

# Early History and Distribution of Trade Ceramics in Southeast Asia

Terrence H. Witkowski

*Department of Marketing, California State University, Long Beach, USA*

## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper investigates the early history and distribution of trade ceramics in Southeast Asia over a thousand year period stretching from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE. The goal is to provide a brief overview of this trade and then, based largely on archaeological evidence, further explore physical distribution (transportation routes and hubs; ships, cargo, and packing) and product assortments, adaptation, and globalization of consumer culture.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study takes a material culture approach to the writing of marketing history by researching the ceramics trade through the analytical lens of artifacts and their social context in Southeast Asia. It draws from literatures on the art, archaeology, and history of Chinese and Southeast Asian ceramics. It also is informed by first-hand experience inspecting surviving artifacts in shops, talking to dealers, and taking in museum displays.

**Research limitation/implications** – The literatures provide good overviews of ceramics trade history, but only limited information about their distribution and leave many questions unanswered. This study contributes to international business and marketing history by documenting a thousand years of trade among China, mainland, and insular Southeast Asia, and a long-standing cultural exchange facilitated by seaborne commerce.

**Keywords:** Trade ceramics, Southeast Asia, distribution, marketing history, material culture

**Paper Type:** Research Paper

## Introduction

Trade ceramics in Southeast Asia consist of a large variety of bowls, dishes, cups, saucers, bottles, storage jars, figures, and many other objects made for commercial, domestic, or ritual use (see Figure 1). Ranging from utilitarian, low-fired pottery to durable stoneware to finely decorated, high-quality porcelain, trade ceramics have been found on terrestrial, riverine, and maritime sites all over the region. Wares from China dominated export markets during much of the thousand year period starting in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, but objects from Thai and Vietnamese kilns also had a significant presence for well over a hundred years, especially during the 15<sup>th</sup> century when the Chinese emperor clamped down on private exports and shipping. This era has come to be known as the “Ming Gap” (Brown, 2008; Miksic, 2009b). The Southeast Asian ceramics trade involved local Cham, Malay, and Javanese peoples; attracted merchants from Arabia, Persia, and India; and, in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, saw the entry of the Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch. This paper presents a history of these trade ceramics and provides further details about their export distribution, a topic so far neglected in the marketing history literature.

Ideas from material culture studies inform the historical research and writing. Artifacts – in this case ceramic objects – provide the analytical point of departure. They are worthy of study in and of themselves as tangible goods that embody aesthetic qualities and cultural heritage, but equally important they provide an analytical lens for surveying and documenting early marketing and distribution. Globally, ceramics have been traded, and have facilitated trade, over long distances for thousands of years. For example, Twede (2002) describes how large commercial earthenware jars known as amphorae were used to ship wine and other products throughout the Mediterranean world from 1500 B.C. to 500 A.D. Southeast Asian trade ceramics shed light on how producers, merchants, shippers, and consumers interacted in social contexts much different from those of other times and places. Their history contributes to knowledge of the international distribution of goods and how consumer culture was globalized in the past. Given the maritime context, and the often stunning photographic evidence published in books and articles, research on Southeast Asian trade ceramics adds richness and a touch of romance to the understanding early distribution and marketing history.

The remainder of the paper starts with a discussion of material culture data sources for writing marketing history. Then, the next two sections will present a brief historical overview of the ceramics export trade in Southeast Asia, followed by a more specific discussion of where, how, and by whom this distribution was conducted. Transportation routes and hubs; the different types of ships, their cargoes, and packing for export; and product assortments and consumer use of ceramics in different markets will all be considered.

Figure 1. Examples of Thai, Vietnamese, and Chinese Trade Ceramics from Shipwrecks



Thai celadon bowl from Royal Nanhai wreck, ca. 1460 (upper left) and Vietnamese export wares from Hoi An wreck, ca. late 15<sup>th</sup> century (upper right). Chinese “Nanking Cargo” porcelain, ca. 1752 (bottom row).

**Material culture data sources**

As physical objects that have survived from earlier times to the present, trade ceramics not only provide a tangible link to the past, but also potentially convey a good deal of primary data. When recovered in situ on land or under water and using the methods of professional archaeologists, information can be retrieved from these artifacts and their context about manufacturing techniques, transportation routes and hubs, modes of shipping, packing techniques, and product assortments in form and decoration for different foreign markets. Physical evidence and its analysis are crucial because relatively few original written sources from the earlier periods have survived. In the case of the Southeast Asian ceramics trade, Chinese official records and other sources provide only a few brief

written accounts of maritime commerce (see Crick, 2010). Not until the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* or VOC) entered the Southeast Asia trade in the 1600s were detailed shipping documents compiled that still exist today (Jörg and Flecker, 2001).

