

Second Installment

Export of Chinese Ceramics up to the Yuan Dynasty

by Prof. Feng Xiang Ming

Archaeological discoveries of Chinese porcelains abroad

In the ruins of ancient cities in the coastal regions of various Asian countries, large amounts of Chinese porcelains and specimens have been discovered in the course of organised scientific excavation since the latter half of the 19th century. More and more porcelains or fragments of porcelains dating as far back as the Tang dynasty have been discovered in the past fifty years. These finds have broadened people's outlook, filled in blanks in historical documentation and provided abundant material evidence for the study of exports of Chinese porcelains.

In the past thirty years, thousands of sites of ancient porcelain kilns have been found in various Chinese provinces. An enormous number of specimens has been found in the kiln sites in Fujian, Guangdong, Zhejiang and Jiangxi provinces along the southeastern coast; many of the discoveries being similar or identical to the Chinese porcelains unearthed abroad. Comparative studies provide extremely useful information on a series of questions including the place of origin, port of export, shipping route, quantity and circumstances of production of porcelains of various periods.

Since we have had little opportunity to see first hand reports on these archaeological discoveries and have been able, even less, to see the objects themselves, most of our information comes indirectly and is, therefore, necessarily limited.

Chinese Porcelains Discovered in Japan

The relatively short distances between China, Korea and Japan

provide a certain justification for the assertion of modern Japanese scholars that Chinese porcelains first got to Korea and from there were brought to Karatsu in Japan, but convincing material evidence and documentation is lacking to support this hypothesis. The earlier Chinese porcelains discovered in Japan belong to the Tang dynasty, with a sharp increase in specimens from the Song and Yuan periods and a gradual decline in the number of Ming and later specimens.

Among the Tang porcelains discovered are three-colored porcelains and white porcelains from the Singzhou kilns, blue porcelains from Yuyao kilns, and painted porcelains from the Changsha kilns. Although the finds are limited in number, they come from such famous pottery and porcelain producing areas as Henan, Hebei, Zhejiang and Hunan provinces.

Three-colored porcelains were most popular at the height of the Tang dynasty and found a ready market in Xi'an and Luoyang during the first half of the 8th century. Archaeological discoveries show that three-colored porcelains of that period were also sold to Japan. Among the three-colored porcelains found at Nara are Chinese head-rests with stamped designs, jars, three-legged incense burners and twining body headrests. These had their influence in Japan where the firing of such porcelains soon began. The Japanese product, called "Nara Three-Colors" can be seen today in the Shosoying Temple and are highly treasured.

A limited number of white porcelains have also been discovered. Those unearthed in Nara and Kyoto are all bowls of the lipped, jade base-ring type, typical of the North

China style in the Tang dynasty. Such bowls were produced in large quantities in the kilns of Lincheng and Quyang in Hebei province and Pingding in Shanxi province. The porcelains made in Lincheng came in two categories: refined and coarse, the former being covered with glaze as white as snow and glazed at the center of the base-ring; the coarse porcelains were first painted and then glazed, with the center of the bottoms left unglazed. Bowls of this type made in the kilns of Quyang and Pingding were also left similarly unglazed.

More blue porcelains from the Yuyao kilns were found in Japan than three-colored and white porcelains. Among the former are three-legged incense bowls, boxes, bowls, lamp bowls and ewers, unearthed at Fukuoka, Kyoto and Nara. Judging from the method of firing used, these blue porcelains were products not only of the Yuyao kilns but of kilns of the same school in neighbouring districts. Very few porcelains of the Changsha kilns were discovered. Among those found are floral vessels mottled in brown discovered in Nara and two complete brown-green painted bowls found in Okinawa.

Song porcelains have been discovered in as many as forty countries in the coastal and central regions of Hondo, Kyushu and Shikoku. Most of these discoveries belong to the late Northern Song and Southern Song periods. They are chiefly blue-and-white or blue porcelains, plus a number of black, brown and low-temperature green glazed objects, including a large number of plates and bowls and a certain proportion of vases, ewers, jars, boxes, water-pots and scripture containers. The scripture containers, apparently made to order, are long and slender with lids and

stands and some have engraved designs. Altogether more than three hundred of these have been discovered, together with blue-white porcelain dishes and other small objects including about one hundred boxes. Most of the blue-white porcelains were products of Jingdezhen and neighbouring kilns. Some of the four-looped vases have thick and heavy bodies, produced in kilns in the coastal regions of Fujian province. Similar objects have been unearthed in kilns of the Song and Yuan dynasties in the Fujian area.

