

A Glimpse at Southeast Asian Ceramics Publications¹

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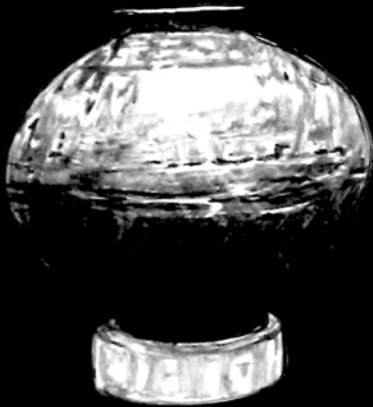


Illustration by
Sakulchat Chatrakul Na Ayutthaya

Southeast Asian ceramic traditions are major components of Southeast Asian art. Since Southeast Asia became a region with clear political boundaries after World War II, these traditions have been researched either through national perspectives or as part of the analytical unit “Southeast Asian ceramics”. Scholars thereby contributed to constructing ceramic traditions in different parts of the region in order to create a clear cultural identity and autonomous history in contrast with the over-emphasis on Chinese influence in the development of the local ceramic industries. Several books and exhibition catalogues entitled “Southeast Asian Ceramics” were published, clearly demonstrating that local ceramics in the region should be considered as an independent research unit.

This article is an attempt to provide an overview of the publications, starting from the 1960s, on Southeast Asian ceramics by ceramic societies, heritage institutions, and researchers in Southeast Asia. Obviously, it cannot be a holistic guide since many important works of a much wider range of pioneer scholars and institutions published outside the region (for example, *Bulletin of École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, *Trade Ceramic Studies* and *Arts of Asia*) or articles written in local languages by researchers in the region need to be included and acknowledged. However, a brief review of the publications may help to illuminate how the ceramic societies and related institutions in the region have been raising awareness in, and enhancing the standard of, this field of study. The timeframe for this brief overview begins in the

¹ This article is prepared for my visit of the “Southeast Asian Ceramics: New Light on Old Pottery” exhibition held at the National University of Singapore Museum (14 November 2009-25 July 2010) during my internship at the museum. I sincerely thank Ms. Foo Su Ling, Dr. Geoff Wade, Dr. Edna Wong, and editor Mr. Ean Lee for their comments on this short article. Prof. John Miksic, Prof. Peter Lam, Dr. Don Hein, Dr. Goh Geok Yian and Mr. Kyaw Minn Htin also provided some useful research information for my study.

1960s, a period when most of the Southeast Asian ceramic societies were established.

Singapore

In Singapore, the *Southeast Asian Ceramic Society (SEACS)*, which was established in 1969, has been maintaining a strong presence. The founding president of the Society, British scholar Prof. William Willetts (1918-1995), was the curator of the Art Museum at the University of Singapore from 1963 to 1973. The aim in creating SEACS in the region, as he mentioned in the first SEACS exhibition catalogue *Ceramic Art of Southeast Asia* (1971) (Fig 1), is “to widen appreciation and acquire knowledge of the ceramic art of China and countries adjacent to China, especially those of Southeast Asia” (Willetts 1971:5). Following the lead of the SEACS Singapore chapter, ceramic societies emerged in West Malaysia, Jakarta, Manila and Hong Kong (Tun 1981:v). Several landmark exhibitions catalogues and books have been published, including *Khmer Ceramics 9th-14th Century* (1981), *Vietnamese Ceramics* (1982), *Art & Archaeology of Funan: Pre-Khmer Kingdom of the Lower Mekong Valley* (2003), *Earthenware in Southeast Asia* (2003) (Fig 2), and *Southeast Asian Ceramics: New Light on Old Pottery* (2009). These are well-edited works, engaging a broad range of topics in the area of Southeast Asian ceramic studies (both exhibits and studies). Journals such as the *Transactions of the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society* (1971-1981), and *Heritage* (published by the Singapore National Museum from 1977 to 1993, and in 2004 becoming an online

journal edited by the National Heritage Board) reported archaeological discoveries, while the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* is the major refereed journal accepting articles relating to the material culture and history of the region (Fig 3). *Archaeological Research on the ‘Forbidden Hill’ of Singapore: Excavations at Fort Canning, 1984* (1985), *A Guide to the Collections of the National Museum Singapore: Archaeology* (1987), and *Early Singapore 1300s-1819: Evidence in Maps, Text and Artefacts* (2003) are some of the other publications

