



# Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter

## Inside This Issue:

### Newsletter Articles:

- Blue and white porcelains of Korea's Joseon dynasty.....1

### Collection Review:

- Kendi with marbled slip decoration.....4

### News in Brief:

- The opening ceremony of new special exhibition at Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum.....5
- 700 year old artefacts on display at Brunei's new archaeological park.....6
- Archaeologists digging in search of common people, Cambodia.....6
- Navy receives maps of Hoang Sa, Truong Sa, Vietnam.....7

## Blue and White Porcelains of Korea's Joseon Dynasty



**Fig. 1** Underglaze cobalt-blue on white porcelain, (top) Design of "Celestial Flying Horse" *Cheonma*, 16th century, excavated from kiln site #9 in Beonceheon-ri, Gwangju, Geonggi-do, Seoul Korea National Museum; (bottom) Jar with plum blossom, bird, and bamboo design, 15th - 16th century, National Treasure No. 170, SKNM



China was the first to introduce painting with Persian cobalt on white porcelain during the Yuan dynasty. Not long after, the power struggle on the Korean peninsula that resulted in the violent transition from the Goryeo dynasty (918-1392) to the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910) also resulted in many other changes, including the conver-

sion of the state religion from Buddhism to Neo-Confucianism and its minimalist and purist aesthetics, which necessitated the change of the main court drink and offerings

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### Letter from the Editor

Since the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum (SEACM) restoration finished in 2014, the first special exhibition entitled “Development of Kendi in Southeast Asia” has now been held. The opening ceremony of this special exhibition was conducted on September 5, 2015 and details are provided in the “News in Brief.” This special exhibition will be open to the public from September 7 to November 14, 2015 with no admission fee. Atthasit Sukkham and Burin Singtoaj, as co-author, write the review of the unglazed kendi with a marbled slip decoration, which is one of the ceramics displayed in the special exhibition. John Toomey writes on Korean blue and white porcelains, and his results are very interesting. And there are more details on a new exhibition in Brunei, progress of excavations in Cambodia, and the new discovery of ancient maps in Vietnam - these all are included in the “News in Brief.”

from tea to rice wine, and the shift of the color of the official porcelain from celadon bluish-green to white, representing Confucian purity. During the 15th to 16th century this “pure” color was applied in the form of a white slip wash to the greyish-green ground of the very tactile and earthy, almost folk-style, *buncheong* earthen ware—a ware still highly sought by connoisseurs today.



**Fig. 2** Underglaze cobalt-blue on white porcelain, (top) Beveled jar with literati painting of flowers, 18th century, Museum of Oriental Ceramics, Osaka; (bottom left) *Youngji* mushroom and fish design, 19th century, SKNM; (bottom right) Octagonal water dropper with landscape and poem, 19th century, Treasure No. 1329, SKNM

Eventually this rustic style was superseded by a more refined plain white porcelain of great beauty and durability, which in the 15th century was decorated in cobalt blue, giving way to iron brown when the cost of cobalt became exorbitant in the 17th century. The iron-brown work could be highly sophisticated and literary, or even carefree and humorous. Copper red decorations, mainly from the 18th century, were more unusual and difficult to make and can dazzle us with their color and freshness. The *Saongwon* ministry in charge of royal cuisine ordered production of white vessels at the *Bunwon* official kiln in Gwangju, Gyeonggi Province (just outside Seoul), where court painters were sent to decorate the now famous Joseon blue and white. The cham-

bered climbing kilns were key to the success of Joseon blue and white. Eventually plain white porcelain became available to commoners; but blue and white remained in the realm of aristocrats, especially royalty, due to the expense of cobalt, until at last at the end of the era, when they became available to the commoners, as well.

