Translation

Bernard-Philippe Groslier : La céramique chinoise en Asie du Sud-est: quelques points de méthode, *Archipel* 21 (1981) : 93–121, online at www.persee.fr

Chinese ceramics in SE Asia: Methodological considerations

Translated Aedeen Cremin March 2016

Note:. *This paper was written while the author was in France, unable to return to Democratic Kampuchea. He died in France, in 1986, aged 60.*
Although parts of the paper are now out of date, as China was at that time difficult of access and fewer shipwrecks were available for study, the main points are still useful. The author particularly cautions against using Chinese ceramics as a precise dating tool, given the various factors of trade, usage, imitation and diffusion that he discusses.
The text is long and discursive, with occasional digressions. Accordingly I have abbreviated, by numbering paragraphs and synopsising their content. Paragraphs marked with an asterisk are translated in full—these are mostly passage related to BPG's work at Angkor. I have occasionally added a clarification [in square brackets]. Footnotes have been translated in full. The author uses ellipsis marks (...) as an exclamation. I have used exclamation marks instead.*
I am happy to translate any other parts, on request.

1. Chinese ceramics are found in incredible quantities in SE Asia. They are useful chronological markers and are also evidence of complex interactions and exchanges.
2. We should thank the 20th century collectors and museum professionals who have laid the bases for research: first EW van Orsoy de Flines[1], then Charles Nelson Spinks in Siam, Arturo de Santos and the Locsins in the Philippines,[2] and, for Chinese ceramics in general, the Eumorphopoulos, Oscar Raphäel and Percival David.
3. Until the 1950s, only private or museum collections were avalailable for study. Scholars of SE Asia tended to be linguists, architects or art historians, studying texts and monuments. Archaeologists are now researching ceramics,[3] as collectors continue to do,[4] with dedicated societies in Singapore, Hong Kong, Jakarta and Manila,[5] not forgetting Japan.[6] Antique dealers are also playing a part.[7]
4. This approach has some drawbacks; the collector's piece is often high quality or rare, and may not be representative. European taste was formed by the East India Companies, and does not correspond to that of Chinese connoisseurs. Ming porcelain was popular with late

[1] E.W. van Orsoy de Flines, *Guide to the Ceramic Collection, Museum Pusat Djakarta*, Djakarta, 1969 (2nd ed.).
[2] C.N. Spinks, *The Ceramic Wares of Siam*, Bangkok, Siam Soc., 1973 (2nd ed.); L. et C. Locsin, *Oriental Ceramics discovered in the Philippines*, Tokyo, Rutland, 1967.
[3] See Cheng Te-K'un, 'The study of ceramic wares in Southeast Asia', *J Inst.of Chinese Studies*,Hong Kong,1972, vol 2, pp. 1-40.
[4] A.M. Joseph, *Chinese and Annnamese Ceramics found in the Philippines and Indonesia*, London, Hugh Moss, 1973; D.F. Frasché, *Southeast Asian Ceramics* …, New York, The Asia Soc., 1976; Roxanna M. Brown, *Legend and Reality : Early Ceramics from South-East Asia*, Cologne and Tokyo, 1977; Id., *The Ceramics of South - East Asia*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford U.Press, 1977.
[5] W. Willetts, *Ceramic Art of Southeast Asia*, The S.E. Asian Ceramic Soc., Singapore, 1971; Cheng Lammers, *Annamese Ceramics in the Museum Pusat Djakarta*, The Ceramic Soc. of Indonesia, Jakarta, 1974: S. Adhyatman and C. Lammers, *Tempayan/Martavan di Indonesia*, The Ceramic Soc. of Indonesia, Jakarta, 1977 (reviewed by us in this issue of *Archipel*); John Addis et al, *South-East Asian and Trade Pottery*, The Oriental Ceramic Soc., Hong Kong, 1979.
[6] Sakae Miki, *The Sawankhalok Kiln in Siam*, Tokyo Zauho Press 1954; Chuta Ito and Yoshitaro Kamakukura, *Nankai Ko-toji*, Tokyo, Hounsha, 1937.
[7] For example, R.M. Brown, *South-East Asia and Early Chinese Export Ceramics*, London, Sorsby, 1974; B.J. van Trent, *Ceramics Wares of Siam*, Amsterdam, Aalderink, 1978, etc.

19th century travellers, but, as we study more, we are refining our scale of values: there is world of difference between the knowledge of Grandidier [major French collector 1890s] and that of Michel Calman [a modern researcher]. Nowadays we know more about the variety of Chinese wares, and not just those from Imperial kilns.[8] We are also learning more about the East India Companies' collections from studying their bills of lading and exchange.[9]

5. Early European writers, following Chinese scholars, date ceramics by the Chinese dynasties.

6. Chinese ceramics reach SE Asia in the following periods: Three Kingdoms (219–316), Six Dynasties [Northern & Southern Dynasties] (317–580), Sui (581–618), Tang (618–906), Five Dynasties (907–960), Northern Sung (907–1125), Southern Sung (1128–1279), Yuan (1260–1368) and Ming (1368–1644).[10] But this system is elastic and inefficient: Sui ceramics are not clearly defined and we can only refer to them as 'pre-Tang' or '5th–6th centuries'. The Three Kingdoms, Five Dynasties and Southern Sung each cover one century, but Six Dynasties and Northern Sung cover two while Tang and Ming cover three (though, within the Ming, marks enable us to distinguish Imperial reigns).

