

Workshop Paper

Exports of Chinese Porcelains Up to the Yuan Dynasty

By Professor Feng Xian Ming

Background to the Export of Chinese Porcelains

China is known the world over as the "country of porcelains". Far back in the Eastern Han period, more than seventeen centuries ago, mature green-glaze porcelains appeared in Zhejiang province, thus completing the transition from proto-porcelains to full-fledged ceramics. During the Tang dynasty, porcelain-making techniques were further advanced. The green porcelains of Yuyao county, the white-porcelains of Lincheng county, the underglazed porcelains of Changsha and the three-colored porcelains of Gongxian county won fame throughout the country for their unique local flavor and style.

Chang'an, capital of the Tang dynasty, was one of the centers of international trade in the orient and its West Market was reserved for trade with foreign merchants. Products of the kilns of Yuyao, Lincheng, Changsha and Gongxian, appearing for the first time on the market in Chang'an, caused a sensation among foreign merchants who hunted around for specimens to take back to their own countries. The market for Tang dynasty porcelains grew. They were shipped overland on the old Silk Road and overseas in Arab and Chinese bottoms to many countries in Asia. In those days Chinese porcelains were unique, since no other Asian countries had them as yet. Moreover, they were much more attractive than pottery.

Contributing Factors to Increased Exports

In the Song dynasty, exports increased dramatically both in volume and in the number of foreign markets. There were five factors behind this development:

1. In the early days of the Song dynasty new attention was given to overseas trade. An agency was established for the administration of foreign trade and related matters and mercantile shipping offices were later set up in such cities as Guangzhou, Mingzhou (today Ningpo in Zhejiang province),



- | | |
|---------------------|-------------|
| ■ Kiln-sites | ● Ports |
| 1 Yuyao | 1 Guangzhou |
| 2 Lincheng (Ningpo) | 2 Mingzhou |
| 3 Changsha | 3 Hangzhou |
| 4 Gongxian | 4 Quanzhou |

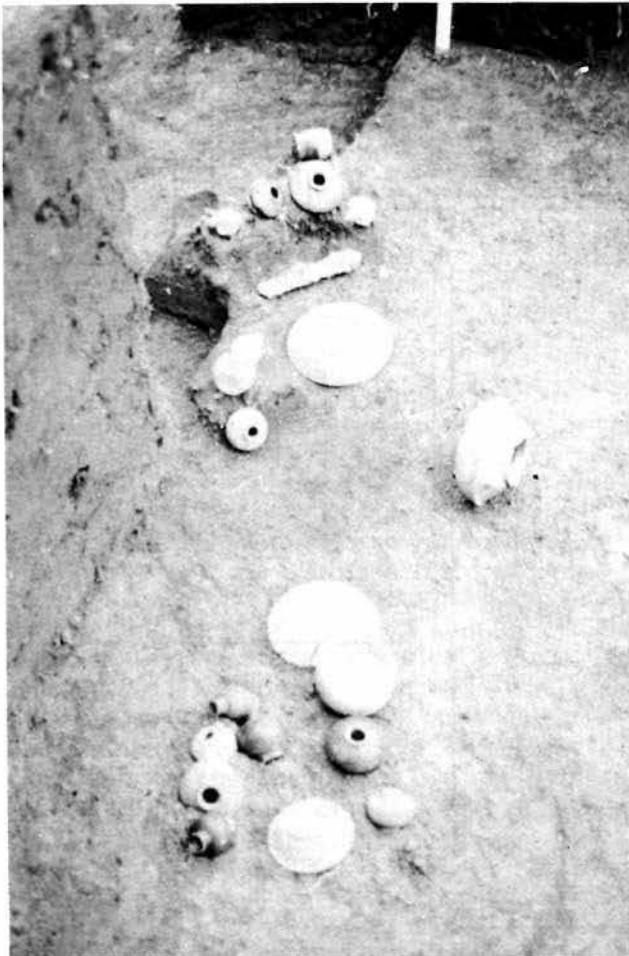
The map indicates the location of the kiln sites and ports mentioned in the article.