A large proportion of the blue porcelains (celadons) were from the Longquan kilns. Among them were

basins are products of the kilns of Tongzi Shan at Quanzhou. Among those discovered at historical sites are those with sacred mountain of longevity and lines of poetry.

Blue flowered porcelain of the Yuan dynasty have also been discovered, mostly in Okinawa and a lesser number in Wakayama county and the city of Fukuyi. Among them are animal-eared urns, vases, yi, plates and bowls as well as fragments of these.

Chinese Porcelains Discovered in Korea

Chinese potteries and porcelains were first discovered in Korea in the 1930s. Many of them were

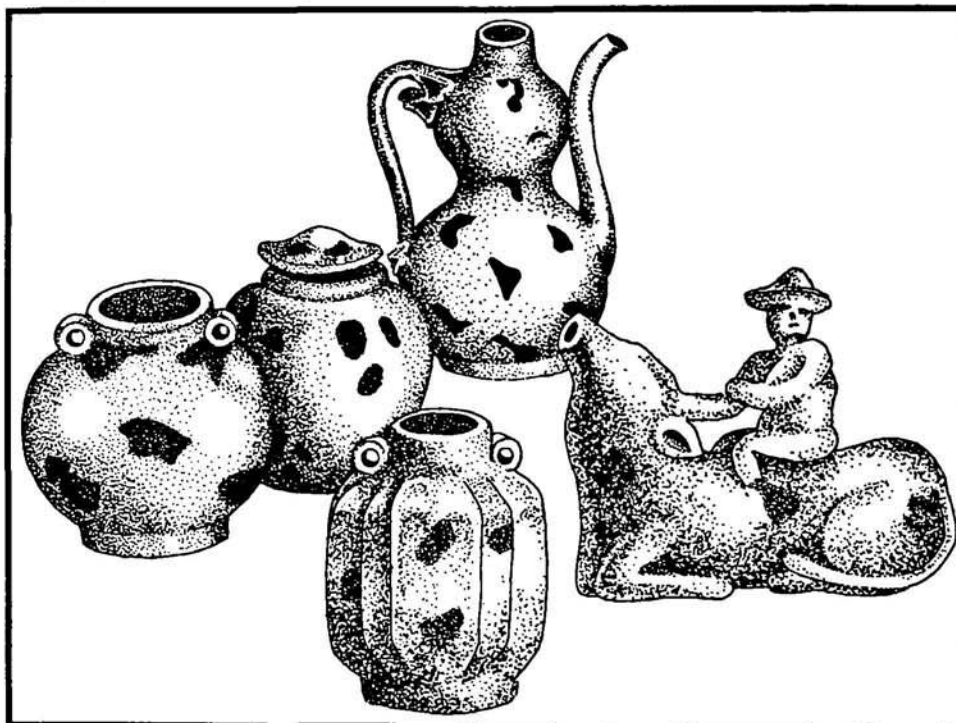
written in brown paint, one of them reading "The small-mouthed vessels made by the Zheng family are world-famous" and the other "The small-mouthed vessels made by the Pian family are the best in the world". Both legends are inscribed under and to the right of the handle. Ewers excavated at the former sites of kilns at Changsha also bear inscriptions denoting the year of manufacture, but differ from those found in Korea in that the inscriptions do not smack of commercial advertising.

Among the Song porcelains discovered are ewers with engraved designs and celadon bowls with engraved fine-comb designs from the Yaozhou kilns, and blue and white porcelains from Jingdezhen. Quite a number of the latter, at least thirty, were found at Ch'unchun village in Gangwon province.

