 3).



Clean me, I'm dirty!



What glue to use?

Fix me, I'm broken!



In planning stage: Care & Repair of Antique Ceramics Workshop

The S. E. Asian Ceramics Museum has invited Bonnie Baskin, a professional conservator from the USA, to give 4-hour workshops (9 a.m.—1 p.m.) on Thurs 21 June and Saturday 23 June 2007 (if enough interest). A Bht 1,600 fee will include materials and light snacks. In English, Thai translations. Info: museum@bu.ac.th

Letters to the editor

Champa kilns excavation

Dear Editor,

We were amazed to read in the *Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter* (January-February 2007), more specific in a footnote in the "Letters to the editor", that a powerpoint on the Go Hoi excavations 2002 (in the Binh Dinh province in Vietnam) can be ordered from you and used. The powerpoint on Go Hoi was made to use for the press conference in Vietnam and in Belgium in 2002. It is not a scientific publication and can not be used without the permission of the Institute of Archaeology in Hanoi (Vietnam) and the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels (Belgium). The excavations were realized by a Vietnamese and a Belgian team of these two institutions and were financed by the Belgian Office of Scientific, technical and Cultural Affairs. The Go Hoi excavations will be published in the near future. The delay of the publication of the Go Hoi site is due to the sudden passing away of Prof. Trinh Cao Tuong, archaeologist and project manager of the Binh Dinh ancient ceramics research program, former manager of the Historical department of the Vietnam Institute of Archaeology. May we ask you to publish this in your next Museum Newsletter.

[Signed]

Miriam Lambrecht, art historian and project manager for the excavation program with Vietnam, curator of the Collection India and Southeast Asia of the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels.

Dr. Ann Degraeve, archaeologist and field director for the Excavations in Brussels, Ministry of the Brussels Capital Region, Direction of Monuments and Sites, Royal Museums of Art and History, [Musees Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis](http://www.museesroyaux.be)

Kinrande shipped west?

In regard to your question about *kinrande* from 16th century shipwrecks off South Africa [for Jan-Feb 2007 *Newsletter*], I have not seen any *kinrande* ware pieces, though one or two shards from the *Nossa Senhora Madre de Deus* of 1643 showed traces of yellow when tested by means of Raman spectrography by our University's Chemistry department. No visible colour remained on the shards. Only this particular colour, identified as 'Naples' yellow, was discovered.

Prof Danita De Waal is currently researching the glaze on the shipwreck shards.

— Valerie Esterhuizen, S. Africa



Chocolate bases

I enjoyed your Vietnamese ceramics book review [*Newsletter* Jan-Feb 2007], but I can't agree with the idea that the chocolate base could be the remains of some sort of adhesive. If it's residue from a standard technique, would not all pieces be similarly coated with chocolate wash? We know that contemporaneously produced Vietnamese ceramics may or may not have a chocolate base; it's really a random feature. I wonder if the wash was used to mark pieces for counting. Dr. Brown [editor of this *Newsletter*] once mentioned to me that, Judging by her personal experience, the wash appears on perhaps one in seven pieces or so. Perhaps the marked pieces represent a share that was counted and taxed by a kiln master or some official. Think about the way some restaurants write up a bill based on how many of each sized dish is on a table. Or maybe some of the potters applied the chocolate wash simply because they thought it was attractive and they liked it? I attach a photograph of a chocolate base.

—Walter Kassela, Bangkok

How to clean burial stains?

I wonder whether you or any of your readers can make a suggestion about how to clean buried Thai ceramics. We have a very heavily encrusted chicken kendi (from Indonesia) and in the few places where the glaze is visible it looks as if it is a monochrome black or a very dark brown colour, which is rather unusual for zoomorphic wares. We have tried all normal cleaning methods but without any success. All suggestions are welcome.

- Dick van Oenen, U. K.

Bonnie Baskin,

professional conservator answers:

If the dirt is very hard, like cement, it is possibly a crust of insoluble salts, a common burial product. Called "insoluble" because they don't dissolve in water, these salts form from ions in the soil or from ions in the soil that bond with ions on the surface of the pot; they often form around and trap clots of earth. Sometimes insoluble salts can be thinned or even coaxed from the ceramic surface entirely through the deft and cautious use of a scalpel or dental tools, a cleaning process sometimes improved if you first wet the salts with water as a kind of lubricant; hot water may give better results than cold, but be cautious in introducing it and keep it on the salts, away from the pot itself.