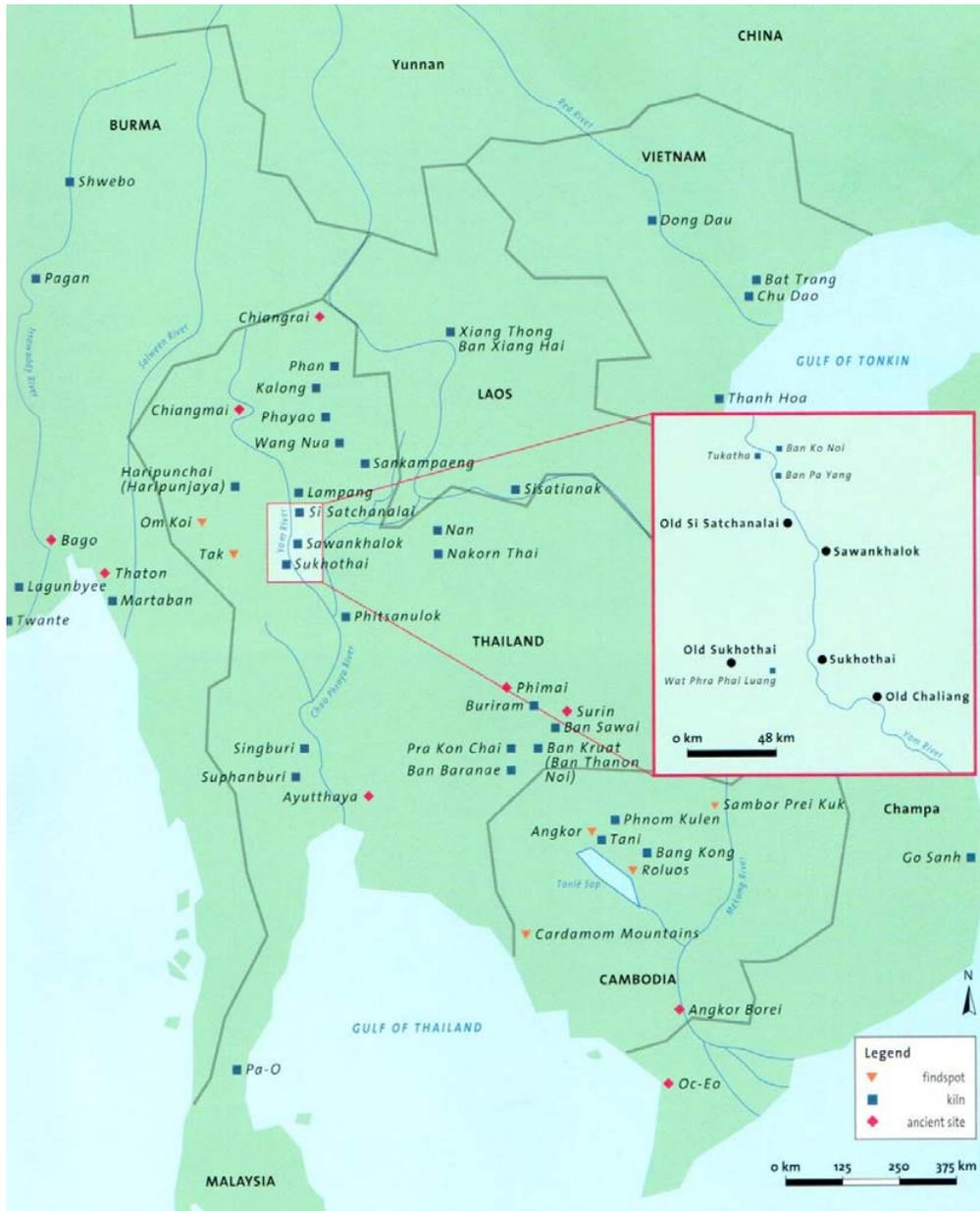
Relatively little had been published on Southeast Asian archaeology and art history relevant to trade ceramics until the late 1960s. Then, the scholarly literature proliferated as an era of well-documented land excavations and professional maritime salvage operations began in earnest. Over the next 40 years, numerous kiln, habitation, and burial sites on both mainland and insular Southeast Asia were recorded and over 100 sunken ships and their ceramic cargoes have been found (see Figures 2 and 3). Shipwrecks are potentially excellent data sources because the timber

Figure 2. Sites of Trade Ceramics Found in Southeast Asia



Source: Miksic (2009, p. 8)

Figure 3. Sites of Trade Ceramics Found in Southeast Asia



Source: Miksic (2009, p. 8)

remains of vessels along with some of the other organic cargo they carried may enable reasonably precise dating through dendrochronology (analysis of tree rings) and radiocarbon methods (see, Adams, 2001; Flecker, 2001; Krahl et al., 2010). If coins are present, they may be stamped with information about when they were produced. However, Chinese coins were often used over several centuries and thus may predate the wreck on which they are found (Flecker, 2001). Ideally, these methods can be used in combination.