In 1976, a Yuan dynasty ship was discovered at the bottom of the sea near Sin An, Mokp'o. The more than 1,100 porcelains salvaged from this ship constitute one of the most important archaeological events of the 1970s, unprecedented for the number of items, excellence of workmanship and variety. Among the porcelains, most were blue and white porcelains from Jingdezhen and celadons from Quanzhou. There were also products from kilns at Jizhou and Hanzhou in Jiangxi province, and Cizhou in Hebei province as well as some from as-yet unidentified sources.

Studies and discussions in the past two years on the dating of the ship and the period or periods to which these porcelains belong have by and large produced three different opinions:

1. One school of thought bases itself on the copper coins bearing the inscription "Third year of the Zhi Da rule" (1310). Some tendentious opinions place the time of the shipwreck after that date 20 years later.⁹
2. Another bases itself on the fact that no patterned celadons of the Yuan dynasty was found in the wreck. Since these porcelains were produced in the final years of that dynasty, some scholars hold that the ship must have sunk toward the middle period of the dynasty.¹⁰



Chinese export ceramics decorated with splashed brown iron spots and a yingqing glaze over porcelain body.

bowls with lotus-petal designs in relief, many from the late Song and Yuan periods. One type of bowl was engraved inside with fine-comb lines and outside with double line decoration. These are called in Japan pearl celadon and were made in the kilns at Tongan, Anxi, Nanan, Minhou and Lianjiang in Fujian province. Similarly decorated porcelains were made in Wuyi and Dongyang in Zhejiang province, right up to the Yuan dynasty.

The yellow-glazed brown-painted basins unearthed in Fukuoka come in two forms: straight-rimmed and folded, with branches and flowers painted in their centers. These

finely-crafted articles from famous kilns. However, some were not discovered in the course of regular and official excavations, so it is difficult to ascertain their exact time and place of discovery. Of the few Tang porcelains found, there are the three-colored, three-legged incense burners, found at Keongju, similar in form and color-markings to those discovered in Yangzhou in Jiansu province.

Three ewers made in Changsha with applied flower and figure designs and brown spots were found at Leongmae island near Haeju. Two of these bear under the glaze eight-character inscriptions

3. Still another school argues that since the inscription on a Longquan plate denotes that the article was made for the "Headquarters of the Xuanweishisidu in Eastern Zhejiang", set up in the 12th year of the rule of Zhi Da (1352), the sinking of the ship must have taken place no earlier than in the 14th year of Zhi Da (1354). It also maintains that all the porcelains in the wreck were produced in the first half of the 14th century, hence the ship could not have sunk before that.¹¹

All three schools agree on the period to which the porcelains belong, but disagree on the time of the shipwreck. The first two schools put the sinking in the middle period of the Yuan dynasty, the third school holds out for the latter period of that dynasty.

I myself believe that the period of the porcelains and the time of the ship's sinking coincide: both belong to the middle period of the Yuan dynasty and their time gap is very brief. Not more than a year elapsed between the time the porcelains were manufactured, packed and loaded and the sinking of the ship. It can be stated with certainty that the majority of the porcelains were fresh from the kilns. After chemical treatment the salvaged porcelains were basically restored and looked as if they had just come out of the kiln. They were probably packed immediately after manufacture and the ship carrying them very likely took advantage of seasonal wind to set sail, thus there could not have been a very big time gap. A few of the porcelains belonged to an earlier period and bore characteristics of the Southern Song dynasty. For instance, the rabbit hair wine cups from the Jian kilns in Fujian province had a copper rim denoting that the edge had been damaged. Other such examples were also observed, but their number was negligible.

As for the Xuanweishisidu headquarters mentioned above, it was set up not in the twelfth year of Zhi Zheng but in the sixth year of Da De (1302). Volume 194 of *Zi Zhi Tong Jian* mentions that:

"The Xuanweishi of eastern Zhejiang was redesignated the Xuanweishisidu in the Jia Zi period of the tenth month in the winter of the sixth year of Da De;

his jurisdiction extended to Qing Yuan and the waterways thereof."¹²

The porcelains for the special use of this headquarters were apparently manufactured after the setting up of the new agency. Why government property was being exported is something worth considering.