Forms included dishes, bowls, bottles, and jars of many different shapes, severely simple, yet elegant. They were used as special tableware and also as ceremonial or even burial vessels. A special form was the placenta jar, a set of inner and outer jars, for burying the placenta of a prince or princess. Moon jars, almost globular and quite large, were a special form of the 18th century. In

the 19th century, brush holders and brush rests with beautifully crafted openwork designs complemented the scholar's necessities. Such unpretentious forms, understated decoration, and subtle use of color emphasized the Neo-Confucian aesthetic. This aesthetic reflected the taste of the aristocrats and the literati, the dreams and wishes of their time, especially for longevity and good luck, sometimes with good grace and sometimes with extravagance, but always with dignity.

Large, robust, bulbous jars with patterns of dragons and clouds, sometimes with two dragons chasing the wish-granting jewel through the clouds, are among the finest exam-

ples of the Joseon blue and white ceramics. The freedom of drawing in these jars emphasizes warmth and spontaneity, vitality and often even humor. Dragons defeat evil and bring the rains for a bountiful harvest. Only the king was allowed dragons with five claws, the nobility was allowed four, and commoners three-clawed dragon motifs. Dragon and cloud jars were often used to display flowers or hold alcohol at banquets.

Late Joseon dynasty blue and white pieces often feature the *Shipjangsaeng* motif, the ten traditional symbols of longevity. Originally entering Korea with the coming of Chinese Taoism in the 5th century, these symbols appeared in every facet

of the lives of both aristocrats and commoners who saw in them the harmony of the universe as well as immortality. The crane, deer, and tortoise live long lives; and the rocks, water, sun, and clouds endure forever. Bamboo and evergreen pine stand for strength, yet bend when the wind buffets them. The mythical *yongji* mushroom gives the elixir of immortality. Motifs favored by the literati include the Four Noble Gentlemen: Pine, Plum Blossom, Bamboo, Orchid (or Chrysanthemum), and landscapes, portraits, animals and other plants.



**Fig. 3** Underglaze cobalt-blue on white porcelain, (left) Large jar with dragon and cloud design, 18th century, Museum of Oriental Ceramics, Osaka; (right) Jar with plum blossom, bird, and potted plant design, 18th century, Leeum Samsung Museum of Art

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## Collection Review



### Kendi with Marbled Slip Decoration

Possibly produced in Sukhothai, 16th century

Height 14.4 cm.

Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum, Bangkok University

Sukhothai kendi with a wide mouth, a bulbous spout on the shoulder, a round marbled body, a low foot rim, and marbled slip in a small circle on the bottom.

Marbled ware is one type of ceramic decorations in which the surface of the ware looks like marble. The oldest marbled wares were created during the Chinese Tang Dynasty (618 - 907) and onwards (Qingzheng 2002: 212-213). In general, there were at least three methods to make a marbled body, and this consisted of the use of mixed clay (kneading clay of white and brown -or more colors- then forming as a vessel) (Qingzheng 2002: 212-213), applying a marbled veneer (kneading clay of white and brown -or more colors- then compressing it for wrapping around

a vessel) (The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York 2006), and the use of marbled slip decoration (Ceramics in Mainland Southeast Asia Database by Freer and Sackler Gallery 2008). All three of these methods were performed before the firing of the wares.

The Sukhothai kendi with marbled slip decoration was decorated by the marbled slip method and was fired as earthenware at 850 to 1150 degrees Celsius. However, Thai scholars believe the kendi was produced by open-air firing somewhere in the present-day province of Sukhothai; it was not put in a firing chamber of a Sukhothai or Si Satchanalai kiln. According to study of the museum collection, the marbled slip decorated Sukhothai earthenware kendi has a shape similar to the Jingdezhen

blue and white kendi, the Chu Dau overglaze enameled kendi, and especially the Si Satchanalai two-color glazed kendi. They all usually have flanges on the mouth, bulbous spouts on the shoulder, round bodies, and low foot rims; and all were produced in the 16th century.

Unfortunately, most of the Sukhothai kendis with marbled slip decoration are now held in private or museum collections with unsure provenance, and they are not mentioned in any archaeological excavation reports. Therefore, it is difficult for scholars to make informed conclusions concerning origins, usages and distribution.