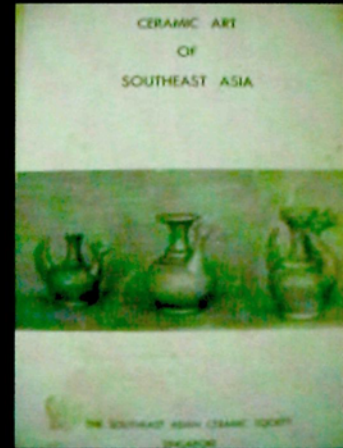


Fig 1 *Ceramic Art of Southeast Asia* (1971)

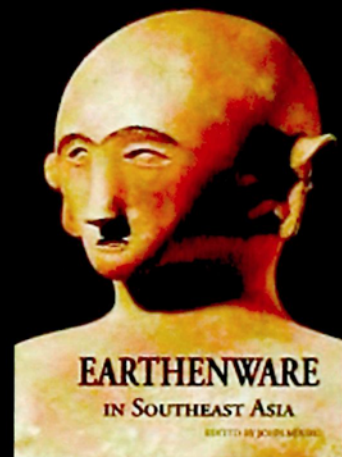


Fig 2 *Earthenware in Southeast Asia* (2003)



Fig 3 *Heritage Journal* (1989)

focused on the archaeological findings in Singapore and Malaysia. Singapore has also been a hub of scholarly publications on Southeast Asian ceramic topics, including Dawn Rooney's *Khmer Ceramics* (1984), John Guy's *Oriental Trade Ceramics in South-East Asia, Ninth to Sixteenth Centuries* (1986) and *Ceramic Traditions of South-East Asia* (1989), Barbara Harrisson's *Pusaka, Heirloom jars from Borneo* (1985), as well as Sukekuro Sato's *Khmer Ceramics from the Kamratan Collection* (1990) published by Singapore Oxford University Press, and Nicol Guerin and Dick van Oenen's *Thai Ceramic Art - The Three Religions* published by Singapore Suntime Publishing Ltd. (2005).

Malaysia

The first exhibition catalogue, *Nonya Ware and Kitchen Ch'ing*, was published by the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society (West Malaysia Chapter) in 1981, eight years after the society was established when Prof. William Willetts moved to Kuala Lumpur to set up the Museum Seni Asia at the University of Malaya in 1973 (Tun 1981:v).² In 1985, a colour catalogue entitled *A Ceramic Legacy of Asia's Maritime Trade*, edited by Peter Y.K. Lam, was printed. This catalogue has been cited by researchers in the field, even today. Many ceramic-related articles were published in various Malaya- and Malaysia-based periodicals, such as *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, *Sarawak Museum Journal*, *Borneo Research Bulletin*, *Federation Museums Journal*, *Jurnal Arkeologi Malaysia* and *Jurnal Persatuan Muzium Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur became another publishing centre for Southeast Asian ceramic books, such as the following:

- *The Ceramics of South-East Asia: Their Dating and Identification* (1977), Roxanna Brown
- *Ceramics in the Sarawak Museum* (1988), Lucas Chin
- *Northern Thai Ceramics* (1981) and *Thai Ceramics: The James and Elaine Connell Collection* (1993), John Shaw
- *South-East Asian Ceramics: Thai, Vietnamese, and Khmer, from the*

² In June, 1972, the Ministry of Culture decided to close the Art Museum at the University of Singapore, and Willetts' contract ended on 31, January, 1973. The story in detail can be seen at Miksic, John N. 2009. 'Introduction: The SEACS and the NUS Museum' edited by John N. Miksic, *Southeast Asian Ceramics: New Light on Old Pottery*, Singapore: Southeast Asian Ceramic Society, pp. 13-18.