Chinese porcelains discovered in the Philippines

Evidence of China's early contacts with the Philippines can be found in the Song Dynasty author Zhao Rushe's *A Description of Foreign Countries* cited earlier, in which the names of such places as Sanyu (the Philippines peninsula), Mayi (Mindoro), Balaoyou (Palawan), Bajinong (unidentified), Baipuyan (Babuyan), and Pufilu

scientific determination of their period of manufacture. Prof. H. Otter Beyer discovered many such sites in the Philippines and amassed a considerable amount of material. In the late fifties, Prof. Robert B. Fox made further discoveries in the district of Batangas. In the early sixties, Mr. and Mrs. Locsin made excavations in the Sta. Ana region of Manila, and in 1967 in cooperation with San Carlos University in the Cebu City excavated the site. Within a decade they unearthed about forty thousand porcelains and together set up the De Santos, Locsin and Roberto Villanueva repositories, in which the porcelains left by Prof. Beyer were later also placed.¹³

Among the porcelains discovered were engraved green porcelains of



Yuan dynasty wares produced in Jingdezhen and decorated in underglaze cobalt blue.

(Polillo) are to be found. It is explicitly mentioned that trade in porcelains was conducted at Sanyu and Mayi. These places are also mentioned in Wang Dayuan's *Description of Island Foreigners* and also in records of the Ming and Qing dynasties. China and the Philippines have already had contacts for seven or eight hundred years. The porcelains bear witness to these comings and goings.

The first ancient sites with Chinese porcelains were found in the Philippines in the 1880. In this century, Michigan University collected eight thousand porcelains from the central and southern part of the Philippines, but there is no data for

the Yuyao kilns, five-tube vases and tall vases of the Longquan kilns, blue-white porcelains with engraved designs and blue-white porcelains with brown spots from Fujian, all of the Song dynasty. However, most of the finds were of the Yuan dynasty, with a high proportion of porcelains from Jingdezhen. Among the latter were blue-white porcelains, blue-and-white flora porcelains and underglazed red porcelains. Some of the blue-white porcelains were decorated with brown spots. All of those discovered belong in the category of small utensils. Among the green porcelains from Longquan in Zhejiang province, most were small items

including ewers, jars and incense burners.

A certain proportion of porcelains from the Quanzhou and Dehua kilns in Fujian were also found. From the Dehua kilns there were printed vases, ewers, plates, boxes and so forth. Porcelains of this type were also black-glazed carved vases, jars, incense burners, etc., made in imitation of engraved red-and-black lacquerware. There was a large number of blue-white small jars, of which very few have been found in China or anywhere else.

Large quantities of Chinese porcelain from many different kilns have been found in the Philippines. These are important finds which require further study.

Chinese Ceramics Unearthed in Malaysia

The Federation of Malaysia is composed of Malaya, Sarawak and Sabah. Malaya is called West Malaysia, Sarawak and Sabah are called East Malaysia. Since the beginning of this century, excavations have taken place around Santubong, Sungei Buah, Sungei Jaong and Great Cave at Niah (at the delta area of Sarawak river in Sarawak region of east Malaysia). A fantastic amount of Chinese porcelain fragments have been discovered. According to the Sarawak Museum, the finds in the past ten years and more have accumulated to over one million pieces.

Examples of the Song dynasty include blue-and-white, celadon, black porcelain and Cizhou kiln wares. The blue-and-white wares include ewers, vases, caskets and bowls mostly from porcelain kilns of Dehua and Quanzhou of Fujian province, Chaozhou of Guangdong province and Xicun of Guangzhou. The celadons came from porcelain kilns along the coastal areas of Zhejiang and Fujian provinces. The black porcelain mostly came from Fujian region, while the wares with incised decoration are very similar to those from kilns of Fujian and Guangdong regions. The blue-and-white porcelain and fragments of wares with incised decorations of Jingdezhen and Dehua kilns of Fujian province have also been unearthed in Bukit Batu Lintang in West Malaysia.