Ceramics researchers are primarily concerned with dating trade ceramics and assigning them to various kilns (Brown, 1988, 2008; Miksic, 2009a, 2009b). Art historians and archaeologists see trade ceramics as having aesthetic significance and as being material sources of knowledge about the cultures that created and used them. Their scholarly interest emerged partially as a response to growing collecting activity, which, in turn, was stimulated by artifacts brought to dealers by Indonesian villagers, Vietnamese fishermen, and Hmong and other hill tribes in western Thailand (Brown, 1988; Crossette, 1986; Jörg and Flecker, 2001; Watkins, 2009). In the 1980s, Michael Hatcher, an Australian salvage operator, recovered great numbers of porcelains from a sunken Ming junk (1643-1646) and from the Dutch ship *Geldermalsen* (1752). In 1999, he raised the ceramics' cargo from the *Tek Sing* wreck (1822). Many other deep-water sites in the region have been discovered and mined (Flecker, 2002, 2009). Subsequent auction sales often have been spectacular events [1]. An antiquities market comprised of dealers, auction houses, and private and institutional collectors is keen on knowledge that dates these objects, identifies their places of origin and use, and assigns monetary values. Public museums in Southeast Asia have sometimes sponsored original archaeological research and governments have partnered with commercial salvors to excavate wreck sites (Flecker, 2001, 2009; Nguyen, 2002; Pope, 2007). Underwater archaeology often requires a substantial financial investment to rent equipment and hire divers and other crewmembers.

This study draws heavily from the secondary literature, but is also informed by the author's personal collecting of antique Southeast Asian trade ceramics. Over the years, I have physically examined hundreds of artifacts, talked with dealers in shops in Bangkok, Hanoi, Hong Kong, and Singapore, bid at eBay auctions, and surfed online dealer sites. This marketplace experience has been augmented by numerous visits to museums to take in permanent collections and special exhibits. Direct contact with artifacts, not unlike physically examining old written documents in archives, can motivate the researcher and sharpen the eye for design details.

Artifacts have both advantages and disadvantages as data sources for marketing history (Witkowski and Jones 2006). Ceramics were used by a broad cross-section of the population in Southeast Asia and, therefore, may be more representative data sources than texts. Moreover, objects are generally less self-conscious cultural expressions and, therefore, conceivably more truthful (Prown, 1982). Through their style, objects communicate tacit but fundamental values of a society (Prown, 1980). On the other hand, physical data sources suffer from their own shortcomings. Artifacts do not reveal details about their distribution and use as directly as do some written records, such as personal diaries or company records. Ceramics can survive many centuries of burial on land or under water, whereas leather, wooden, and base metal consumer goods rarely last under these conditions and textiles hardly at all. Thus, ceramics tend to be overrepresented among material artifacts. Ceramic objects often have survived because they possess special attributes, such as high quality, artistic values, or a history of ownership by distinguished or affluent families. More common or cruder artifacts experienced harder use, deteriorated more rapidly, and were more likely to have been discarded as junk. Their survival rate is much less than that of high-style objects and this may too bias our image of the past.

### Historical overview

The oldest Chinese pottery discovered in Southeast Asia was made during the western Han period (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries CE), but examples are rather rare. The incidence of surviving artifacts suggests that a significant ceramics export trade did not develop until the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century during the later Tang Dynasty (618-907) (Crick, 2010; Miksic, 2009b). By then, merchants from India, Champa (central Vietnam), Malaya, Java, Persia, and Arab lands had become proficient at long-distance shipping. Coastal trading posts were established throughout Southeast Asia – spreading Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic culture in the process – and ships were now sailing north to Guanzhou (Canton), Yangzhou, and other Chinese ports in search of wares. In response, a number of different kilns in China (see inset, Figure 2), especially in Fujian, Guangdong, and Jiangxi Provinces, began producing for export. Chinese stoneware and porcelain were technologically superior to porous, brittle earthenware and, hence, were in great demand, not just in Southeast Asia, but as far north as Japan and

as far west as the Middle East and Europe. Despite some interruptions, this trade continued during the Song (960-1279), Yuan (1271-1368), and early Ming (1368-1644) Dynasties. Chinese ships eventually began to venture out and by the 11<sup>th</sup> century large ocean-going junks had appeared (Crick, 2010).

