



SURVEY

JULY, 1975

NUMBER THIRTEEN

CHRISTCHURCH CITY COUNCIL
ROBERT McDOUGALL ART GALLERY



oriental ceramics

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

From the tenth to the sixteenth century potteries played a major role in the colourful and interesting history of trade between China and the rest of Southeast Asia. The term 'trade' or 'export' is used to describe wares made in China and exported to other countries. This word calls immediately to mind the huge numbers of misfired and discoloured pots that scholars have believed for so long formed the mainstay of exports out of China as distinct from the highly skilled, supremely perfect Chinese porcelain made exclusively for Imperial use.

There is still good reason to believe that much inferior porcelain was exported, but the increasing quantity of high quality pieces being discovered in places like the Philippines, Borneo, and Indonesia, are causing a rapid reappraisal. Many of the wares found in these places had their origins in kilns in Annam (now Vietnam), Sawankhalok (now Thailand), as well as in South China itself. In recent years there has been a growing awareness of the quality of

'Annamese' wares, with an increasing number of collectors entering what was not so very long ago a quite neglected field. The items recently purchased for the McDougall Art Gallery's Collection have come recently from Indonesia, where they have been released by the National Museum. They represent a considerable period in the development of oriental ceramics.

Trade between China and other parts of the East (and indeed the Middle East) began early in history. A fourteenth century Chinese manuscript records a valuable shipment of merchandise to Canton in 932 by traders from Ma-yi (the Philippines), and it is generally believed that the ship was an Arab one. Although Chinese trading ships are known to have sailed to the Persian Gulf at the time, Arabs had largely dominated the sea routes to and from Asia since the Tang dynasty (618-906). The venturesome Arab traders navigated their sturdy dhows to various ports in India, through the Straits of Malacca, and northwards, skirting the coasts of Indo-China, to reach the main ports of China itself.

It is also on record that the Arabs were expelled from southern and central Chinese



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ports in the ninth century and encouraged to use new routes through the Straits of Malacca, Borneo, the Philippines, Formosa and on to other parts of Southeast Asia. The reopening of the ports of Ch'uan chou and Canton did not force the Middle East traders to neglect their new trade routes, but merely to intensify their activities in these areas. Records of the Sung dynasty mention Chinese trade in the ports of Ch'uan chou and Canton with the Arabs, the Malay Peninsula, Tonking, Siam, Java, Western Sumatra, Western Borneo, parts of the Philippines, and other parts of Southeast Asia. Items traded included gold, silver, coined money, lead, pieces of coloured textiles, porcelain, cotton fabrics, incense and scented wood, in exchange for rhinoceros horns, ivory, coral, amber, strings of pearls, cho-ku shell, rock crystal, cotton goods, ebony, and sapan wood.

The early involvement of Arab traders in the area of Southeast Asia brought cultural influences which exist to the present day, particularly the Muslim religion and social customs.

By the tenth century the Chinese Government was becoming concerned with gaining a greater share of this lucrative trade, sending missions abroad and gradually driving the Arabs from the sea lanes with overwhelming competition. During the thirteenth century the Chinese came to completely dominate the Southeast Asian trade.

Any study of Southeast Asian ceramics and their role in the trade relationships that were built up therefore necessitates a knowledge of Chinese history, however brief, and the developments that affected the art of



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pottery making. A chronological list of the Chinese dynasties is perhaps the first starting point.

- Tang Dynasty 618 - 906
- Five Dynasties 907 - 956
- Northern Sung Dynasty 960 - 1126
- Southern Sung Dynasty 1127 - 1279
- Yuan Dynasty 1280 - 1368
- Ming Dynasty 1369 - 1644
- Ching Dynasty 1645 - 1912

The culture of China dates back to 4,000 BC when, as a rich and powerful nation its emperor received embassies from India, Greece, and Persia, as well as tribute from the smaller states of Southeast Asia. During the seventh century it was probably the most powerful Empire in the world, when its influence reached to Turkestan, parts of Korea, Annam, and Tibet. It was probably

during this time, when the Sassanid Persian ruler appealed to the Chinese Emperor for help against the Arab invasion of Mesopotamia that Sassanian influences crept into China with Western Asian refugees. Great was the influence on ceramic styles in the Tang Dynasty. From India came Buddhist influence which left a deep mark on Chinese culture and religion. Foreign contacts were reflected in all Chinese art forms, especially pottery.