Hangzhou and Quanzhou along the southeastern coast. The Guangzhou shipping office was established in the fourth year of the Emperor Tai Zu (971) and followed soon after by others in Hangzhou and Mingzhou. The one in Quanzhou appeared in the second year of the reign of Emperor Zhe Zong (1087). Large quantities of Song dynasty porce-

This is the first part of the paper presented by Prof. Feng on the Workshop on Ceramics of East and Southeast Asia. Prof. Feng is a research fellow at the Palace Museum, Beijing.

lains were exported from these ports to Asian and African countries.

2. Officials were dispatched abroad to open up trade routes. In **History of the Song Dynasty and Chronicles of Major Events of the Song Dynasty**, it is recorded that during the reign of the Emperor Tai Zong, eight court officials with credentials and four boatloads of gold and silk were dispatched to countries in the south seas to make gifts to their sovereigns and to purchase spices, medical substances, rhinoceros horns, elephant tusks, pearls and precious stones. Each official had a number of blank credentials to be filled in and presented in each country they came to.¹
3. In order to increase tax revenues, the Song court instituted a system of rewards. In the **Chronicles of Major Events of the Song Dynasty**, the Emperor Gao Zong of the Southern Song dynasty is recorded as saying in the year 1137: "Much profit can be made from merchant ships. Correctly handled they may bring in as much as a million strings of cash."² In the year 1146 he is again recorded as saying: "The profits from merchant shipping are most beneficial to the state. It is advisable to keep up the old practice of attracting foreign merchants to do business."³ For this purpose, the Song court even conferred official posts on foreign merchants as a form of reward and incentive. The section on



spices in the Register of Comestibles in Volume 185 of **History of the Song Dynasty** contains the following passage:

"In the sixth year of Shaoxing (1136) the magistrate of Quanzhou, Lian Nanfu, sent a petition to the court to the effect that appropriate promotions should be given to ships' masters who could attract foreign merchant ships upon whose merchandise taxes amounting to fifty thousand and one hundred thousand strings of cash could be extracted. The Arab official, Luo Xin, sold frankincense to the value of three hundred thousand strings of cash and the Chinese ship's master, Cai Jingfang, brought in ships with cargoes that yielded nine hundred and eighty thousand strings of cash in taxes. Both were given the official post of Receiver of Imperial Messages. The officer in charge of maritime affairs in Fujian and Guangdong provinces obtained a million taels of silver worth of taxes on frankincense for which he was given a promotion."⁴

By means of rewards and incentives the Song court acquired enormous revenues, as recorded in the **Miscellaneous Records of Affairs In and Outside the Court Since the Reign of Jian Yan**:

"In the seven years between the second year of Jian Yan (1128) and the fourth year of Shao Xing (1134) the maritime office in the city of Quanzhou gained profits amounting to nine hundred eighty thousand strings of cash; and in the final years of Shao Xing, the maritime office in Guangzhou and Quanzhou obtained as much as two million strings of cash every year from taxes and purchases."⁵

From these accounts, it can be seen that the tax money obtained by the Song court increased year by year.

4. The Song court put much effort into developing shipbuilding. During the reign of the Northern Song dynasty, shipbuilding was highly developed in the Fujian and Guangdong districts along the southeastern coast. Shipbuilders were able to construct ocean-going merchant vessels with a displacement of as much as two thousand dou (piculs). These ships were well-equipped with appliances for piloting, weighing anchor, jibbing their sails and depth sounding and, moreover, had compasses for navigation. Shen Kuo's **Mengxi Notes** contains a description of the structure and principles of the compass.

The **Diary of the Emperor Xuan He's Envoy to Korea** described how ships' officers observed the stars and the sun during clear weather but took their bearings from the compass on cloudy days and nights. Such well-equipped ocean-going sailing vessels were among the most advanced in the world at the time. Merchants and envoys from other countries found much pleasure sailing in these ships when coming to China. This had a substantial effect on promoting friendly contacts and com-

An assemblage of unique export ceramic wares decorated in underglaze iron oxide, copper red and cobalt blue were found in excavations in Pila, Laguna, Philippines.

merce between China and countries in Asia and Africa.