7. This matters little in China proper, which is so well documented and where ceramics are not the only dating tool.

8.* In SE Asia on the other hand these date-ranges are too broad, do not necessarily correspond to local cultures and may even conceal them. To give an instance: in surveying Khmer sites in the Se Mun basin of northeast Thailand, we have found numerous habitation sites dateable by surface finds of Chinese sherds.[11] Many are 'Tang'. But this attribution, 618–906, is inadequate and misleading. For we know from the monuments that Khmer occupation started around 600–650, was eclipsed in the 8th century and resumed at the start of the Angkorian period, around 850. Clearly it would be more useful for us to be able to specify not just 'Tang', but 7th, 8th or 9th century, because 7th-century sites¸ at the start of conquest, would be more interesting than those of the 9th. Similarly the absence of 8th-century sites should confirm our hypotheses. On the other hand, and almost paradoxically, we are less interested when in late 9th- to late 12th-century sites we find sherds dating to the Five Dynasties, Northern and Southern Sung (1128–1279), because this is a time of continuous occupation and the ceramic sequence needs to be confirmed by excavations. In any case, for this period, we are getting such sound information from texts and monuments, that we may even be able to use it to date the imported Chinese ceramics!

10. Contrariwise, it is clear that precise date-rages are misleading. Yuan wares did not suddenly become Ming between 1367 and 1368. Some useful forms were retained, others were developed; innovations may or may not have been immediately adopted.

11.* At Angkor, excavations have revealed two royal palaces at Angkor Thom (the two latest). The penultimate covers the late 13th century to mid-14th; the last from 1430, generally speaking. They are clearly separated by traces of burning. But if we compare the astonishingly abundant Chinese material between these two levels, there is hardly any difference either in ware or in decoration, only some changes in the frequency of forms; this is not necessarily a matter of dates, as it could reflect a change of fashion, or of importer. In

---

[8] We need only here refer to the most recent and excellent synthesis: Margaret Medley, *The Chinese Potter*, London, Phaidon, 1976.

[9] Especially T. Volker, *Porcelain and the Dutch East India Companv (1602-1682)*, Leiden, Brill,1971.

[10] Chinese specialists have refined this and differentiate Northern from Southern wares between the Han and Sui periods (and between the Liao and those of the Five Dynasties and Northern Sung). But this does not concern us here since the export pieces seem, at present at least, to come overwhelmingly from South China for which my chronology will be adequate.

[11] B.P. Groslier, 'Prospection des sites khmers du Siam', pp. 38-58, in B.P· Groslier ed. *Coûts et Profits en Archéologie*, [Cost and profit in archaeology) , Publication of the Centre de Recherches archéologiques, Paris, CNRS, 1979

practice if we had found these wares in only one level we would thought they were Yuan and we would not have noticed the change from Yuan to Ming, which in fact corresponds, for once, to a clear and significant local historical event.

12. Another problem with using strictly Chinese dates is that from the 10th and 11th centuries, wares were being made especially for export to SE Asia, e.g. the containers found all along South Seas coasts; these are not found within China itself. For China we really know only about imperial production, or grave-goods. And we know too little about kilns, except that they were in the southeast.[12]

13. There are also kilns which were originally Chinese but then changed over time, i.e. those of Thanh Hoa, discussed by many authors.[13] Up till 939 they were Chinese, since Annam was an Imperial province, but thereafter there were distinctive developments, though some older forms stayed in fashion. So that for instance a certain amount of 'Tang' pieces found in Indonesia, especially in Borneo seem to me to be Vietnamese and 12th to 13th century.[14] This is a serious problem.

14. It gets worse. A famous inscribed and dated 'Chinese' vase [in Istanbul] could very well be Vietnamese.[15] We know from European documents that Dutch and other ships loaded up in the Gulf of Tonkin and Hainan with Annamese ceramics, but also with smuggled South Chinese wares.[16] Some-brown-surface wares, long identified as 'Khmer' are more likely Vietnamese or even South Chinese.[17]

15. Was Tonkin the only centre for this extra-territorial Chinese material? I think that over time more kilns were built further south.[18] We know that hill-tribes in Indochina, as in Indonesia, used large decorated jars for beer-making. While some were made in China others could have been made in Vietnam, for gift exchange between the Emperor of Annam and the 'Moï'.

16. Chinese-run kilns were created in 'Indianised' countries, at Sukhotai and Sawankhalok,[19] as well as in north Thailand,[20] and possibly in Malaysia.[21] In Thailand the 5-enamelled porcelain *pancharong* [Bencharong] was towards the end of the 17th century manufactured in China for Siamese taste, but later by Chinese in Bangkok itself.[22] I have

---

[12] Some non-specialist authors describe as 'Chinese' ceramics which are actually Japanese, or Korean. But it is of little importance.

[13] Y. Lefebvre d'Argence, *Les céramiques à base chocolatée*, Paris, EFEO, 1958. Most recently C.N. Spinks, 'A Reassessment of the Annamese wares', *J Siam Soc*. 64.1 (1976), pp. 416-52, et A.M. Joseph, *Chinese and Annamese Ceramics*, op. cit (n. 4 above).

[14] R.B. Fox foresaw this problem : 'The archaeological record of Chinese influences in the Philippines', *Philippines Studies* 15.1 (1967), pp. 41-62.

[15] I refer to the Istanbul bottle dated to 1450, R.M. Brown, *The Ceramics of South-East Asia*, op. cit (n. 4 above), p. 19.