The earliest of these, Tang pottery, is generally characterised by soft earthenware bodies which are a pale buff colour when fired. There is also a stoneware foreshadowing the porcelaneous, high-fired celadons of the Sung period. Shapes are well articulated with a 'blown up' or 'exploding' appearance. There is an abrupt change in contour, usually around a joint



Ming Swatow 2



Ming Swatow 3



Ming Swatow 5

which is hardly ever disguised but usually emphasized, producing flaring mouth rims, high powerful shoulders and splayed foot.

In China, border wars, invasions, and internal troubles brought about a gradual decline in the Tang Dynasty from the eighth century onwards. By 907, the entry of the Ch'i-Tan Mongols from the north caused China to disintegrate into a number of kingdoms. Called the Five Dynasties, this period ended with the establishment of the Sung Dynasty (960-1279) with Kaifeng in the north as its capital. The last Emperor of the Northern Sung Dynasty (960-1126) Hui-Ts'ung, was subject to successive nomadic attacks after the fall of the Tang Dynasty until in 1126 the victorious Chin Tartars deported him to Siberia where he died a few years later. The Northern Sung capital of Kaifeng was sacked, and the Imperial Court forced to flee across the

Yangtze with one of the Sung princes. So was established the Southern Sung Dynasty (1127 - 1279) with its capital in Hangchow.

Classical Northern Sung wares are the olive green celadons with over-all carved floral designs and the boldly decorated Tz'u-chou wares may well be products of south China kilns — kilns located in the provinces south of the Yangtze as far as the areas bordering Annam.

The removal of the Chinese capital to the south created a strong movement towards the development of ceramic kilns in the area. To meet the demands of the Imperial Court which could no longer rely on the inaccessible northern kilns, two pottery centres in Hangchow produced Kuan wares, and other new kilns developed rapidly, brown wares being produced in Fukien Province, Kiangsi turning out a

substitute for the White Ting porcelain of the north, Southern Chekiang Province producing the very popular celadon ware, and the Ching-Te-chen kilns, the famous cobalt decorated porcelain.

The Sung period has been regarded as a time of greatly reduced military power, a restriction of influence brought about by the number of threatening enemies, and a period of marking-time. It is a period characterized by elegance, an intellectual development, a tendency towards the archaic, great refinement and to some extent, a sophisticated cult of simplicity. This all-pervading spirit greatly influenced the ceramics produced during this period.

Generally Sung trade porcelains show great care in manufacture with attention to over-all glazing and shape. Such refinements are specially evident in the thin, clearly cut, unglazed foot rims and in the carefully glazed bases of Sung celadon wares. When compared to the heavier and sturdier wares of the Ming export trade the potting is light and the glaze is usually more unctuous and rich than in later pieces, which sometimes tend to be glassy.

Chinese monopoly of the Southeast Asian trade continued and increased, reaching new peaks in spite of the Mongol invasion by Kublai Khan who overthrew the last Sung Emperor. The Southern Sung capital of Hangchow fell in 1276, soon after the arrival of Marco Polo in China. In 1280 Kublai Khan achieved mastery over all China, giving the name 'Yuan' to a dynasty that was to last only eighty-eight years, for in 1368 the Mongols were expelled, China liberated, and the Ming Dynasty established under the Emperor Hung-wu.

There had been many innovations in the arts in the Yuan period of Mongol rule which had encouraged travel and trade between areas which had previously been at war. Potters began to produce forms familiar to the taste of the new rulers. So that cups with handles and ewers with long spouts, which had never been used by the Chinese before, began to be produced.



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The first appearance of blue-and-white underglaze painting in ceramics may have appeared in the Yuan Dynasty (1280-1368), or it might have been earlier. There is no agreement among scholars that this may have been derived from Persia and Mesopotamia where this form of ornamentation had been in existence for several hundred years.