5. With the flourishing of porcelain manufacture, new kilns rose in different parts of China like bamboo shoots after a rain. Many were built near port cities in Fujian, Guangdong, Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces along the southeastern coast to meet the need for exports.

Exports of porcelains were even greater during the Yuan Dynasty. At the outset, the Song practice of setting up maritime offices was continued. Pu Shou-gen, Song dynasty administrator in charge of shipping in the city of Quanzhou, was induced to work for the new regime and given important power. Other measures adapted were the following: a twenty-two-article law on merchant shipping was promulgated and foreign trade was placed under the direct control of the government. The income obtained every year from merchant shipping was quite considerable.

Important Historical Data on Exports of Chinese Porcelains

Export of porcelains had already started during the Tang dynasty. It is regrettable, however, that historical records are lacking for the study of these exports. In 1225, during the Song dynasty, a book called **A Description of Foreign Countries** was written by Chao Rushe. The author, an official in charge of maritime shipping in Fujian province, wrote in a preface:

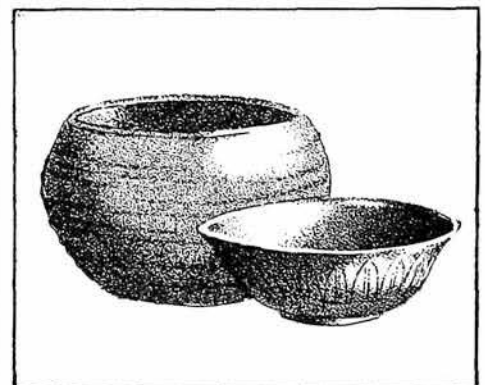
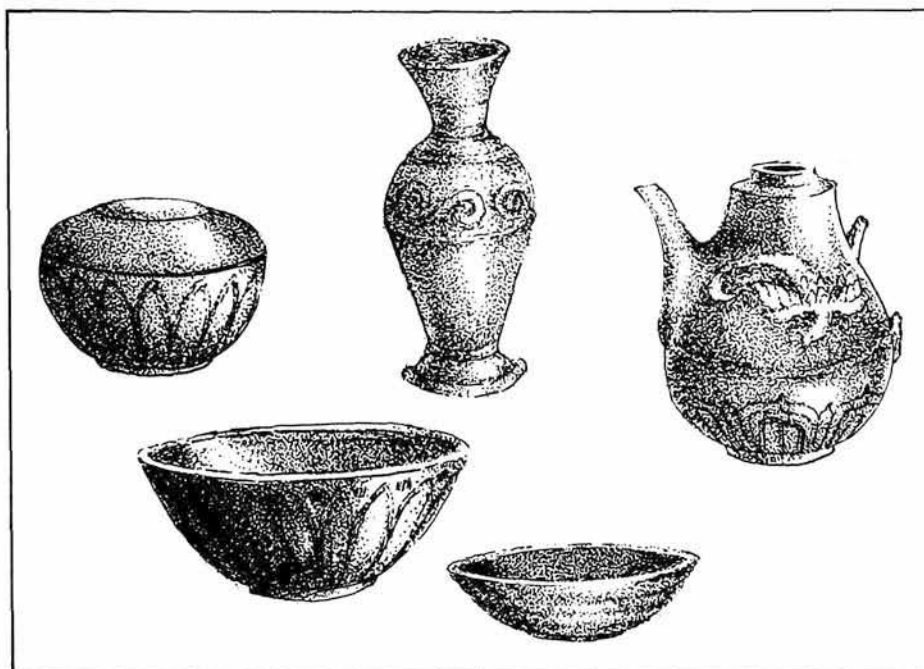
"I was ordered to read up on foreign countries during my spare time. In all the books I perused, there was nothing about the islands in the South Sea which I questioned foreign merchants about, the names of the countries there, customs and habits of their peoples, their distances from China and their mountains and rivers and natural resources. I translated their replies into Chinese, delet-

ing all that was extraneous and keeping the essence which I wrote into the book **A Description of Foreign Countries.**"⁶

The preface also contained an account of the writing of this book and the author's views and opinions.