The next alternative is to apply a mild acid: moisten the salts with a little lime or lemon juice mixed in water, or rub the crust with a cut half of lime, before using your scalpel; be sure afterwards to rinse with water thoroughly and repeatedly (6x), patting the area dry between rinses, in order to eliminate all traces of the acid. If this doesn't work, there is a more drastic treatment with nitric acid, but it can soften glazes and is therefore an option only if all else fails; please write to me, and I'll guide you through it.

You do not mention if your kendi is stoneware or earthenware. If it is earthenware, you need to be very careful about using water, for it can soften the clay and therefore jeopardize the stability of the glaze once it's revealed underneath the insoluble salts.

— Bonnie Baskin, USA
(Bbaskin@juno.com)

Burmese Martaban jar excavated on Canada's east coast

Ferryland, Newfoundland: The jar [far right] was found in the fall of 2005 during the excavation of a midden that is believed to belong to the 2nd half of the 17th century. The photograph and an inquiry were sent to Pam Gutman who forwarded the information onto the *Newsletter*. The news came from Barry Gaulton, Archaeology Unit, Memorial University of Newfoundland, who mentions a colleague Jim Tuck and a friend Bly Straube, who made the identification. Gaulton believes the jar is associated with the Sir David Kirke family

who lived in associated buildings from 1638 until the settlement was raised in 1696. He speculates that the jar could be from a 'curiosities' collection. As far as anyone knows this is the only Martaban known in North America, although since similar jars were excavated from the *San Diego* (1600) shipwreck (in the Philippines), a Spanish galleon that sailed the Manila-Acapulco route, there might be old examples in Mexico. ✓

If any readers can add information to help explain this discovery, please send e-mail.



IDENTIFICATION BY TOUCH

A SMALL GROUP OF blind teenagers attended an experimental workshop at the S. E. Asian Ceramics Museum on 4 April 2007. After one hour of instruction and enthusiastic handling, the students successfully identified ceramics handed to them as a test. They had three possible choices: Thai Sukhothai or Thai Sawankhalok stoneware or Chinese porcelain. The workshop was held sitting on the floor and fragments from the Shard Archive were used for handling. Shown left to right: Kanikar Wongpen, National Museum Volunteer Nidhi Asthana (behind), Are Boonsee, Yodkhwan Koowatcharajareran, and Monthian Bunthan, President of the Thailand Association for the Blind. The experiment was proposed by National Museum Volunteer Susy Barry and Mr Monthian. Several other volunteers as well as the Director of the National Museum Somchai Na Nakornphanom came along as observers. ✓

More Letters to the editor

Portuguese impact

Concerning your paper on the Portuguese impact on the South-east Asian ceramics trade, I send a photograph [right] of a large plate fragment in Zhengde (1506-21) style with an IHS monogram for Jesus that must have been ordered by the Portuguese. The first Portuguese *padrao* (treaty or landmark) on a small island near Canton was raised towards the end of 1513 by Francisco Rodrigues and, in no time at all, they began to order porcelain with heraldic designs for the kingdom of Portugal and the church. Pieces such as this seem to all come from the Maluku islands of eastern Indonesia. The dish, which is in my private collection, is about 54-56 cms in diameter.

—Zheng Jin Ie, Jakarta

Editor replies: My paper for the Chinese Trade Ceramics symposium (see page 1 news) argued that the type of shipwreck cargoes now assigned to the Hongzhi (1488-1505) reign probably continued largely unchanged in composition until after the Portuguese conquest of Melaka (1511). The change likely came the next year after a major loss of local ships (that would otherwise have made trade voyages to China) in a failed counter-attack in January 1512. Zhengde-type cargoes, which probably begin in 1512 rather than at the start of the Zhengde (1506-21) reign, have lesser amounts of Chinese ware than Hongzhi cargoes. While examining the Zhengde dish photo, I suddenly noted the similarity of the IHS monogram to very stylized motifs on a bowl (shown right) from a century later.