Chinese porcelains found in Brunei

Brunei is situated in the northern part of Kalimantan and borders on Sarawak of eastern Malaysia. In the fifties, excavation was conducted in Kota Batu. The site of the ancient capital of Brunei was conquered by Spain in the sixteenth century and relinquished in the time of Sultanate. Excavated were Chinese porcelains of the 12th-16th centuries. Among those of the Song dynasty were flowered incised flora blue-white porcelains from Fujian and Guangdong and products of the Cizhou kilns in south China with black and dark brown base colors. The unglazed part of the bodies of the blue porcelains discovered were earth-red in color. They were obviously products of the Longquan kilns in Zhejiang province.

In variety and period, the porcelains unearthed in Kota Batu bore similarities to those found in the Sarawak river delta. Another point of similarity was that very few unbroken examples were found.

A variety of Chinese export ceramics were found in South and Southeast Asia

Chinese Ceramics Found In India

The exportation of Chinese ceramics to India had been recorded both in "Zhu Fan Zhi" (the **History of Various Foreign Countries**) and "Dao Yi Zhi Lue" (A **Brief Account of the Island Countries**), the latter even referred particularly to the blue-and-white porcelain. Ibn Battuta, India's anecdote writer of the 14th century, had also recorded in his book that large quantities of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain arrived in India. Sixty seven fragments of blue-and-white porcelain ware had been unearthed in Delhi during the reign of Kotla Firuz Shah. Evidence showed that they were intentionally broken by men.

Like all Moslem rulers, Firuz Shah adhered strictly to orthodox Islamic doctrine and ordered that no image of human being or animals should be allowed to appear on

utensils. He mentioned in his autobiography the batch of blue-and-white porcelain unearthed in Delhi. He stated:

"There are images of human being and patterns on the utensils. Entrusted by god and with the favour bestowed upon me, I ordered that all images and patterns on these utensils be eliminated. The cooks in the royal kitchen took the order, smashed all the porcelain wares and threw them over the wall."

There are characters formed by small holes bored on these blue-and-white porcelain utensils. The characters "Huangjia Chufang" (Royal kitchen) have been found on 47 fragments of utensils, "Huangjia Chufang Zuofang Cai-chen" (Property of the Royal kitchen) have been found on 2 fragments, and "Songgei huang-jai shiyong" (For the use in royal kitchen) have been found on 19 fragments.¹⁵

Besides the 67 fragments of blue-and-white porcelain, there are also 5 pieces of Yuan dynasty Longquan kiln celadon. The unearthing of this batch of porcelain has provided proof for the records in the historical books of China and India, and has added new data for the research of blue-and-white porcelain of the Yuan dynasty.

Chinese Ceramics Discovered In Pakistan

Pakistan is situated to the north of the Arabian Sea and has a very important geographical position. It had been the only route leading to the Western Asiatic regions for the ocean going trading vessels in the Tang and Song dynasties. Fragments of Chinese porcelain wares dating back to Tang and Song dynasties had been discovered over a century ago and more discovered in the twenties. The major sites include:

1. Brahminabad, situated at the upper reaches of the Indus, originally belonged to India and was the commercial center on the Indus river from the seventh century to the eleventh century. It was reduced to ruins by earthquake during the fourth year of Tienxi in the reign of Emperor Zhenzong of Song Dynasty (1020 AD). The Chinese porcelains unearthed here belong to the period before the earthquake, and include celadons of Yue kiln of Tang dynasty, white porcelain of Xing kiln, and celadons of Song dynasty etc.

2. Bhambore is situated between Karachi and the religious city of Tatta, 64 kilometers west of Karachi. The archaeological survey of Bhambore started in 1951, and the systematic excavation took place in 1958 under Dr. F.A. Khan of the Pakistani Archaeological Research Institute. Fragments of Chinese porcelain wares can be found almost everywhere on the hilly slopes of Bhambore region. They include celadons of Yue kilns of Zhejiang province and decorated underglaze pottery of Changsha kiln in Hunan province of the late Tang dynasties.

3. Pak is located in the Kolwa region. It was discovered by A. Stein of Great Britain during 1927-1928 when he was touring western Asia, but only one piece of Chinese porcelain fragment was discovered at that time. More fragments of blue-and-white porcelain of Song dynasty were discovered between 1931-1932 in a number of ancient sites.