The book itself listed fifty-six countries in Asia and Africa, fifteen, or one-quarter, of which had dealings with China in porcelains. This is an extremely important historical record and the only complete document for the study of lines of communication, trade and friendly contacts between China and foreign countries during the Song dynasty. As such, it is most valuable and significant. The countries mentioned in the book with which trade in porcelains was conducted were:

| Country | In Today's | Items Exported |
|----------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Zhan-cheng | Vietnam | Porcelain |
| Zhen-la | Kampuchea | Porcelain |
| San-fo-qi | Indonesia | Porcelain |
| Dam-ma-ling | Malaysia | Porcelain |
| Fo-uo-an | Malaysia | Porcelain |
| Ling-ya-si-jia | Malaysia | Porcelain |
| Lan-wu-li | Indonesia | Porcelain |
| Xi-lan | Sri Lanka | Porcelain |
| Ya-po | Indonesia | Light-blue Porcelain |
| Nan-pi | India | Porcelain |
| Gu-lin | India | Porcelain |
| Ceng-ba | Tanzania | Porcelain |
| Bo-ni | Malaysia | Green porcelain |
| Xi-long-gong | Indonesia | White porcelain |
| M-yi | The Philippines | Porcelain |
| San-yu | The Philippines | Porcelain |
| Ma-li-lu | The Philippines | Porcelain |



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Varieties of export wares from the Song to the Yuan Dynasties found in excavations in the Philippines:

1. *tê-hua* types, *ch'ing pai* and other white wares
2. grey wares.



Some typical forms of celadons exported during the Song to the Yuan periods.

Green, light-blue and white porcelains are mentioned respectively in trade dealings with three different places; porcelain ware is a general designation; and green, light-blue and white porcelains are exported to more than one place.

As far as states or kingdoms are concerned, the seventeen were situated in what are today Vietnam, Kampuchea, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and India on the Asian continent and Tanzania in Africa. When Chao Rushe questioned the foreign merchants, it was quite possible that certain details were missed, including details about trade in porcelain. Thus the number of countries to which porcelains were actually exported may not have been limited to the seventeen mentioned. As regards sailing distances, the longest voyages were to Zanzibar in East Africa. Archaeological discoveries have confirmed the reliability of the accounts in the book **A Description of Foreign Countries**.

China's Trading Partners

In the Yuan dynasty, Zhou Dagan, a native of Yong Jia in Zheijiang province, wrote a book called **An Account of Local Conditions and Customs in Cambodia**. In 1296 Zhou Dagan accompanied an imperial envoy to Cambodia and returned to Mingzhou in 1297 to write his observations and impressions. He wrote in a section devoted to the demand in Cambodia for Chinese goods that: "Chinese gold and silver come first in demand since that country does not produce any; next come light and colorful silks; then pewter ware from Zhenzhou, lacquerware from Wenzhou and blue porcelains from Quanzhou ..."

Descriptions of Island Foreigners, ranking in importance with the book **A Description of Foreign Countries**, provided indispensable materials for the study of Yuan dynasty exports. The author, Wang Dayuan, sailed abroad in the Zhi Zheng reign (1341-1368) and after returning wrote down what he had seen in the countries he visited, including a list of the

goods employed in trade with these countries. Porcelain is mentioned in connection with forty-five of the places described. These are:

| Name of Country | In Today's | Porcelain for Trade |
|------------------|-----------------|---|
| Liu Qiu | Japan | Rough bowls and green wares from Longchuan (celadon) |
| San Dao | The Philippines | Blue-and-white bowls |
| Wu Zhi Ba | India | Green-and-white wares from Longchuan (celadon) |
| Zhan Cheng | Vietnam | Blue porcelain bowls |
| Dan Ma Ling | Malaysia | Blue-and-white bowls |
| Ri Li | Indonesia | Green ware, rough bowls |
| Ma Li Lu | The Philippines | Porcelain dishes, porcelain water jars from Longchuan (celadon) |
| Xia Lai Wu | Malaysia | Green ware, rough bowls |
| Peng Heng | Malaysia | Porcelain |
| Ji Lan Dan | Malaysia | Blue-and-white wares |
| Ding Jia Lu | Malaysia | Blue-and-white wares |
| Rong | Malaysia | Blue-and-white bowls, vases and ewers |
| Lou Wei | Malaysia | Blue-and-white bowls |
| Lou Duo | Thailand | Green wares |
| Dong Chong Ge La | Malaysia | Blue-and-white bowls, big and small jars |
| Lu Lou Ga | Malaysia | Blue-and-white wares |
| Dan Miao | Malaysia | Coarse bowls, green wares |
| Jian Shan | Malaysia | Blue bowls, and big and small jars for water |
| Ba Jie Na jian | Indonesia | Blue wares and jars |
| Xiao Pen | Indonesia | Green wares |
| Java | Indonesia | Blue-and-white bowls |
| Wen Dan | Indonesia | Green wares |
| Su Lu | Indonesia | Porcelain wares from Longchuan (celadon) |
| Long Ya Xi Jiao | Malaysia | Blue-and-white wares |

Continued on page 22

The Relation

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Ceramic

The consultants/resource persons were the following: Prof. Feng Xian-Ming and Mr. Li Hui-Ping from China; Dr. Janice Stargardt from Cambridge University; Dr. Pierre-Yves Manguin from Ecole Française D'Extrême-Orient; Prof. Meitoku Kamei from Kyushu Historical Museum; and Dr. Zuraina Majid-Loewe from the Universiti Sains Malaysia. Dr. Rosa Tenazas represented the SPAFA Coordinating Unit.

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|---------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Jiu Gang | Indonesia | Longchuan celadon and big and small jars |
| Pu Ban | Indonesia | Green-ware rough bowls, and big and small jars |
| Wen Lao Gu | Indonesia | Green wares, jars and the like |
| Long Ya Men Hua Mian | Indonesia Indonesia | Longchuan celadon Rough bowls and green Longchuan porcelain |
| Dan Yang | Indonesia | Rough bowls and the like |
| Gou Lan Shan | Indonesia | Green wares and the like |
| Ban Da Li | India | Blue-and-white wares |
| Man Tuo Lang Nan Wu Li | Unidentified Indonesia | Green wares Blue-and-white wares |
| Jia Li Na | Iran | Blue-and-white wares |
| Qian Li Ma Xiao Ba Nan | Unidentified India | Rough bowls Blue-and-white wares |
| Peng Jia La | Bangladesh | Blue-and-white wares |
| Tian Tang | Saudi Arabia | Blue-and-white wares |
| Tian Zhu | India | Blue-and-white wares |
| Gan Mai Li | Iran | Blue-and-white wares, jars and vases |
| Wu Die | India | Blue-and-white wares |

The above list mentions green porcelains (celadons) fifteen times, Chu hou porcelains five times, blue-and-white floral porcelains sixteen times, blue and white porcelains three times, porcelain ware three times and rough bowls five times. Most of the exports came from the kilns in Jiangxi and Xhejiang provinces and a lesser number from those in Fujian province.

(to be continued)

Footnotes

¹Page 1868, Vol 3, Zhonghua Shuqu edition.

²⁻³Page 2516, Vol 3, Zhonghua Shuqu edition.

⁴⁻⁵Page 4537-38, Vol 13, Zhonghua Shuqu edition.

⁶"Zhu Fan Zhi, Revised and Annotated" Page 5, 1966 edition, Zhonghua Shuqu edition.

⁷Page 7. "Ku Jin Yi Shi" (photomechanical Printing).