Chinese ceramics dominated the export market in Southeast Asia for hundreds of years. Yet, in 1372 the Ming Hongwu emperor banned private overseas trade for reasons still not entirely clear to historians (Brown, 2009). Xenophobic thinking among the official classes may have been fueled by their deep resentment of the wealth merchants were accumulating (Sheaf and Kilburn, 1988). Exports did not cease immediately, but archaeological evidence of Chinese ceramics from the 15<sup>th</sup> century is sparse, whereas the relative proportions of Thai and Vietnamese shards at documented sites increase dramatically in this period. Thus, imperial policies created a “Ming Gap” that provided export opportunities for potteries in Thailand and Vietnam. Ironically, while halting private trade, the Ming rulers sent out seven major naval expeditions between 1403 and 1433. Under the command of the highly capable Admiral Zheng He, these fleets traveled as far as the Indian Ocean and the east coast of Africa, trading Chinese for local goods when they dropped anchor and visited local kingdoms and sultanates. The voyages ended when wars against the northern Mongols took funding priority. China’s maritime power went into decline for 150 years (Sheaf and Kilburn, 1988).

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, much of present day Thailand was ruled by the Kingdom of Ayutthaya, which had incorporated Sukhothai and Chiang Mai to the north and had subdued the Khmer empire based at Angkor to the east. Ayutthaya became an entrepôt where goods from the east (China), south (Malaya), and west (India and Arabia) were exchanged (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005). Production sites of export ceramics were concentrated in Sawankhalok, Sukhothai, Suphanburi, San Kamphaeng, and Singburi in northern and central Thailand (see Figure 2; Brown, 2009). These kilns were located near the Yam River. Cargoes were shipped downstream to the Chao Phraya River and then toward the Gulf of Thailand where they could be transferred to seagoing vessels heading toward the Java Sea and island Southeast Asia. Thailand exported a number of different types of stoneware bowls, boxes, jars, and ewers, many of which featured a pale-green celadon glaze (see Figure 1) (Brown, 1988; Miksic, 2009b). Trade in Thai ceramics went on with little interruption from about 1400 until the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. Data from a variety of archaeological sites indicate that, in general, Thai ceramics were the most popular after the Chinese (Miksic, 2009b).

Vietnam has had a long history of ceramics production and ports on the Gulf of Tonkin established trade connections as early as the Han period. However, the export of ceramics did not get under way until the 15<sup>th</sup> century when Vietnam was under the rule of the later Le Dynasty (1428-1524). Its most important kilns were in the Red River area near Hanoi (see Figure 3). Archaeological finds indicate that the most sustained and concentrated Vietnamese trade went to the Indonesian islands of Java and Sulawesi, but significant quantities also have been found in Malaysia and the Philippines, as well as the former Thai capitals of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya. Some Vietnamese artifacts have been discovered as far afield as Japan and the Middle East (Guy, 1997). Vietnamese ceramics were usually high-fired stoneware and not true porcelain whose technology only the Chinese had mastered. Vietnamese kilns produced bowls and other objects with green or brown glazes. They also made ceramics with hand-painted, underglaze cobalt blue decorations on a white background, which resembled finer Ming porcelains (see Figure 1). This similarity to Chinese wares may have increased the value of Vietnamese exports in some areas (Miksic, 2009b).

Despite continuing Imperial prohibitions on seagoing ships, enforcement was spotty and Chinese merchants were again trading in Southeast Asia by the early 1500s. When the Portuguese first arrived in Malacca in 1509, they counted five Chinese junks in port. Eventually acknowledging the futility of trying to ban private shipping, the Chinese government changed policy in 1567 and began issuing export licenses (Sheaf and Kilburn, 1988). By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Chinese trade ceramics had reentered the export market in force and had displaced their Thai and Vietnamese competitors (Brown, 1988). China’s recovery of market domination may have been assisted by Thailand’s wars with the Burmese empire, which closed some Thai kilns, and by the restrictive policies of Vietnam’s inward-looking Mac dynasty (1528-1592). Chinese-made ceramics accounted for most of the trade in Southeast Asia during the remainder of this history. However, supply disruptions occurred over the two decades of civil war that followed the fall of the Ming dynasty (Jörg and Flecker, 2001). Apparently, Vietnamese potters once again took advantage of the situation. Dutch East India Company records mention shipments of coarse “Tonkin” porcelain in 1669, 1670, and 1672 (Brown, 1988).