Generally the Yuan period is thought of as a period of decline and transition while the ensuing Ming period (1369-1644) is seen as a Renaissance with new confidence and vigour, reflected in a national unity under a native imperial dynasty. In ceramics there was a heightened sense of colour, outgoing energy, a revival of the dynamic Tang styles, a liking for classicism, bigness of scale and what some have seen as a 'measure of vulgarity'.

Under-the-glaze painting in blue did not develop fully or reach real popularity until the Ming period. Blue-and-white porcelains replaced the monochrome wares of the Sung and Yuan dynasties and pieces of



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great size and durability were produced in China.

According to Thai tradition, it was in 1294 that Chinese potters were introduced into Thailand. Although Thai ceramic manufacture appears to have been restricted mostly to earthenware before the coming of Chinese influence, the Chaliang kilns north of Sukhotai had long been producing brown-glazed utilitarian wares such as pots and jars with wide mouths. In the fourteenth century, Chaliang, now known as Sawankhalok saw a great upsurge in pottery making. Whether this sprang from Thai desires of gaining part of the highly profitable porcelain market or from direct encouragement of Chinese traders hampered by restrictions at home is no longer clear.

In Sawankhalok native ideas adapted Chinese pottery styles, producing a

spectacular range of wares that were uniquely Thai. The output included painted and monochrome figurines, boxes, bottles, pitchers, cups, bowls, dishes, and a wide variety of export pieces.

Annamese wares were exported in considerable quantities to Indonesia and it is believed that the manufacture of ceramics in Annam has a history almost as old as that of China, which in ancient times exercised some form of suzerainty over the less powerful southern neighbour states. It is not surprising then that the artistic development of Annamese ceramics has intensely reflected Chinese influence. Dating of Annamese ceramics has been largely dependent on similarities to Chinese pieces of different periods. Their Annamese provenance is mostly determined by certain distinguishing features such as the robust and almost naive treatment of Chinese



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ornamental styles and the frequent use of a broad-tipped brush; the use of a basic warm white glaze which frequently is mat, although there are glassy examples; a tendency towards blue-black rather than a cobalt blue in the painting colour, the finely textured, putty-grey-coloured stoneware body, the depressed circular portion at the base of boxes and jarlets forming a medium-to-wide low foot rim; in bowls and dishes, the markedly high foot and the often broad base.

Although Chinese trade continued to flourish throughout the Ming Dynasty and into the Ching period (1645-1912) there was a decline in its relative importance because of the growing ascendancy of the Spanish galleon trade. Nevertheless, Chinese blue-and-white export ware remained popular and in great demand, so that much

is still to be found in antique shops in various parts of the East today.

The pottery of Asia is a direct and vivid reminder of the long and brilliant story of this large and intricate part of the world.

B. D. Muir

Further reading:

Oriental Ceramics Discovered in the Philippines
by Leandro and Cecilia Locsin.
(Charles E. Tuttle Company, Rutland, Vermont & Tokyo, Japan, 1967).

ORIENTAL CERAMICS

Catalogue of pieces owned by the Robert McDougall Art Gallery.



Sung 12

MING SWATOW

14th-15th Centuries

All measurements in centimetres

- 1 Plate, blue underglaze decoration under pale celadon glaze 19 cm (diameter).
- 2 Small plate, blue and white decoration under pale celadon glaze. 13 cm (diameter).
- 3 Shallow bowl, blue underglaze decoration, chrysanthemum and vase design. 21 cm (diameter).
- 4 Shallow bowl, blue and white underglaze decoration, Chinese calligraphic symbol. 12 cm (diameter).
- 5 Square press-mould dish, blue underglaze fish decoration, pale grey glaze with fine crazing. 8 cm (width).
- 6 Squat bottle, blue underglaze decoration, blossom branch under light celadon glaze. 7 cm (height).
- 7 Bottle, blossom branch decoration on body, pale pinky grey glaze with fine crazing. 7 cm (height).
- 8 Bowl, blue and white under glaze decoration, stork wading in water, classic shape. 12.5cm (diameter).