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## News in Brief

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### The Opening Ceremony of New Special Exhibition at Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum, Thailand



**Fig. 1** The special exhibition was opened by Emeritus Professor Srisakra Vallibhotama, a famous Thai researcher in anthropology and archaeology (middle) as well as Dr. Sountaree Rattapasakorn, Vice President for Administrative Affairs (right) and Dr. Pariwat Thammaprechakorn, Director of Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum (left), Bangkok University, who hosted the opening ceremony

On September 5, 2015, the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum (SEACM) hosted the opening ceremony of the special exhibition entitled “Development of Kendi in Southeast Asia.” The opening ceremony included Dr. Sountaree Rattapasakorn, Vice President for Administrative Affairs, Bangkok University who gave a welcome speech, and Emeritus Professor Srisakra Vallibhotama, a famous Thai researcher in anthropology and archaeology and one of five Thais to receive the 18th Fukuoka Asian Culture Prizes, category: Academic Prize in 2007, who made a speech on Indianization and different uses of kendi in Southeast Asia, as well as Atthasit Sukkham who gave a curator’s talk on this special exhibition.

The special exhibition will be open to the public from September 7 to November 14, 2015 at the special exhibition gallery of SEACM, and will include the curator’s talk on September 12, 19 and 26, 2015. The special exhibition displays kendi made of ceramics and especially unglazed Chenla kendi and glazed Angkorian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Si Satchanalai and Kalong kendi produced from the 6th century up to



**Fig. 2** Atthasit Sukkham, an assistant curator of SEACM, gave a curator’s talk

the 16th century. Also included in the exhibition is information to assist all visitors to understand the origins of the term kendi, and the development in kendi forms from the Ancient India period until the period of the other Southeast Asian kingdoms.

***Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum,  
Bangkok University***

## 700 Year Old Artefacts on Display at Brunei's New Archaeological Park, Brunei



**Fig. 1** 500 year old Sukhothai wares also on the display, photo by Brunei Times/ANN

Members of the public can now learn about the history of 700 year old artefacts that were left behind from the ancient city of Kota Batu at the newly-launched Archaeological Park. The 120 acre park has an exhibition that showcases ancient objects found at Kota Batu archaeological site around 1950. The exhibited artefacts include stone carvings, pottery, ceramics and ancient coins. A 2.9 kilometer walkway was also built at the park for sightseeing.

Director of Museums Pg Dr Karim Pg Hj Osman said the \$2 million Kota Batu Archaeological Park was built to preserve objects from the fallen Kota Batu city as a step in tracing back Brunei's cultural heritage. Speaking on the sidelines of the launch of the park yesterday, he said the historic city of Kg Kota Batu was known to be occupied by over 25,000 people comprising migrants from Vietnam, Thailand and China. Pg Dr Karim explained that the department had excavated only 30 percent of the artefacts at the site. The director believes the department could discover more historical relics in the future, including the palace of Sultan Bolkiah dating 1521.

***The Brunei Times/Asia News Network  
via AsiaOne.com***

## Archaeologists Digging in Search of Common People, Cambodia



**Fig. 1** Pieces of sandstone that researchers think might have been used for a house mound discovered during a 2013 excavation, photo courtesy of Alison Carter

In Angkor Wat research, the focus has long been on temples and high society. A new project there is taking a different approach, laying the foundation for a new understanding of the iconic empire. A team excavating a dirt mound at Angkor Wat is hoping to shed light on one of the enduring blank spots in archeologists' understanding of the Angkorian empire: the lives of its common people. It's a fresh direction in the field of Angkorian archaeology, according to the leader of the dig, Alison Carter, 35, an Honorary Associate at the University of Sydney.

Carter, an American who has been doing archaeology work in Cambodia for 10 years, said that her excavation was the first of its kind to focus directly on, what she believes to be, an Angkorian-era home. The project, titled "Excavating Angkor: Household Archeology at Angkor Wat" which began in early June and continued through July, is funded primarily by the US-based National Geographic Society, as well as the Dumbarton Oaks institute. It is a part of the larger Greater Angkor Project, an umbrella research initiative managed by the University of Sydney and the APSARA Authority.