[16] Volker, *Porcelains and the Dutch*, op. cit (n. 9 above) and also Volker, *The Japanese Porcelain trade of the Dutch East India Company after 1683*, Rijksmuseum, Leiden, 1959; K. Glamann, *Dutch-Asiatic Trade 1620-1740*, Copenhagen and the Hague, 1958.

[17] It seems O.H. Beyer was the first to 'invent' these 'Khmer' pieces, which he thought were manufactured in Kota Tinggi! H.O. Beyer, 'Outline review of Philippines archaeology', *Philippines J of Science*, 77. 3-4 (1947) pp. 276, 280, 287, 292-3, etc . It is amusing to note that there is also a reverse error, e.g. C. Lammers, *Annamese Ceramics in the Museum Pusat Djakarta*, op. cit (n. 5 above), p. 19; n° 3A8/1431 is not Annamese but Khmer.

[18] As well, of course, as those of Bat Trang, and architectural ceramics; see refs in R.M. Brown, *The Ceramics of South-East Asia*, op. cit (n. 4 above), pp. 23-25.

[19] For Siamese kilns, see R.M. Brown, *Ceramics*, op. cit.; from p. 45, and most recently H.W. Woodward Jr, 'The dating of Sukhothai and Sawankhalok ceramics', *J Siam Soc.* 66.1 (1978) 1-7.

[20] Whatever part the Chinese may have played, it is important to take account of the Khmer traditions in form and techniques. For kilns in North Siam, see R.M. Brown, *Ceramics*, op. cit. from p. 62.

[21] H.O. Beyer 'Outline review', op. cit (n. 17 above), pp. 217, 276, 280.

[22] It seems the first piece for Siamese taste were made in Kang-xi China, see W.A. Graham, 'Pottery in Siam', *J Siam Soc*. 16.1 (1922),pp. 1-27. It is amusing to note that because of the Siamese occupation until the start of

reason to believe that during the 18th century there were Chinese manufacturers in Cambodia, near Kompong Cham.

17.* In any case, Cambodia had access to Chinese techniques since the 9th century. What we call Kulen ware, because that is where the kilns are, are obviously imitations of celadon wares, not only in paste, glaze and firing, but also in form and decoration. They are completely different from the local style which continues in parallel, partly borrowing Kulen techniques. It is such a change that one is inclined to believe that Chinese potters came into the country. Over time, production changes according to local taste and parallel Chinese wares which are still imported, as if there was a desire to stay 'in fashion'. But let's be careful: there are, in the 12th century Kulen material, boxes with octagonal covers which seem to be copied from the Annamese. In contemporary levels of excavation there are also Annamese imports, not surprisingly since this is the time when Suryavarman II is in conflict with the Dai Viet Empire. This is yet another case of Chinese or 'Chinese-type' influence … at a remove.[23]

18. In Pagan, Burma, there are decorative bricks and glazed bas-reliefs. Bas-reliefs are of Indian origin, but only in Pagan are they glazed, like Chinese architectural elements.

19. Were there Cham ceramics? We know the Cham were in direct contact with China from the Han period, when Chinese potters first settled in Tonkin.

20. Even if we knew exactly when SE Asian Chinese wares were manufactured we still would not know when they were exported or how they were used.

21. We need to better understand the dynamics of product-usage.

22. Ceramics were not very important in SE Asian domestic material culture where bamboo, basketry and lacquered wood were more normally used.

23. Copper vessels were important, at least in Cambodia.[24] Probably because they are suitable containers for milk, part of Indian-derived rituals, where containers need be easy to clean and without cracks.[25]

24. Ceramics are strongly tied to domestic life[26] and, as SE Asian houses are often on stilts with flexible floors (usually bamboo) and little furniture, there is a preference for round-bottomed containers, which can sit firmly on the ground, as shown in reliefs from Java and Cambodia.

25.* There are of course large vessels with a small foot: 'baluster vases' and jars. But we can see that jars are placed and used under houses, i.e. on the ground; they may have a lug which enables them to be anchored to a pillar. Looking at the reliefs, it seems that baluster-vases, which we know to be of high quality, were religious or luxury items, therefore utilised in stone-floored temples or in timber- floored palaces.

26.* Local ceramics are for the most part small vases and lidded boxes, well-adapted to local furniture, and it is no coincidence that these types make up the majority of imports. Ceramics might here replace the more expensive metal.

---

the 20th century there is in Battambang province a glazed ware, manufactured by Thai Chinese, which imitates Bencharong.

[23] For the Chinese at Angkor, see B.P. Groslier 'Inscriptions du Bayon', pp. 164, 167–178, in J. Dumarçay and B.P. Groslier, *Le Bayon*, EFEO, Paris, 1973.

[24] 6th to 10th century Khmer ceramics often seem to imitate metal. Some of the very rare bronzes thought to be Cham seem to reflect an inverse exchange between technologies: L. Malleret, 'Une cruche de bronze presumée chame', *Artibus Asiae*, 30 (1968) pp. 53-60.

[25] Let us be careful : while both milk and butter are mentioned in ancient Khmer inscription – inevitably so, since Cambodia became Hinduised – milk is not normally drunk nowadays and indeed the country today seems allergic to it. This is a fundamental and remarkable point which marks the nature and degree of 'Indianisation'. Can one imagine India without milk?