Collection of the Art Gallery of South Australia (1995), Dick Richards

- *The Beauty of Fired Clay: Ceramics from Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand* (1997), Hiromu Honda and Noriki Shimazu

As the study of shipwreck ceramics became more significant in Malaysia, a number of publications were released, including *Turiang: A Fourteen-Century Shipwreck in Southeast Asian Waters* (2000), and *Maritime Archaeology and Shipwreck Ceramics in Malaysia* (2002), and *The Wanli Shipwreck and its Ceramic Cargo* (2008).

Indonesia

The Ceramic Society of Indonesia (CSI) was established in 1973 by Adam Malik (the Chairman of the Board), T.K. Adhyatman (Malik's Secretary) and Sumarah Adhyatman. The list below contains some of the many in-depth studies on ceramics published by CSI:³

- *Annamese Ceramics in the Museum Pusat, Jakarta* (1974)
- *The Adam Malik Art Collection* (1980)
- *Antique Ceramics Found in Indonesia: Various Uses and Origins* (1981)
- *Excavation Report: Pasar Ikan Jakarta* (1981)
- *Notes on Early Olive Green Wares Found in Indonesia* (1983)
- *Tempayan Martavans* (1984)
- *Burmese Ceramics* (1985)
- *Kendi: Traditional Drinking Water Container* (1987)
- *Earthenware Traditions in Indonesia* (1995) (Fig 4)
- *The Pulau Buaya wreck: finds from the Song period* (1998)
- *Zhangzhou (Swatow) ceramics: sixteenth to seventeenth centuries found in Indonesia* (1999).

The journals *Bulletin of the Ceramic Society of Indonesia*, *Berita Penelitian Arkeologi* and *Bulletin of the Research Center of Archaeology of Indonesia* bring together ceramic and archaeological investigation research materials that are particularly important to Southeast Asian

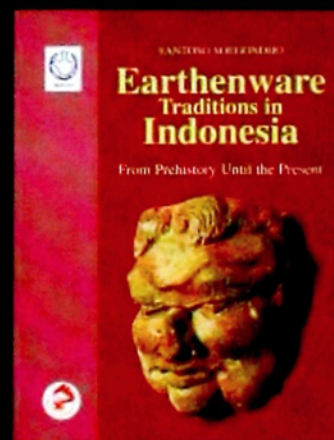


Fig 4 Earthenware Traditions in Indonesia (1995)

³The Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong (OCSHK) was established in 1974, after the ceramic societies were formed in Singapore, West Malaysia and Jakarta. The founding president was Dr. Philip Mao Wen-chee. Information provided by Prof. Peter Lam.

ceramic researchers. Several exhibition catalogues and proceedings have also been published, including the following:

- *Guide to the Ceramic Collection of Museum Pusat Jakarta* (1972)
- *The Sawankhalok Porcelain Exhibition* (1970)
- *Studies on Ceramics* (1984)
- *Proceedings of International Symposium for Japanese Ceramics of Archaeological Sites in South-East Asia: the Maritime Relationship on 17th Century* (2000)
- *Album of Ceramics from Singkawang: Transfer of Traditional Technology* (2002).

The Philippines

The success of the *Manila Trade Pottery Seminar* (1968) and *The Villanueva Collection of Oriental Pottery* (1974) exhibitions provided impetus for the establishment in 1980 of the Oriental Ceramic Society of the Philippines (OCSPP), whose founding president is Roy L. Baughman. Besides printing *The OCSPP Bulletin*, OCSPP also published several colour ceramics catalogues as follow:

- *Guangdong Ceramics from Butuan and other Philippine sites* (1989)
- *Chinese and Southeast Asian Green ware found in the Philippines* (1991) (Fig 5)
- *A Thousand Years of Stoneware Jars in the Philippines* (1992)
- *Chinese and Southeast Asian White ware* (1993)
- *Chinese and Vietnamese Blue-and-White Ceramics found in the Philippines* (1997)
- *Zhangzhou Ware found in the Philippines* (2007).