Chinese Ceramics Excavated In Iran

The main site where Chinese ceramics are found is Siraf, one of those prosperous harbours at the Persian Gulf. Since 1965, the Iran Archaeological Research Institute of Great Britain has made numerous investigations at the Siraf site where large amount of Chinese porcelain fragments have been unearthed. What strikes people's attention in these finds is the presence of white porcelain of Xing kiln of Tang dynasty and celadons of Yue kiln type.¹⁸

In addition, Nishapur, Minah (in the vicinity of Hornu), and Rayy (in the vicinity of Teheran) have also contained celadons of Yue kiln style and dish with painted decoration of Changsha kiln both of Tang dynasty. The supporting marks on the celadon bowl of Yue kiln indicate that they do not belong to the Yue kiln of Shanglin-hu of Yuyao county but rather belong to the porcelain kiln of Yue.

Chinese Ceramics Uncovered In Iraq

Samaria, situated along the Tigris river, is well known for the Chinese ceramics unearthed in Iraq. It was the capital of Iraq from 836 AD until 892 AD. The Samaria site had been excavated three times;

The study of China's export ceramics will strengthen links among scholars of various countries.

the first time was carried out in 1910 by a German scholar. Three coloured pottery of Tang dynasty, green glaze, yellow glaze, white porcelain, and celadon wares had been unearthed. The earliest dating of these finds is Tang dynasty down to the early stages of North Song dynasty.

The second excavation was conducted in 1936 when celadon and blue-and-white porcelains were unearthed. The celadons include bowls with lotus petal design. The third excavation took place in 1964. Among the unearthed objects are bowls also with lotus petal design with datings similar to those from the second excavation.

Chinese Ceramics unearthed in Egypt

The farthestmost extension westward to China where Chinese ceramics of Tang dynasty were unearthed in Asia is the Fostat site which is situated in the southern suburb of Cairo. It was built by the Arabic army after the conquest of Egypt in 624 AD. Fostat fell into the hands of the Christian army who came with the Second Crusade and was reduced to ruins. The excavation started in 1912 and continued in 1964 and 1966. Large amount of ceramic fragments were unearthed and it was estimated that the quantity can reach some six to seven hundred thousand pieces. Mr. Koyamafujio, the late Japanese expert in ceramics, classified them and found that twelve thousand pieces are Chinese ceramics. Among them, 673 pieces are celadon of Yue kiln dating from the Middle Tang to early Song dynasties, 964 pieces are celadons from Longquan kiln dating from Song to Yuan dynasties, 191 pieces are blue-and-white from Yan dynasty, and the rest are blue-and-white and painted porcelain from Ming and Qing dynasties. Three coloured pottery fragments of Tang dynasty were also found.

From the above data, we can see a brief outline of the exportation of Chinese ceramics since the Tang dynasty. Although we are dealing with Asia in this article, the picture presented is a partial one due to the limitation of reports from some countries. The study of the exportation of Chinese ceramics has become a popular thing in recent years. The Japanese scholar Misugi Ryuho proposed the study of "silk road on the sea". Tsugio Mikami gave it a straight forward title, "The ceramics road", and made on the spot investigations along the route and thus opened a new field of study. Some scholars, basing themselves on the sites where Chinese ceramics are unearthed, have extended the ceramics road to Latin America.

Porcelains are objects of daily use, they became a ribbon that tied China with the rest of Asia over one thousand years ago. Today, the study of the exportation has become a ribbon again; it will strengthen the links between the scholars of various countries and contribute to the promotion of the traditional friendship between them.

Footnotes

⁸ Copies revised and annotated by Peng Yuan-rui of Qing dynasty.

⁹ "Chinese sunken Boat of Yuan dynasty found off Sinan Coast" by John Ayers.

¹⁰ "Chronological Study of Ceramics found off Sinan Coast" by Zhen Liang-mo, Korea.

¹¹ "Chinese Ceramics found in the Sunken Boat off Sinan Coast of Korea" by Li Te-jing and others. *Archaeological Report*, Vol. 2, 1979

¹² Page 5284, *Zhonghua Shuqu* edition.

¹³ "Chinese Ceramics discovered in the Philippines" Addis. *Annual Report of the Oriental Ceramics Society*.