[26] 26. C.N. Spinks presents some useful observations on particular uses of ceramic, what I would call its 'dynamic': 'Some unusual Thai and Chinese uses of ceramics', *J Siam Society* 65.1 (1977), pp. 247

27. In SE Asia objects are placed on the floor, and thus viewed from above. Accordingly, ceramics are decorated on the neck and shoulders, and there seems a preference for Chinese wares decorated in this way. (Ancient Greek pots were decorated on the sides and on the base, because the Greeks lay down to eat and upturned the cups for libations).[27]
28. Chinese ceramics had significant technical advantages: they were tough, thoroughly fired and not only glazed but vitrified. Highly important for food consumption[28] but even more so for containers: water jars, fermenting jars and jars for fish-paste and fish-sauce. Ceramic jars are essential for fish-paste: metal containers cannot be used for acid products and may be difficult to seal during fermentation, whereas jars sealed with clay are perfect, better than wooden vessels. Drinking water again is best kept and decanted from clay jars. However I do not believe that jars were particularly used for grains, since nowadays grain containers are made of basketry or wood. And stonewares are perfect for spices, tea, honey, wax etc.
29.* We cannot say whether this 'technological revolution' was available sufficiently early and at sufficiently low cost to halt progress in local production. This may be so at Angkor where local production seems impoverished because of the influx of Chinese ceramics. In any case, it is clear that, from at least the 10th century, SE Asian countries systematically acquired Chinese wares, precisely (even almost exclusively) in the three types we have just described: crockery (bowls and cups), boxes and tiny closed vases, and jars.
30. The Chinese were obviously able to exclusively manufacture these types and could adapt for various markets, from Persian/Muslim to those of the East India Companies. That is why we need to be careful, as some items may have been 'archaic' to respond to a specific taste and need not correspond to what was being made in China for the Chinese, as we've already noted for the Tonkin kilns [Pars 13 and 14, above].
31.* An example from Angkor itself; we have found Northern Sung circular lidded boxes, which were highly popular and may, I think, have been used to store betel leaves. We have found literally thousands of similar pieces, all imports, with similar shapes and decoration, but of lesser quality, even of poor quality. They are found in all the later levels and are associated with a very few good-quality Southern Sung and Ming boxes. It is thus clear that this type was particularly successful and that the Chinese reproduced it almost indefinitely, without variations, while simultaneously continuing to produce luxury goods for the upper elite. Taken in isolation these objects would not give a precise date, only between 12th and 15th centuries. For dating purposes, we must therefore take into account the 'viscosity' of certain forms. To take a classic example, up till the 1920s the [French] Bank of Indochina used to mint coins with Mexican eagles, or Maria-Theresa *thalers*, in order to buy opium from the Meos, since those tribes, long used to dealing with the Chinese, would accept no other currencies.
32.* We should also consider the uses of selectively-acquired Chinese ceramics, so as to understand their value as chronological indicators. At Angkor we can group the material into four main categories:
A. From Northern Sung times, a few very-high-quality vases, excavated at Angkor itself, each one being more or less unique. This suggests they were reserved for the highest people and may even have been 'ambassadorial gifts' when found at Angkor Thom's Royal Palace.

[27] M. Pirrazoli-t'Serstevens has noted these significant relations between object and usage within Chinese ceramics: 'A propos d'une jarre à alcool chinoise', *Objets*, 4-5 (1970), pp. 35-38.
[28] There is a well-known story whereby celadons change colour in the presence of poison (which is why the Ottoman sultans would use only them as tablewares). It probably derives from this obervation. Celadon and porcelain are physically speaking glasses; they are easy to clean, organic debris cannot build up nor affect the food and its taste.

B. From Southern Sung times, more numerous and varied pieces, of good quality, found either in urban centres or near temples, and increasingly often in graves or 'caches' which become more frequent in the last stages of the Angkorian Empire and after its fall.
C. A considerable quantity of mediocre-quality ceramics, of mass-produced types (boxes, globular vases, bowls), found almost always as fragments in habitation sites: this is the 'banal' production we spoke of earlier [Par. 26 above].
D. Lost containers, small narrow-neck jars, unglazed but very well-fired, which would have held some imported product; sometimes re-used and always associated with dwellings.

34.* Obviously Groups A and D, within dwellings, could provide dates close to their time of manufacture in China (or at least of the time of importation), unless they have been reused or are grave-goods. Sherds of Group A are the most precise because they're close to Imperial productions, which changed frequently, and would have been imported as the 'latest fashion' in China proper. On the other hand Group D, lost containers, are difficult to date in the present state of knowledge; we don't have a chronology and they vary little.

35.* Sherds of Group B, equally close to Chinese fashions, might give similar information. Almost all the complete pieces come from graves or caches. We shall come back to these.

36.* Finally, Group C would be the ideal dating material, especially since the vast majority of these sherds are found within dwellings. But we know how ambiguous they are: they are poorly known and dated within China and are indefinitely repeated.

37. Intact pieces in collections have been the most carefully studied. They were often associated with ritual, magical, religious or funerary, and they may have been in use for a very long time, just as in the 19th century many French churches and houses still had medieval artefacts. There is a good study by Vuong Hong Sen on the current use of small globular Chinese vases (even though some of the pieces he thinks are Sung are actually Yuan or even Ming).[29] Cambodia has similar ceramics and similar uses.[30]

38.* Temple collections or treasuries may be equally misleading. We know dozens which contained pieces from Northern Sung to Ming, associated with an Angkorian temple, because the temple remained a religious centre to this day, after conversion to Buddhism. In Cambodian monasteries one can find Angkorian vases, Yuan or early Ming pieces or 17th- and 18th-century Chinese crockery, probably made in Cholon or Bien Hoa.[31] Dating the temple or pagoda by these pieces would be absurd.