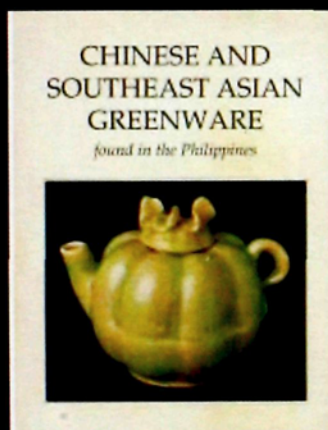


Fig 5 Chinese and Southeast Asian Greenware found in the Philippines (1991)

In 2006, the Society created the online *Newsletter of the Oriental Ceramic Society of the Philippines* to promote public interest in ceramic studies (Panlilio 2006:2). Journals such as the *Philippines Studies*, *National Museum Papers*, *Filipino Heritage*, *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, *Hukay* and *Bulletin of the UP Archaeological Studies Program* contains most of the articles published so far on ceramic excavations in the Philippines. Other books published in the Philippines on ceramic topics include *Discovery and Archaeological*

Excavation of a 16th Century Trading Vessel in the Philippines (1988), *The Pearl Road: Tales of Treasure Ships in the Philippines* (1995) and the *Lena Shoal Archaeological excavation* (1997) which report the significant underwater discoveries of the 15th-century Pandanan and Lena Shoal wrecks in the Philippines.

Thailand

The Siam Society (established in 1904), and SEAMEO-SPAFA (established in 1985), a regional archaeological and fine arts organisation under the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation, created two important platforms in Thailand to allow researchers to publish their ceramic-related articles. The first is the scholarly *Journal of the Siam Society* (JSS). In 1986, a collection of articles from the JSS was reprinted as *Thai Pottery and Ceramics: Collected Articles from the Journal of the Siam Society*. The second is the *SPAFA Digest (Journal)* (Fig 6), which promote awareness and appreciation of the cultural heritage of Southeast Asian countries through research, promotion and development of the traditional and contemporary arts; the preservation of archaeological and historical artefacts; as well as enrichment of cultural activities in the region. SEAMEO-SPAFA's publications on ceramics also include the *Final Workshop Report on Ceramics of East and Southeast Asia* (1981), *Report on Workshop to Standardize Studies on Ceramics of East and Southeast Asia* (1983), and *Final Report of Technical Workshop on Ceramics*, which was published in 1985 (Fig 7). Southeast Asian ceramic studies articles have also appeared in various local journals such as *Muang Boran Journal*, *Sawaddi*, the *Silpakorn Journal*, and the *Thai Journal of Physics*. An online *Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter* was created by Roxanna Brown, and was published between 2004 and 2008, reporting mostly news concerning Southeast Asian ceramics to ceramics enthusiasts (Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum 2004-2008). *The National Museum Volunteers Newsletter* and *The Siam Society*



Fig 6 SPAFA Journal (1996)

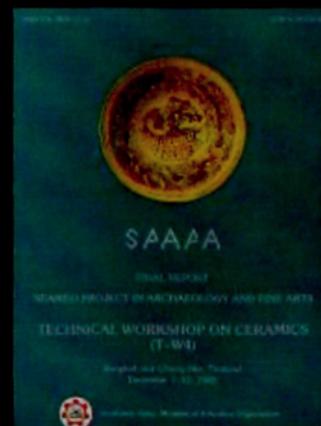
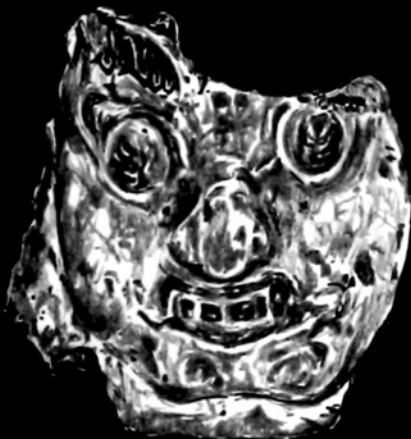


Fig 7 SPAFA Final Report, Technical Workshop on Ceramics (1985)



Sketch of Fragment from
a guardian figure, Sawankhalok,
Thailand, 15th - 16th C
Illustration by
Sakulchat Chatrakul Na Ayutthaya