After 1511, Chinese maritime operations were threatened by the arrival of the Portuguese who attempted to force merchant ships to put into their stronghold in Malacca and pay high duties. The Portuguese influence further increased after 1535 when they obtained rights to anchor off Macau and conduct trading activities. The Dutch came to the region in 1596. They quickly overshadowed Portuguese sea power and took control of Malacca in 1641. They too tried to monopolize trade, but by the 1640s had decided it would be more profitable to leave Chinese networks intact and even allow Chinese merchants to settle in the colonial port city of Batavia (now Jakarta). As China's trade with Europe began to expand, more ships carrying cargoes of tea, silk, and ceramics sailed south along the coasts of Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia on their way to Batavia where parts of their cargoes would be transhipped to the West by the Dutch and the remainder sold in nearby Southeast Asian markets. By the late 17<sup>th</sup> century high quality blue and white porcelains from kilns in Jingdezhen had become a prominent part of this trade (Sheaf and Kilburn, 1988). By one estimate, Chinese junks were bringing 2,000,000 pieces of porcelain to Batavia each year with 400,000 being purchased by the Dutch East India Company, another 400,000 by private merchants, and 1,200,000 by local and inter-Asian traders (Jörg and Flecker, 2001).

The Spanish added still another player in the ceramics trade of Southeast Asia. They began to settle in the Philippines in 1565 and established headquarters in Manila in 1571 where regional trade networks had already been well organized among Chinese, Filipinos, Malays, and other groups (Crick, 2010). As early as 1573 the Spanish started to send galleons filled with Asian goods including ceramics across the Pacific to Acapulco and then eventually to Europe. The silver mines of New Spain (Mexico) and Potosi (Bolivia) provided ample financing and so supplying these ships offered new opportunities for Asian merchants. Manila boomed and Chinese junks began to arrive with ever-greater frequency (Crick, 2010).

### **Distribution of trade ceramics**

#### *Transportation routes and hubs*

Bodies of water are physical barriers, but also means of connecting societies (Adams, 2001). Before the age of steam arrived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, seaborne trade in Southeast Asia was quite literally driven by the monsoon winds that blow from the northeast to the southwest during the months of October to April and from the southwest to the northeast in the months of April to October. Thus, ships sailed down the South China Sea (*Nanhai* or Southern Sea in Chinese) in the winter and returned north in the summer. Ships destined for India, the Middle East, and later Europe would turn northwest at the tip of the Malay peninsula and transit the Malacca Strait, whereas those headed for the islands of Indonesia would turn the opposite direction into the Java Sea (see Figure 2). The voyage from Canton (Guangzhou) in southern China to Palembang on the island of Sumatra took three to four weeks and the return trip from Sumatra, Java, or the west coast of Borneo would take less than 50 days (Crick, 2010). However, voyages would have taken longer if traders made stops at different ports along the way. Ships typically hugged the coasts, but also crossed the South China Sea to trade with the Philippines and Borneo or ventured into the Bay of Bengal to reach Ceylon and India.

Over the centuries, different places in coastal China and Southeast Asia emerged as transportation hubs where ships would stop to trade ceramics and other goods for local products. A major hub was established in Canton where the Chinese government set up a Maritime Customs Office in 713 (Crick, 2010). Ceramics were also shipped from ports farther north, such as Chouzhou and Fuzhou that were accessible to the kilns in coastal China. The Chinese hubs attracted thousands of resident foreign merchants – Chams, Malays, Indians, Persians, and Arabs – who lived in their own city quarters and who had their own religious buildings and burial sites (Krahl et al., 2010). Ships heading southwest would pass Hainan island and then often stop to trade with the Cham people who lived on the east coast of today's central Vietnam. Champa villages became ports of call that sold local amber, gold and silver objects, ivory, rhinoceros horns, and tortoise shells (Crick, 2010). Farther south, located 80 kilometers up the Sumatra's Musi River, Palembang was the capital of the Malay Srivijaya kingdom, which existed from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries (Krahl et al., 2010). Many trade ceramics have been found in the area. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch East India Company became an important dealer in trade ceramics. VOC offices were established in Batavia (Jakarta), the Malay Peninsula, Thailand, Cambodia, and in both southern and northern Vietnam (Brown, 1988). These hubs received cargoes from Chinese and Vietnamese merchant vessels, and also were ports of disembarkation for company-owned Dutch ships.