39.* The same applies to Chinese pieces which have been buried throughout SE Asia, as cinerary urns or grave-goods. Angkor is a good example. We have excavated there a cemetery with over one hundred such deposits. The Khmer bronzes were clearly from the second half of the 11th c. and first half of the 12th; most of the Chinese pieces were of the same date. But some are older, and associated with bronzes from that date-range. One can then suppose that these were heirlooms, given up by the family for particularly significant funerals. Conversely there are burials from the start of the 13th century and two caches of 12th c. jars which contained Yuan vases and 16th-17th c. bronze Buddhas. Isolated burials are the most numerous and cannot be dated by their context. The Chinese ceramic date cannot be directly applied to the burial; at most it offers a *terminus post quem*.The extreme case is a funerary deposit within the Angkor Wat enclosure, where a little Southern Sung jar, closed by

---

[29] Vuong Hong Sen, 'Les pots à envoûtement', Bull. Soc. Etudes Indochinoises 24.3 (1949), pp. 33-37.
[30] George Groslier had noticed this as early as 1911: 'Objets anciens trouvés au Cambodge', *Revue Archéologique*, 4 (1916), pp. 129-139.
[31] André Silice, a connaisseur, pointed out these ambiguities: A. Silice and J. Stoeckel: 'Matériaux pour servir à l'étude de la céramique chinoise au Cambodge', *Arts et Archéologie Khmers* 1.2 (1921-23), pp. 149-153.

a clumsy earthenware lid, contained copper tools and 18th c. coins. The golden rule is to *always apply the latest possible date.*

40. In Indonesia, most Chinese material in collections has come from burial grounds. Under the Japanese occupation there was a great deal of 'pot-hunting' which severely damaged many cemeteries. In the Philippines, however, there has been more systematic work, but it is never easy, to place individual tombs in their overall context, or even to interpret tomb contents. Methods developed for archaic Greece might be usefully applied. I wonder if some dates are not too early; they should certainly not be projected back to China itself.[32]

41. This brings us back to the problem with collectors who have to rely on the information from dealers, who may not be sure of provenance. This was not the case in the early 20th c when Orsoy de Flines and others were collecting.

42. Since World War II we have seen collections go from local purchase through junk shops to antique dealers, in Bangkok, Manila, Jakarta etc.[33] I know of a piece from Than-Hoa displayed in a collection as coming from Indonesia, and which in fact was collected in Tonkin (with accurate provenance) before World War II, was sold as part of a deceased estate in Avignon [France], then bought by a dealer in Lyon and ended up, who knows how, in Jakarta 30 years later!

43.* This is also true of 'pagoda material'. Twenty years ago we could find in Cambodian pagodas (and some wealthy homes) 18th c. 'blanc-de-Chine' candelabras in elephant-shape, or alcohol-pourers in the shape of hares, which may have been there since the time of their manufacture or importation. Because of the [Indochina] war we have seen them go to antique dealers in Bangkok, then turn up in collections. Since the 1950s also some wealthy families have been able to leave China taking pieces with them for resale.

44.* So we may well be studying a Chinese export to SE Asia. But it was exported only in the last few years!

45. The same thing applies to the beer-jars used by hilltribes in Indochina and Indonesia. Some may have been made in Vietnam or the Philippines.[34] We know they are handed down from generation to generation. If a Jarai village dies (which is all too likely these days) all organic material would decay and nothing would be left except the jars, which future archaeologists would correctly date to the 12th or 13th centuries.

46. Comments on Chinese ceramics made so far are equally relevant to a study of exports and exchanges within SE Asia.

47. We need to be certain that ceramics were intended for local populations. This is not necessarily so. In Borneo, for instance there were Chinese settlements on iron mines.[35] In Malaysia and Sumatra the sites marked by huge masses of sherds, may have been (originally) local trading-posts, or only a port-of-call for international ships;[36]maybe swapping cargo with locals, Persians, Muslim or, later, Europeans.

---

[32] The differing conclusions confirm this. Most recently see J.M. Addis, 'Chinese porcelain found in the Philippines', *Trans. Oriental. Ceramic Soc* 37 (1967-69), pp. 17-36; M. Pirazzoli- t'Serstevens , 'Les céramiques chinoises exportées aux Philippines', *Revue du Louvre* 20.6 (1970), pp. 385-99; H.H.E. Loof, *Archaeologie der Philippine*, H.D.O., Leiden, Brill, 1978, pp. 50-52.

[33] We have already mentioned (n.7 above) the beautiful catalogues produced by dealers. While the texts are reliable, it is not always clear that dealers are truly aware of provenance.

[34] H.O. Beyer discusses these Manila potteries in 'Outline Review', op. cit. (n.17 above) pp. 230, 242, 245 etc. I don't know if they have been systematically studied.

[35] T. Harrisson and S.J. O'Connor, *Excavations of the Prehistoric Iron Industry in West Borneo*, Cornell U., Ithaca, 1969.

[36] E.P.E. McKinnon, 'Oriental Ceramics excavated in North Sumatra', *Trans.Oriental Ceramic Soc*. (1975-77), pp. 59-86; Id., 'Research at Kota Cina', *Archipel* 14 (1977), pp. 19-32; A. Lamb, 'Takuapa', pp. 76-86, in J. Bastin and R. Roolvink eds *Malayan and Indonesian Studies: Essays presented to Sir Richard*

48. Chinese and Annamese ceramics in Madagascar might have been left by early sailors, by Zheng He or by Europeans, using them as trade-goods.[37]

49. The Cham are said to have invented fish-paste, the Vietnamese *nuoc man.* This has to be carried in sealed jars. Sone sherds found at Angkor could be from such jars, of Cham manufacture. The Cham are particularly important if we accept that they might have Islamised as early as the 10th century,[38] which can only have been through Muslim sailors on their way to China.