Sketch of earthenware, Ban Chiang,
Northeast Thailand, 300 - 200 BCE
Illustration by
Sakulchat Chatrakul Na Ayutthaya

Newsletter also offer some updated sources on ceramic studies in Thailand. As for other publications, the following are thematic books on ceramics found in Thailand and its border areas:

- *The Ceramic Wares of Siam* (1965,1971,1978), Charles Nelson Spinks
- *Sino-Thai Ceramics* (1982), Natalie Robinson V.
- *Index: Pottery of Dvaravati Period* (1985), Phasook Indrawooth
- *Introducing Thai Ceramics: Also Burmese and Khmer* (1987), and *Ceramics from the Thai-Burma Border* (2003), John Shaw
- *Sangkhlok-Sukhothai-Ayutthaya and Asia* (2002), Charnvit Kasetsiri (ed.)
- *The Ming Gap and Shipwreck Ceramics in Southeast Asia towards a Chronology of Thai Trade Ware* (2009), Roxanna Brown

The Fine Arts Department of Thailand itself has published reports on ceramic kilns and shipwreck excavations, as listed below:

- *Ceramics and Kilns of San Kampaeng* (1972)
- *Sangkalok Sisatchanalai* (1987)
- *Scientific Analysis Results of Ceramic Samples from Excavated Sites in Thailand* (1991)
- *Ancient Kiln Sites in Buriram Province* (1995)
- *Ceramics from the Sea: Evidence from the Koh Kradaad Shipwreck, excavated in 1979* (1979)
- *Underwater Archaeology in Thailand* (1988).

Some other reports, written in collaboration with Don Hein of the Thai Ceramic Archaeological Project (TCAP), were privately published. Another shipwreck monograph edited by the Faculty of Archaeology, Silpakorn University, is titled *Underwater Archaeology in Thailand II: Ceramics from the Gulf of Thailand* (1990).

Vietnam

Vietnam has a number of renowned museums and institutions that assume an important role in Southeast Asian ceramic studies, particularly research in Vietnamese ceramics. These organisations are the National Museum of Vietnamese History, the Museum of Fine Arts

of Vietnam, the Institute of Archaeology of Vietnam, and the Museum of Vietnamese History in Ho Chi Minh City. Some of the leading Vietnamese researchers in the field of Vietnamese ceramics are Dr. Nguyen Dinh Chien, Dr. Pham Quoc Quan, and Dr. Bui Minh Tri. Several useful publications on Vietnamese ceramics have been produced since the beginning of the 1990s :

- *Vietnamese Ceramic Art* (1990)
- *Vietnamese, Khmer and Thailand Ceramics* (1993)
- *Bat Trang ceramics: 14th-19th centuries* (1995)
- *Keramik aus Vietnam* (1999)
- *Cu Dau Ceramics* (1999)
- *Handbook of Vietnamese ceramics with inscriptions from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth centuries* (1999) (Fig 8)
- *Vietnamese Ceramics in the Museum of Vietnamese History, Ho Chi Minh City* (2000)
- *The Collections of Ceramics in Lam Dong* (2000)
- *Vietnamese Ceramics* (2001)
- *Vietnamese Blue & White Ceramics* (2001)
- *Champa Ceramics: Production and Trade* (2002)
- *Vietnamese Antiquities* (2003)
- *Vietnamese Brown Patterned Ceramics* (2005)
- *2000 years of Vietnamese ceramics* (2005)
- *Ancient Town of Hoi An* (2006)

Most of the journals are in the Vietnamese language, and among those that publish ceramics-related articles are specialized journals:

- *Journal of the Museum of Vietnamese History*
- *Journal of the Institute of Archaeology*
- *Vietnamese Studies*
- *Binh Dinh Culture*
- *Khao Co Hoc*
- *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises*
- *Archaeological Studies*

Shipwreck ceramics is another major research area in Southeast Asian ceramics in Vietnam. *The Ca Mau shipwreck, 1723-1735* (2002) and *Ceramics on Five Shipwrecks off the Coast of Vietnam* (2008) publicise recent underwater discoveries with abundant illustrations and pictures.