Above: Zhengde (1506-21) style dish
Below: A century later — but with a motif not forgotten?



Bowl fragment from *The Wanli Shipwreck* (c. 1625), gift for the Shard Archive, S. E. Asian Ceramics Museum, from Sten Sjostrand. The Wanli report is supposed to appear this year, see www.mingwrecks.com

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 19th century.

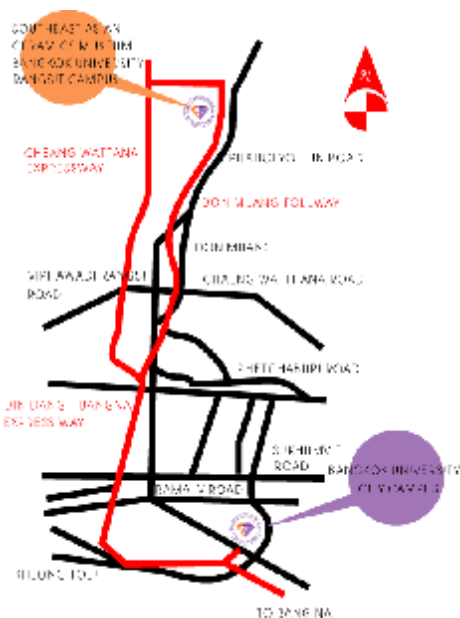
There are ceramics from production centers in Thailand as well as ceramics that were imported in older times from neighboring countries.

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 14th-16th centuries Tak-Omkoi sites of western Thailand.

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

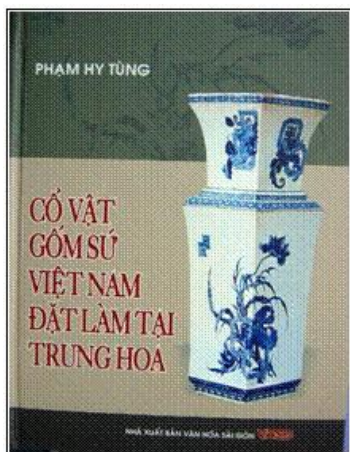


Interior views of the museum (from upper left) show a variety of storage jars; a 5-period outline chronology for Thai trade ceramics; and an open 'sandpit' mixture of Thai, Chinese and Vietnamese ceramics made about AD 1380-1430, with Northern Thai ceramics in the background.

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For enlarged map, go to <http://museum.bu.ac.th>

Vietnam bleu de Hue



Phạm Hy Tùng, *Cổ vật gốm sứ Việt Nam đặt làm tại Trung Hoa* [Ceramic Antiques Ordered by the Vietnamese from China].

Hồ Chí Minh City: Văn Hóa Saigon Publishing, 2006. 384 pp. & more than 400 color plates.

THIS RECENT PUBLICATION tackles one of the lesser known topics in Vietnamese ceramics. It contains three parts: 1) Introduction with general information (pp. 21-39); 2) then a chapter on the ceramics ordered for production in China in the history of Vietnam prior to 1802 and then after 1802 (pp. 40-194); and 3) a chapter about the value of these ceramics (pp. 195-212). Two appendices (pp. 213-372) present subjects including information on old tobacco water pipes, the final days of the renown collector Vương Hồng Sên, fake ceramics from the late 20th and early 21st centuries, and the Hanoi style of displaying Chinese antiques.

This is the first time the public can get an information-rich overview of various (real and [numerous] fake) *bleus de Hue*, including jars, cups, dishes, kendi, wine bottles, writing brush containers and spittoons, lime pots, tobacco water pipes, all ordered from, 'at least the late 16th or early 17th centuries' (p.31) mainly by Vietnamese aristocrats. The only drawback is the sometimes overly subjective view points which may cause some con-

trovery with critics. The book presents the extensive private collection of its author, and it is rich with information on both real and fake examples of the bleu de Hue ware.

The publication is presently available only in Vietnam.

Review by Nguyen Xuan Hien



One of the first dishes produced to order in China (late 16th C., p 241.)