50. From the 16th century on exchanges become ever more complex. Japanese junks take on cargo in China then go to Tonkin, Cambodia and Siam.[39] Siamese junks carry Sawankhlok to Indonesia and probably also the few Khmer pieces found in Java.[40] Indonesian and Chinese sailors are everywhere.[41] A complex situation and there is no reason to believe that it was any simpler earlier on and that a Chinese vase would be brought directly to Angkor.

51 Chinese settlements need to be taken into account, and eating habits. Chinese crockery is ideal for food because it is easy to clean. Every Cambodian or Thai pagoda has a set of Chinese crockery for feast-days. The *achars* [lay managers] and the old women who look after them say the same thing: Chinese crockery is 'tough' and 'easy to clean'. Tea-drinking also requires ceramics. Chinese bowls are ideal for ships: metal utensils rust and wooden ones rot.

53. What was exported in 'lost packaging'? Wine, lacquer, cinnabar, mercury? Through Chinese texts, we know more about imports.[42] We know of silk, spices and aromatics (in triangular exchanges) but, reading Zhou Daguan, it may be that ceramics themselves were a currency.

54. Shipwrecks with intact cargoes have been found at Zeitun,[43] off the coast of Thailand,[44] Phuquoc and Korea.[45] Some ceramics are labelled, but we do not know what their contents were to be exchanged for.

Windsted, Oxford, Clarendon 1964; Id. : 'Miscellaneous Papers. Settlements in Northern Malaya and Southern Thailand', *J Federation Museum* 6 (1961).

[37] E. Vernier et J. Millot, *Archéologie malgache*, Musée de l'Homme, Paris, 1971; *contra* P. Verin,' Note sur les collections de Vohernar', *Rev. Musée Art et Archéologie*, Tananarive 4 (1971), pp. 225-9; Tsugio Mikami, 'L'archéologie malgache', *Objets et Monde*, 12.3 (1972), p. 328; L. Molet, 'Origine chinoise possible de quelques animaux fantastiques de Madagascar', J Soc.Africanistes, 44.2 (1974), pp.123-138.

[38] Most recently E.H. Schafer, *The Vermilion Bird*, U. of California, Berkeley, 1967, p.75.

[39] N. Peri, 'Essai sur les relations du Japon et de l'Indochine', BEFEO 23 (1923), pp.1-137. For Japanese in Cambodia, see also A. Silice, 'Vestiges japonais au Cambodge', *Arts et archéologie khmers* 2.4 (1921-23), pp. 409-411; H. Parmentier, 'Fouille d'un tertre … d' Angkor Vat', *BEFEO* 23 (1923), pp. 296-99; B.P. Groslier, *Angkor et le Cambodge au XVIe siècle*, Musée Guimet, Paris, 1958, pp. 43, 44, 54-7, 82, 128-9, 162.

[40] C.N. Spinks, 'Siam and the pottery trade of Asia', *J Siam Soc*. 44 (1956), pp. 61-112; Id., *Siamese Pottery in Indonesia*, Bangkok, Siam Society, 1959; M. Sullivan, 'Notes on Chinese export wares in Southeast Asia', *Trans. Oriental Ceramic Soc*. 33 (1963), pp. 61-77; J. Stargardt, 'L'Isthme de la Péninsule malaise dans les navigations au long cours', *Archipel* 18 (1979), pp. 15-41.

[41] Most recently J.V. Mills, 'Chinese navigators in Insulinde about AD 1500', *Archipel* 18 (1979), pp. 69-94.

[42] On the dynamics of Chinese imports : E.H. Schafer, *The Vermilion Bird*, op. cit (n.38 above).; Id., *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, U. of California, Berkeley, 1963; P. Wheatly, 'Geographical notes on some commodities involved in Sung maritime trade', *J Malayan Branch RAS*, 37.2 (1959

[43] C. Salmon and D. Lombard, 'Un vaisseau du XIIIe retrouvé avec sa cargaison' *Archipel* 18 (1979), pp. 57-67.

[44] P.C. Howitz, 'Two ancient shipwrecks in the Gulf of Thailand', *J Siam Soc*. 65.2 (1977), pp. 1-22.

[45] J. Ayers, 'The discovery of a Yuan ship at Sinan', *Oriental Art* 24.1 (1978), pp. 79-85; C.M. Zainie, 'The Sinan shipwreck', *Oriental Art* 25.1 (1979), pp. 103-114; S.G. Valenstein, 'Some Chinese celadons reclaimed from the sea', *Oriental Art* 25.1 (1979), pp. 88-102.

55.* We should also consider Chinese settlements overseas. They may be older and more numerous than we suspect, because we are overly impressed by 'Indianisation'. It is worrying that there may have been Chinese potters at Angkor from the 9th century [at the Kulen]. Can there have been some 'Sinicisation' of an Indianised world? In which case, Chinese ceramics are the tip of an iceberg.

56. To repeat yet again, Chinese ceramics, even if they are properly dated, are not an absolute indication of trade between China and the place of discovery but are part of much more complex movements we have yet to trace.

57. It is curious that India has very few Chinese ceramics, though it could easily have obtained some through Middle-Eastern trade. This is all the odder because in SE Asia (outside Vietnam) the foreign material is almost exclusively Chinese.