Fig 8 *Handbook of Vietnamese Ceramics with Inscriptions from the 15th to 19th Centuries* (1999)

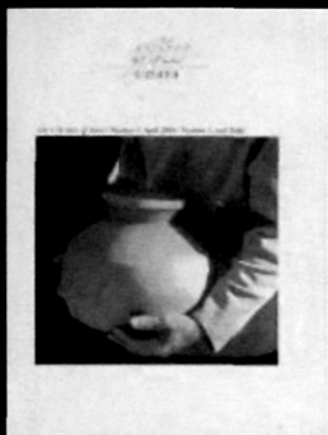


Fig 9 UDAYA: Journal of Khmer Studies (2000)

Cambodia

In Cambodia, there had been little research on the country's ancient ceramics until the 1990s. *Udaya: Journal of Khmer Studies*, published by the Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap (APSARA Authority), is a specialized journal for providing a platform for Khmer cultural studies. In the inaugural issue edited by Prof. Ang Choulean and Prof. Ashley Thompson, Khmer ceramics were chosen as the main theme (Fig 9). Many useful research articles and archaeological reports on ceramics have been published in *Udaya*. Other print journals, such as *Bulletin of the Students of the Department of Archaeology* (Royal University of Fine Arts, Phnom Penh), *Renaissance Culturelle du Cambodge* (Sophia University Angkor International Mission), and the online *Newsletter of the National Center for Khmer Ceramics Revival* (NCKCR), contain details of updated Khmer ceramics finds in Cambodia. Major Khmer ceramics monographs, such as *Tani Kilns A6 Kiln Excavation Research Report* (2005), *The Tani Kiln Site in Cambodia* (2007), *Khmar Po B1 Kiln Site Excavation Report* (2009), and *Archaeological Report on the Thnal Mrech Kiln Site (TMK02) Anlong Thom, Phnom Kulen, Cambodia* (Miksic *et al.* 2009) compiled by Cambodian and foreign scholars, provide detailed archaeological data on Khmer ceramics and their production.



Water jar excavated from Bang Kong Kiln (photo taken by the author, information provided by Mr. Chhay Rachna from APSARA Authority, Siem Reap, Cambodia)



Urns and covered boxes excavated from Thnal Mrech Kiln 02 (photo taken by the author, information provided by Mr. Chhay Rachna from APSARA Authority, Siem Reap, Cambodia)

Brunei

The Brunei Museum was established in 1965, and its journal, *The Brunei Museum Journal* (1969-) covers ceramics finds in Brunei. The articles in the journal include *A Classification of Archaeological Ceramics from Kota Batu* (1970), *Distribution of Chinese and Siamese Ceramics in Brunei* (1981), and *Ceramics Found at Sinaut Agricultural Training Centre* (1991). Some archaeological monographs, including Matussin bin Omar's *Archaeological Excavations in Protohistoric Brunei* (1981) (Maidin 1996:27), have also been published. The Brunei Museums Department has recently become increasingly interested in shipwreck and Southeast Asian ceramics in their own collections, as reflected in the publication of *A Catalogue of Selected Artifacts from the Brunei Shipwreck* (2000), and *Selected Vietnamese ceramics in the Brunei Museums Collection* (2003).



Manunggul jar
Sketch by Sakulchat Chatrakul Na Ayutthaya

Myanmar

The Myanmar Ceramic Society was founded in 1999, and its chairman Myo Thant Tyn actively promotes knowledge in ceramics in Myanmar through, for example, the Conference on Glazed Ceramics of Southeast Asia: their history, technology, and tradition (Bagan, 22-23, September, 1999) and a paper titled *East and Middle East, the Convergence of East and Middle East Glazed Ceramic Traditions in Myanmar* (presented at the 2003 Ceramic Traditions in Myanmar Seminar in Yangon, which was organised by CHAT, SEAMEO Regional Centre for History and Tradition). Myo published his series of studies on Myanmar ceramics in the *Journal of Myanmar Academy of Arts and Science*, namely *Celadon Kilns of Ho-Nar* (2005), *Potter Marks on Myanmar Glazed Ceramics* (2006), *Contribution of Pyu to the History of Myanmar Glazed Ceramics* (2007), and *Design from Ancient Potshards of Twante* (2008, with co-authors Win Kyaing and Than Tun). Other Burmese researchers such as Aung Thaw, Aung Bo, Aung Kyaing, Win Maung, and Than Tun, contributed their knowledge on Myanmar ceramics in several research articles written in Burmese,