*Ships, cargo, and packing*

Documented maritime excavations show that trade ceramics were carried by ships from different lands embodying different types of construction, wood species, and nautical technologies (Flecker, 2009). The ca. 826 Belitung wreck was an Arab *dhow* that must have traveled from the Middle East to China and then foundered in Indonesian waters on her way home (Flecker, 2001; Krahl et al., 2010). In contrast, the Intan wreck from the early to mid-10<sup>th</sup> century and the Java Sea wreck from the mid to late 13<sup>th</sup> century were Indonesian ships of lashed lug construction. Over twenty other wrecks, such as the late 15<sup>th</sup> century ship found off Hoi An, were in the “South China Sea Tradition,” a combination of Chinese and Southeast Asian shipbuilding techniques. Still other wrecks included Chinese junks (Binh Thuan wreck, early 17<sup>th</sup> century; Tek Sing 1822), a Portuguese ship built in India (Wanli wreck, c. 1625), a Chinese-Portuguese *lorcha* (Vung Tau wreck c. 1690), the Dutch vessel *Geldermalsen* (aka the “Nanking Cargo,” 1752), and a British Indian ship named *Diana* (1817). Thus, over the centuries, the merchant ships in Southeast Asian waters could be Arab, Persian, Chinese, Indian, Cham, Malay, Javanese, Portuguese, Dutch, or English.

These ships transported diverse cargos. For example, the ceramics found on the Belitung wreck were sourced from a variety of locations in China (Krahl et al., 2010). The excavation also yielded lead ingots, cast iron and copper metalware, Chinese mirrors and a glass bottle, remains of a spice (star anise), and bronze and gold coins (Flecker, 2001). The Vung Tau wreck carried high quality blue and white porcelains definitely destined for European markets, but also more Chinese-styled white ware, as well as many provincial pieces for Southeast Asian customers. In addition, salvagers found some evidence of tea, dried fish, and possibly paint pigments as cargo. Because these lighter items do not easily survive centuries underwater, their precise amounts on board the different shipwrecks are hard to estimate, but may have been considerable. Written records show that in 1694 the Dutch East India Company purchased 19,050 pounds of red paint from junks arriving in Batavia (Jörg and Flecker, 2001). The Vung Tau ship was probably en route to Batavia, the eastern headquarters of the VOC and home to a growing community of Chinese merchants. Some goods would be transshipped to Europe, and others dispersed more locally. Ships returning to China would carry rice, areca nuts, spices (e.g. black pepper, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg), tropical products (e.g. sandalwood, buffalo horns, elephant tusks, edible bird’s nests), Dutch piece goods, lead, and silver coins (Blussé, 1986; Jörg and Flecker, 2001).

Material evidence of packing for export is scarce because it was originally removed for consumption or, in the case of shipwrecks, had deteriorated over time. However, underwater photographs from the ca. 826 Belitung shipwreck show large wide-mouthed ceramic jars with from 80 to 140 bowls stacked inside (Flecker, 2001; Krahl et al., 2010). Later Chinese paintings depict straw being woven into nets that held stacks of bowls and the packing of bowls in wooden barrels (Jörg and Flecker, 2001, pp. 148, 157). Remnants of these barrels were found in the ca. 1690 Vung Tau wreck. Bowls and dishes from shipwrecks are often found on the seabed still neatly stacked together. Inexpensive provincial wares were stowed less carefully than finer quality blue and white ceramics. Because of their weight, ceramic objects often served double duty as ship’s ballast.

Ships and shipping must have had a profound effect on the lives and imaginations of the peoples of insular Southeast Asia. The spectacular 9<sup>th</sup> century Borobudur monument in central Java has five relief carvings of sailing ships fitted with an outrigger for stability (see Crick, 2010, p. 19; Krahl et al., 2010, p. 17). A very large, mound-like Buddhist stupa, Borobudur has many relief sculptures depicting daily life in the time of the Sailendra dynasty. Sailendra was a thalassocracy (a maritime state like that of the Phoenicians in the Mediterranean), which traded with nearby Srivijaya and other places in Southeast Asia. Much later, Dutch prints and drawings from the 1600s show ships off of Hanoi, Malacca, Banten (west Java), Batavia, and Manila (see Crick, 2010, pp. 43, 44, 47; Guy, 1997, p. 53; Jörg and Flecker, 2001, p. 14). Interestingly, Southeast Asian trade ceramics had a wide variety of decorative motifs, but only one piece, a large Vietnamese dish from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, is known to have an image of ships (Stevenson and Guy, 1997, p. 330).

**Product assortments, adaptation, and consumer use**

Surviving artifacts provide evidence that trade ceramics were adapted for the peoples of different areas within Southeast Asia. Pieces made in China have been found decorated in Arabic calligraphy or in forms (ewers, writing cases) associated with Middle Eastern metalwork (see Crick, 2010, pp. 248, 270, 380). These may have been destined for Muslim communities in the region or possibly shipwrecked on the way to South Asia or the Middle East. Arab and Persian traders began to establish themselves

in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and eventually Muslim kingdoms emerged in Malaya, Borneo, Sumatra, and Java. Also in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Vietnamese kilns began producing *kendi* (a type of glazed pouring vessel with a mammiform spout) and wall tiles specifically for export. The number of surviving examples suggests they were popular trade goods (Guy, 1997). Similarly, some Thai export wares, according to ceramics historian J.C. Shaw, were designed to meet the tastes of Indonesian buyers rather than local Thai preferences (see Miksic, 2009b, p. 92).