58. The great kingdoms of Indochina and Insulinde [Malaysia and the Malay archipelago] did not just buy – they also ordered. For instance, betel-kits: Chinese potters made lime-pots, later taken over by the Vietnamese.[46] In Cambodia lidded boxes seem to have been preferred for betel leaves and may have been specially produced for that purposes. I also think this is true of the little globular vases for perfumed oils, which are hardly found in China proper.

59. The practice continued almost to this day. We've already discussed *pancharong* [Par. 16 above]. The court of Hué ordered blue ware from China.[47] And there are other cases of foreign manufacture. The 19th-century court of Cambodia has its *charabap,* the dancers' costumes, woven in Madras, sending designs, silk and gold thread.

60. An important foreign type made in China was the ablution-pourer, the *kendi* (more correctly *kunda*).[48] It is of Indian origin and was imitated in Funan and Java from the 4th to 5th centuries. But Chinese-made *kendi* quickly became popular. In the Muslim world they were used as drinking vessels. They reached Central Asia from China through Buddhism, though mostly made in metal.

61. In Tonkin, from the 10th-11th centuries there are quantities of funerary urns of Thanh-Hoa type. They are used for cremations, unlike Chinese inhumations in the same areas. They may be Buddhist, as suggested by the common use of lotus-petal ornament. At Angkor, at the end of the 12th century when Buddhism was promoted by Jayavarman VII, the Kulen kilns produced lidded urns which could be used to bury ashes.

62.* But at Angkor, much earlier (as in 5th-6th century Java), cremated ashes were buried in pots, preferably Chinese. At Angkor this 'urn' is accompanied by two or three other Chinese ceramics and very often by a large jar (usually of local make), which has been either 'decapitated' or has a pierced base. We don't know enough to establish a typology nor to figure out the rules of these burials. But at least we can see it is not just to bury the ashes, for which one pot would suffice. But there is always more than one pot. Local cults do not support the idea of offerings for a later life, as in China.

63. In SE Asia from prehistoric time there have been two-phase interments: the first phase defleshing, the second, incineration. This differs both from Chinese inhumation and from Indian cremation. The practice persists and is found in the royal courts of Phnom Penh, Bangkok and Luang Prabang, with defleshing of the royal body in an urn, then a cremation.

---

[46] Vuong Hong Sen, 'La chique de bétel et les pots à chaux anciens du Viet·Nam', *Bull. Soc. Etudes Indochinoises* 2-5.1 (1950), pp. 31-39.

[47] Vuong Hong Sen, 'Les Bleus de Hué', *Bull. Soc. Etudes Indochinoises* 19.1 (1944), pp. 57-70; Id., 'A propos de vieilles porcelaines chinoises et de vieux bleus de Hué', *L'Education* n°14, Saigon,1949.

[48] A. Coomaraswamy and F. Kershaw, 'A Chinese Buddhist water vessel and its Indian prototype, *Artibus Asiae* 3 (1928 -29); I.H.N. Evans, 'On the persistence of an old type of water-vessel', *J Malayan Branch RAS* 87. 1 (1923); Han Wai-Toon, 'A research on kendi', *J South Seas Soc*., Singapore 7.1 (1951), pp. 1-5; A. Sullivan, 'Kendi', *Archiv. of the Chinese Art Soc. Of America* 12 (1957), pp. 40-58.

This was also done at popular level until recently, within Buddhist ritual in Cambodia: the dead person was buried, then exhumed and incinerated during the cremation of some important religious, or at a particularly auspicious time. It is highly possible that Chinese jars were used for this purpose. At Angkor jars and vases may have been used for defleshing, or at least to evoke it.

64. Fermenting drink in jars and consuming it ritually, or at least socially, is also ancient and characteristic of Indochina, South China and Insulinde. Water is poured from a buffalo horn and the jar, for the sacrifice, is tied to the principal house-post. The current 'paddy' was originally chewed leaves, especially *Piper methystiucm Forst* [kava]. In Indonesia leave are still added to the beer—this is touching on the kava cycle of Oceania. In contrast China used distilled alcohol or cooked wines, while India used 'toddy' [palm wine]; this was also used in Burma but nor further east, even though sugar palm is everywhere in Cambodia.

65. In sum, we find associated with ceramic jars two of the most ancient and SE Asian traits: burials and ritual drinking. These were developed in contact with China, prior to being diffused southwards along the coasts. China is the origin of local metallurgy and of the bronze drum, a sign of chiefdoms. Ceramics also seem to come, like metal, from the Chinese world.

66. I am not suggesting that the Khmer maintained ancestral contacts by importing ceramics for burials, but only that the Chinese world was in many ways as important as India, especially for tools, mercury-gilding, jewellery, glazing etc. In the 5th century Cambodia had flat Indian-style tiles, but shortly afterwards it adopted the curved Chinese tile, as did all other SE Asian countries for their wooden buildings.

67. At this point I can make some suggestions for the archaeological study of Chinese ceramics from SE Asia.

68. For a start we now have better dynastic chronologies and information on kilns, as shown by the remarkable work of Margaret Medley.[49]

69. Chinese archaeologists have a huge task ahead of them, especially for manufacturing sites. We already know how important surface collections have been, from the work of Malcolm Farley [US missionary and archaeologist in Fujian, 1920s-1930s] and A.D. Brankston [Chinese-born, investigated Jingdezhen kilns 1930s] or the Japanese Fujio Koyama [investigated kilns in North China, 1920s-1930s]. The same work on kilns will of course need to be done in Vietnam.