but it may not be easy for ceramic enthusiasts to find the materials.⁴ In 1963, Dello Strologo and U Kyaw Nyein reported their findings of ancient kilns in Bagan in the USAID Project Report, *Improved Ceramic Production in Burma*. About twenty years later, research collaborations involving scholars Don Hein, Mike Barbetti, U Nyunt Han, and U Aung Kyaing resulted in the output, *Preliminary investigations of historic ceramic production in Burma, 1988–1990* (2006) (Cort *et al.* 2008). The Archaeological Department in Yangon have produced reports on Myanmar kiln sites, an example of which is the *Report for the Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Kiln No.1, Twante* by Di Crocco, Virginia (2002). There are also several journals which publish essays on ceramic discoveries in Myanmar:

- *Journal of the Burma Research Society*
- *Mandalay Arts and Sciences University Magazine*
- *Khattiya Journal of Applied Science and Technology*
- *Kalaya Magazine*
- *Khauiya*
- *Myanmar Historical Research Journal*

Laos

The ceramics of Laos were first discovered in the Vientiane area in 1970, with the first article on this topic, Hang Minh Kilm's *Viengchan et son Ancien Site* (1970), appearing in the local journal *Bulletin des Amis du Royaume Lao* (Brown 2000:94-95). The Department of the Museum of Lao PDR, The Ministry of Information and Culture, Don Hein and Mike Barbetti of the University of Sydney, Research Institute for Asia and the Pacific participated in a collaboration project. In 1992, the monograph on *An Excavation at the Sisattanak Kiln Site, Vientiane, Lao PDR, 1989* (Bouasisengpaseuth and Thammavong 1996:33) was published. Most Laotian news relating to ceramics are, however, scattered in various journals and exhibition catalogues outside the country.

⁴ Information provided by Mr. Kyaw Minn Htin. I would also like to thank Dr. Goh Geok Yian for showing me Dr. Myo Thant Tyn's *Collection of Articles (1998-2008) on History of Myanmar Glazed Ceramic*.

In conclusion, it is clear that there are several publications on Southeast Asian ceramics in the region since the 1960s, and the effect of their existence is that many ceramic enthusiasts and scholars have increased their interest in Southeast Asian ceramics after the ceramic societies or related institutions were established and issued their own publications, contributing to much progress on Southeast Asian ceramic studies. Undoubtedly, the founders and the successors of the ceramic societies played a key role in forging new visions and directions for the studies. Wider dissemination of information has made topics on archaeological ceramic findings and shipwreck ceramics in the region more significant in recent decades. Printed scholarly journals, periodicals for the general public, bulletins for students in archaeology or fine arts departments, thematic books by expert writers, and monographs published by local heritage institutions serve various functions in bringing attention to Southeast Asian ceramic studies. Interestingly, the above publication lists also reflect a sharp contrast in the development of Southeast Asian ceramic studies in the region. Increasing transnational co-operation in activities such as exhibitions, conferences, workshops, training and research projects with published catalogues, proceedings or reports, will largely improve the imbalanced situation.

Finally, the problems of limited distribution of the publications as well as language barriers in some countries reduce accessibility to potential readers. To overcome these problems, dialogue between ceramic enthusiasts in different disciplines, for example, art historians, collectors, archaeologists, ceramic scientists and artists in our neighbouring countries should be fostered on a regular basis. Online newsletters and websites can serve a purpose in intellectual exchange, and broaden readership in a variety of disciplines. Ultimately, a quality newsletter or website heavily relies on networking and scholarship of the editors and reporters in the field, who represent the hope for Southeast Asian ceramics to attract more attention and encourage ceramic enthusiasts to conduct more in-depth studies in the near future.



Shards
Sketch by
Sakulchat Chatrakul Na Ayutthaya

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