SUNG

11th-12th Centuries

- 9 Shallow dish, classic celadon glaze, blue-green, heavy crazing, glaze over foot. 11.75 cm (diameter).
- 10 Shallow, scraffitto lotus flower under amber celadon glaze, glaze over foot. 12.5 cm (diameter).
- 11 Small press-mould jarlet, two piece, small lugs on top, blossom branch decoration. Pale brown celadon glaze. 5 cm (height).
- 12 Small press-mould jarlet, two piece, small lugs on top, classic grey-green celadon glaze, blossom branch decoration. 5 cm (diameter).
- 13 Press-mould covered box, elaborate rose decoration of trailing vines and flowers, white body, clear glaze. 11 cm (diameter).
- 14 Double gourd shaped bottle, possibly earthenware, traces of polychrome decoration, press moulded and joined in three sections. Flute and scallop design. 9 cm (height).



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ANNAMESE

14th-15th Centuries

- 15 Plate, free scroll brushwork decoration, iron under glaze, glaze worn off. 18 cm (diameter).
- 16 Small jarlet, iron glazed. 6.5 cm (height).
- 17 Box, blue and white decoration in Ming tradition, stylised foliage. 7.5 cm (width).

SAWANKHALOK

14th-15th Centuries

- 18 Small covered box, iron underglaze decoration, fruit decoration applied in clay to lid. 4 cm (diameter).

- 19 Large covered box, grey slip decoration under glaze, splash of brown glaze on knob of lid, foliated geometric design. 11.5 cm (height).
- 20 Ochre glazed squat jar with wide mouth and four ears. 9 cm (height).
- 21 Tall jarlet with small handles at neck, scraffito rings around the top of the bottle, amber coloured ochre glaze. 12 cm (height).
- 22 Large, round jarlet, with heavy incised radial grooves round base and top, small lugs at neck with celadon type glaze and fine crazing. 10 cm (height).
- 23 Small celadon jarlet, small lugs at neck, blue-green celadon glaze running thick to the edge, red-orange body. 6.5 cm (height).
- 24 Tall jar, folded top, four ears, ochre glaze, possibly a tea storage jar. 19 cm (height).



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Annamese 17



Annamese 15



Sawankhalok 18



Sawankhalok 19



Sawankhalok 20



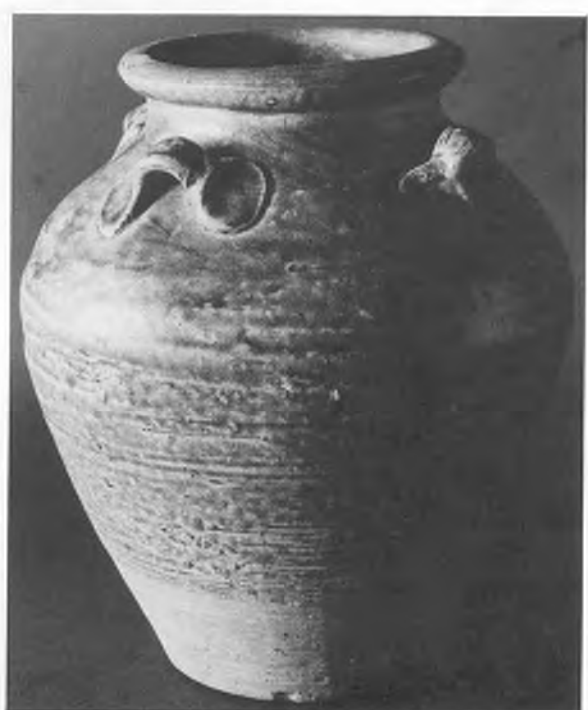
Sawankhalok 21



Sawankhalok 22



Sawankhalok 23



Sawankhalok 24

CHRISTCHURCH CITY COUNCIL

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LOCATION

	Botanic Gardens, Rolleston Ave, Christchurch.
<i>Telephone</i>	40-754
<i>Postal Address</i>	P.O. Box 237, Christchurch.
<i>Gallery Hours</i>	Monday to Saturday (inclusive) 10.00 a.m.-4.30 p.m. Public Holidays 10.00 a.m.-4.30 p.m. Sundays 2.00 p.m.-4.30 p.m. Closed: Christmas Day, Good Friday, Anzac Day.