However, the overwhelming majority of trade ceramics originating in China appears to have been of Chinese form and was usually decorated with Chinese images, symbols, and characters. These changed over time as manufacturing techniques improved and as new fashions dictated. For example, during the Ming and early Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, fine white porcelains with hand painted decoration in cobalt blue became more common. These ceramics showed fishermen, scholars, and musicians. Chrysanthemums and dragons were frequently painted. Peacocks symbolized beauty and dignity and the mythical phoenix signified times of good government and peace, among other meanings (Crick, 2010). Chinese styles appear to have been very popular in Southeast Asia just as they were in Europe. Dragons, phoenixes, and peonies were even incorporated into the wares produced by Vietnamese potters (see examples in Stevenson and Guy, 1997). Thus, trade ceramic distribution suggests the dissemination of Chinese material forms and aesthetics, dimensions of Chinese culture that may themselves have evolved over time.

Many trade ceramics, such as jars, ewers, cups and bowls, were intended for domestic use, especially the consumption of food. Large jars were used to store food (in brine or marinade), water, and fermented drinks. Small jarlets contained precious medicines, cosmetics and perfumes to be doled out sparingly. Made by Chinese, Thai, and Vietnamese potters, they have been found in many locations, sometimes, as in the case of the Hoi An shipwreck, in great numbers. Because Southeast Asian societies spent a good deal of time squatting and eating on the ground, ceramics needed to be sturdy and stable. Items such as water droppers and brush pots were used in writing and painting with inks. Small statuettes could be used simply for decoration or as toys for children.

Many items also served votive purposes, including use in funeral rites. In the Animist religions that pre-dated Islam and Christianity, ordinary objects became grave goods to accompany the deceased. Early in 1984, in western Thailand near the Burmese border, Hmong and other hill tribes began excavating as many as 100 old burial sites, probably the remains of Thai or Mon peoples (Brown, 1988; Crossette, 1986). In addition to some swords, jewelry, and other objects, these graves contained massive numbers of Chinese Song, Yuan and Ming pottery, as well as Thai celadon wares from the kilns at Kalong, Sawankhalok, and Sukhothai. Trade ceramics have been recovered from graves throughout Southeast Asia. Most are rather ordinary bowls that may have been used by the deceased.

### Conclusion

Trade between different groups of people has had an ancient history. This paper has discussed long-standing exchange in Southeast Asia conducted among Chinese, Southeast Asian peoples, Indians, and Arabs. Facilitated by seaborne distribution, trade ceramics reached customers throughout the region. Although some adaptations were made for local markets, these goods generally exposed people to the same styles and decorative motifs strongly rooted in Chinese, Thai, and Vietnamese civilizations. In this way, past consumer cultures were globalized to some degree. Ceramics excavated from archaeological sites on land and under water document this trade. The material culture approach to artifacts as a data source and analytical approach allows business and marketing historians to reconstruct trade patterns, the methods of export distribution, and some details of the societies and cultures involved. Surviving written accounts and visual depictions of ceramics production augment the physical data.

Material, written, and visual forms of evidence are helpful in reconstructing some of the early history of the ceramics trade in Southeast Asia, but many questions remain about how this distribution was carried out and by whom. How, for example, were relative “prices” of trade goods – ceramics, foods, spices – negotiated and established through barter? Did the terms of trade – the relative prices among goods – change over time? Were ceramics sold on credit? Was there competition among rival kilns, merchants, and ship owners? How much did buyers know about the sources of goods? How were caugos of trade ceramics resold after being offloaded at different places in Southeast Asia? Were there auction sales at portside and were small loads of ceramics taken inland by itinerant peddlers as they were in, for example, colonial America? Were there retail shops in Southeast Asian towns and

cities that carried or even specialized in ceramics? It is hoped that new discoveries will help to answer these and other questions about the early distribution of trade ceramics in Southeast Asia.

#### Note

[1] Early trade ceramics in Southeast Asia, like other antiquities, have had a dual history of distribution: the periods when they were originally exported, used, buried, or lost at sea and modern times when they were discovered, brought to market, and sold again. The history of this re-distribution and re-marketing is quite interesting in itself, but beyond the scope of the present paper. Suffice it to say that modern commerce raises serious ethical issues since diggers and looters rarely maintain archaeological standards and, as a consequence, valuable cultural information is lost (see Flecker, 2002; Miller, 1992). International conventions and source country anti-trafficking laws may also be broken.