70. Laboratory methods will be useful if they become cheap. Thermoluminescence can help to authenticate a piece,[50] but is not yet sufficiently precise for dating purposes.

71. Similarly, identifying physical components of clay or glazes is not praticable given the huge quantity of material. However, kilns with sherds in contexts can provide useful comparisons and data.[51]

72. We should also have more rigorous definitions of wares, by types of firing, glazing etc. This is already been successfully undertaken by some researchers.[52] We also need a standard vocabulary.

---

[49] Not to mention new discoveries : J.M. Addis, *Chinese ceramics from datable tombs*, London, 1978.

[50] E.g. S.J. Fleming, 'Thermoluminescent authenticity studies of unglazed T'ang dynasty ceramic tomb goods', *Archaeometry* 16. l (1974), pp. 91-95.

[51] A.L. Hetherington, *Chinese Ceramic Glazes*, London and South Pasadena, 1948; W.J. Young, 'Discussion of some analyses of Chinese underglaze blue', *Far-Eastern Ceramic Bull*. 2.2 (1949), pp. 20-26; W.J. Young and P.E. Whitmore, 'Analysis of Oriental Ceramic '*Far-Eastern Ceramic Bull*. 9.1 (1957), pp. 1-27.

[52] . E.g. W.D. Kring, 'An analysis of three Chun type shards', *Far-Eastern Ceramic Bull*. 1.4 (1949), pp. 30-33; R.T. Paine Jr and W.J. Young, 'A preliminary report on the sub-surface structure of glazes of Kuan' *Far-Eastern Ceramic Bull*. 5.3 (1953), pp. 2-20; F.R. Matson, 'Kuan-yao glazes', *Far-Eastern Ceramic Bull*. 5.4 (1953), pp. 13-20; S.M. Kaplan, 'Toward a classification of Chinese glazes', *Far-Eastern Ceramic Bull*. 7.1 (1955), pp. 6-16, etc.

73. As regards kilns, most imports into Cambodia, at least from Southern Sung times were mass-produced; once the kilns have been identified we can better know what countries were supplied, by comparing pots from different find-places.
74. Collections are practically useless for this sort of study since all they tell us is that Chinese ceramics were imported at some stage between the 6th and 19th centuries.
75. Complete piece have a long life and are frequently reused. Finding a Sung pot in a tomb only tells us the tomb cannot be earlier than Sung, but it could be 18th century. If we find Sung with blue-and-white, this does not tell us that blue-and-white was developed in the 12th century; it is more likely Yuan or later (with a Sung vase as grave-good). There are too many hypotheses and not enough certainties within collections.
76. However, collections do give a notion of what was valued in any one country. They need to be more systematically described in exhibition or sales catalogues, like those of Nanne Ottema [Dutch collector 1920s-40s]. For me the shape of the foot, or the edge of the glaze on the foot, were decisive in discriminating between Southern Sung and Yuan pieces at Angkor.
77. This is even more true of the systematic analysis of decoration, as shown by the work of Arthur Upham Pope [US historian of Persian art 1920-30s].
78. But finally it comes down to the excavations of tombs and dwellings in both China and SE Asia. For any site gives information only on immediately local conditions. The range of Chinese ceramics found in one part of Angkor Thom is not the same as in another, let alone in a contemporary site in the Se Mun area. How can they be correlated with a port in Malaya, a trading-post in Borneo or a cemetery in the Philippines?
79.* But that is the only way in which we shall obtain an overview of Chinese exports to SE Asia, bearing in mind that Chinese goods may postdate their creation in China. For instance I have not found any blue-and-white at Angkor before 1350, which does not mean that that porcelain is late.[53] What it means is that a) I didn't find it—but I have not excavated the whole of Angkor, or that b) blue-and-white did not reach Angkor earlier, or that the Khmer didn't like it – that's all. We often forget that an argument from absence is not an argument, only an indication.[54] We must always remember that SE Asia, with its own tastes, needs and cults, required products which were not necessarily to be found in China. Finally we need to beware of dynastic chronologies whose time-blocks may distort local histories.
80. In conclusion I want to make clear that Chinese ceramics from SE Asia are of enormous and vital importance. In time to come they will be an excellent dating tool, if we follow some basic rules of interpretation. They may one day be as useful as Corinthian or sigillata wares are for Mediterranean history.

[53] I had lent these sherds to Mr Basil Gray, and they were shown in the great exhibition of blue-and-white in 1954. ref Sir Harry Garner, *Exhibition of Chinese Blue and White Porcelain by the Oriental Ceramic Society, 1953-54*, London, 1953, and also B. Gray, 'Art under the Mongol Dynasties of China and Persia', *Oriental Art* 1.4 (1955), pp. 3-11. They were used of course to argue both for a late and for an early presence of blue-and-white. Fortunately the question is now closed.

[54] Miss Roxanna Brown, *The Ceramics of South-East Asia* op. cit. (n. 4 above), p. 60 note 6, makes me say that the Sawankhalok 'cannot be earlier than around 1350' because I had not found any at Angkor before that date. Either I expressed myself poorly or I have been misunderstood. I only said 'I have not found Sawankhalok at Angkor before 1350'. But I have not dug all of Angkor and tomorrow a pre-1350 site may well be full of Sawankhalok. One has to be careful of arguments from absence (*a silentio*). In this case all one can say is that given the close relations between Siam and Angkor in the 14th century, it is likely that if Sawankhalok wares had been produced before 1350, they would have reached Angkor, a simple supposition. In fact, the absence of a foreign product means nothing at all.