Carter and her international team are looking for artefacts of daily life – pots, utensils, food remains, gardens – hoping to piece together a picture of what life was like for the non-elite during and after the reign of the Angkor



empire from *circa* 802 AD to about 1463 AD. The idea for her project stemmed from a 2013 excavation within the Angkor Wat enclosure that found ceramics, cooking vessels, Chinese trade wares and other features that suggested human habitation. It was an important find, said Carter, but one that was largely overshadowed by the published results of another project: an extensive aerial laser surveying – known as lidar – of Angkor and its surrounding temples that was released around the time of the 2013 dig.

Along with evidence of daily activities, Carter and her team are also looking for signs of postholes in their mound. Those strategies include methods that have not been used so far in the study of Angkor, such as soil analysis. Through several methods, including analysis of both macro and micro materials, team members can deduce a number of things from the dirt: where there might have been entryways, which areas were used for food preparation and areas where there may have been a garden.

Dougald O'Reilly, a senior lecturer in archeology at the Australian National University, said that to date, most research of the Khmer empire had examined things mostly from a macro perspective. "It is encouraging to see this type of work being undertaken to bring to light the subtle nuances of daily life at Angkor at the height of its

power. It will bring a far more textured understanding of the past," O'Reilly said.

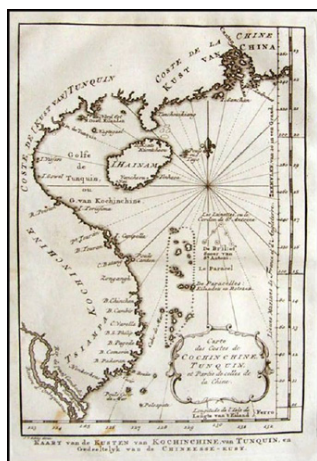
Carter said that, due to a binding agreement with National Geographic, she was unable to disclose the specific details of what her team had discovered so far. However, she did say that the team had discovered a lot of ceramics that seemed to be related to cooking. Team member Cristina Castillo, from University College London who is studying macrobotanical remains, said they hoped to continue the research in the residential areas to find out more about the local people's diets and farming systems, which may have included horticultural activities adjacent to their residences. "After all, rice was the staple, but they were eating a variety of crops, and fish and animals, as well," she said.

Carter stressed that this excavation was just the beginning of what she hoped would be a renewed focus on the lives of regular Angkorians.

"This is the power of archaeological research – to give a voice to these parts of the past."

***Brent Crane, the Phnom Penh Post via the Southeast Asian Archaeology Newsblog***

## Navy Receives Maps of Hoang Sa, Truong Sa, Vietnam



**Fig. 1** A collection of maps displays at Da Nang Museum on the Weeks of Islands and Sea of Viet Nam, photo by Cong Thanh

The Ministry of Information and Communication has delivered a documentation collection, "Map Exhibition of Hoang Sa (Paracel) and Truong Sa (Spratly) of Viet Nam – Historical and Legal Evidence," to the navy force.

The collection, which was handed over to the Command of Navy Zone 3, includes 132 maps and documents, of which 60 maps of Viet Nam, China, and some western countries published

the royal Nguyen dynasty (1802-45); six written in Han (Chinese script) and 14 documents from the French colonial period, stating that Hoang Sa (Paracel) and Truong Sa (Spratly) belong to Viet Nam.

Vice minister Truong Minh Tuan said the collection will help Navy Zone 3 promote all communication on the protection of Viet Nam's sea and island sovereignty. A training course on sea, island, and foreign affairs communication was also held for 200 youths from 63 provinces and cities in the central city on Thursday. The city has managed to gather a comprehensive collection of 95 maps published between 1626 and 1980, 10 of which indicate that Paracel and Spratly archipelagos belong to Viet Nam.

Meanwhile, as scheduled, the Hoang Sa Museum will be built on the Son Tra Peninsula later this year.

***Viet Nam News via the Southeast Asian Archaeology Newsblog***