#### References

- Adams, J. (2001), "Ship and boats as archaeological source material", *World Archaeology*, Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 292-310.
- Baker, C. and Phongpaichit, P. (2005), *A History of Thailand*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Blussé, L. (1986), *Strange Company—Chinese Settlers, Mestizo Women and the Dutch in VOC Batavia*, Foris Publications, Dordrecht, Netherlands.
- Brown, R.M. (1988), *The Ceramics of South-East Asia: Their Dating and Identification*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Art Media Resources, Ltd., Chicago.
- Brown, R.M. (2009), *The Ming Gap and Shipwreck Ceramics in Southeast Asia: Towards a Chronology of Thai Trade Ware*, River Books Co. Ltd., Bangkok.
- Crick, M. (2010), *Chinese Trade Ceramics for South-East Asia from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century*, Foundation Baur and 5 Continents Editions, Geneva and Milan.
- Crossette, B. (1986), "Looters imperil unknown people's past," *New York Times* (September 9), p. C.3.
- Flecker, M. (2001), "A Ninth-century AD Arab or Indian shipwreck in Indonesia: First evidence for direct trade with China," *World Archaeology*, Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 335-354.
- Flecker, M. (2002), "The ethics, politics, and realities of maritime archaeology in Southeast Asia," *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology*, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 12-24.
- Flecker, M. (2009), "Maritime archaeology in Southeast Asia," in *Southeast Asian Ceramics: New Light on Old Pottery*, John N. Miksic, ed. Singapore: Southeast Asian Ceramic Society, pp. 34-47.
- Guy, J. (1997), "Vietnamese ceramics in international trade," in Stevenson, J. and Guy, J. (Eds.), *Vietnamese Ceramics: A Separate Tradition*, Art Media Resources, Chicago, pp. 46-61.
- Jörg, C.J.A. and Flecker, M. (2001), *Porcelain from the Vung Tau Wreck: The Hallstrom Excavation*, Sun Tree Publishing Ltd., Singapore.
- Krahl, R., Guy, J., Wilson, J.K., and Raby, J. (2010), *Shipwrecked: Tang Treasures and Monsoon Winds*, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Miksic, J.N. (2009a), "Kilns of Southeast Asia," in Miksic, J.N. (Ed.), *Southeast Asian Ceramics: New Light on Old Pottery*, Southeast Asian Ceramic Society, Singapore, pp. 48-69.
- Miksic, J.N. (2009b), "Research on ceramic trade, within Southeast Asia and between Southeast Asia and China," in Miksic, J.N. (Ed.), *Southeast Asian Ceramics: New Light on Old Pottery*, Southeast Asian Ceramic Society, Singapore, pp. 70-99.
- Miller, G.L. (1992), "The second destruction of the Geldermalsen," *Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 26, No. 4, pp. 124-131.
- Nguyen, D.C. (2002), *The Ca Mau Shipwreck, 1723 – 1735*, Ca Mau Department of Culture and Information and The National Museum of Vietnamese History, Hanoi.
- Pope, F. (2007), *Dragon Sea: A True Tale of Treasure, Archaeology, and Greed off the Coast of Vietnam*, Harcourt, Inc., Orlando, FL.
- Prown, J.D. (1980), "Style as evidence," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 15, pp. 197-210.
- Prown, J.D. (1982), "Mind in matter: An introduction to material culture theory and method," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 17, pp 1-19.
- Sheaf, C. and Kilburn, R. (1988), *The Hatcher Porcelain Cargoes: The Complete Record*, Phaidon-Christie's Ltd., Oxford, UK.

- State Art Collections Dresden (1998), *Guide to the Permanent Collection in the Dresden Zwinger*, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Porzellansammlung, Meissen, Germany.
- Stevenson, J. and Guy, J., eds. (1997), *Vietnamese Ceramics: A Separate Tradition*, Art Media Resources, Chicago.
- Twede, D. (2002), "Commercial amphoras: The earliest consumer packages?" *Journal of Macromarketing*, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 98-108.
- Watkins, P.M. (2009), "New light on old pottery: The founding of SEACS," in Miksic, J.N. (Ed.), *Southeast Asian Ceramics: New Light on Old Pottery*, Southeast Asian Ceramic Society, Singapore, pp. 20-25.
- Witkowski, T.H. and Jones, D.G.B. (2006), "Qualitative historical research in marketing," in Belk, R. W. (Ed.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, UK, pp. 70-82.