

Chinese Ceramics from Mae Klong River

by Malinee Gumperayarnont

Originating from Ta Nao Si Mountain Range in the western border of Thailand, The Kwai Noi and Kwai Yai Rivers, flowing southeasterly for about 200 km, join together in Kanchanaburi to become the so-called Mae Klong River. Then, the Mae Klong River takes either southeastern or southern course draining and fertilizing Ratchaburi and Samut Songkhram Provinces before merging into the Gulf of Thailand.

Historical survey along the flood plain of the Mae Klong River has led to the discovery of at least six ancient settlements and cities of different duration of time. Starting from the upstream of the River, the ancient cities are pronounced as Muang Singh of Lop Buri period (11th-14th centuries A.D.); Ban Pong Tuk of Dvaravati period (6th-11th centuries A.D.); Muang Kosinarai of Lop Buri period; Muang Old Ratchaburi of Lop Buri, Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin periods; and finally Muang Ku Bua of Dvaravati period.

Nowadays, the Mae Klong River still maintain its importance as a watery communication and the fertile settlement area. Along both banks of the River from Ratchaburi down to Samut Songkhram Provinces are densely populated by both Thai and Chinese communities.

The archaeological report on ceramic treasures from shipwreck in Thailand is not new but now and then strikes public interest. Around five years ago, a vast amount of Chinese ceramics and some of Thai, Khmer and Vietnamese wares had been brought to light from the riverbed of the

Mae Klong River in front of Muang District, Ratchaburi Province. Among the ceramics are a bronze cannon, more than ten pieces of Chinese inscriptions made of baked clay which text concerned with the beliefs on Avalokitesvara Boddhisattva, thousands of Chinese coins of different periods, bronze mirrors and gold ornaments. As news spreaded, the treasure hunters and divers either local or from other places came to Ratchaburi Province in order to search for the treasures. Up till now the salvages still continue. The significant underwater sites are located from upstream to downstream as follows: Ban Song, Tha Khwang, Wat Tha Khlong, Wat Tan, Wat Koh, Rong Klun Lao (Whisky Distilled Factory) of Ratchaburi Province and Ban Bang Noi of Samut Songkhram Province (see figure. 1). In addition, the local hunters / divers report on more than ten wooden planks, large wooden stern about 12 metres long and an anchor of about 2 metres or a little bit longer have also been found. It is locally believed that at least four ships of different periods had been sunken.

The ceramics salvaged from the riverbed of the Mae Klong River are not systematically surveyed and excavated, while the sites had unfortunately been disturbed by men and nature which definitely affected the ceramics lying underneath the sand. The condition mentioned above automatically caused considerable problem for the academic study. What should be done here is to locate sites where large amount of specimens had been salvaged and to conduct comparative studies on stylistic and typology in order to provide a very useful information on its provenance and dating.

A large amount of Chinese ceramics from Mae Klong River are supposed to have come from the kiln sites along the southeastern coast of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangxi and Guangdong Provinces. Those kilns are positively grown up according to the flourishing of the maritime trade during the Sung, Yuan and Ming Dynasties, during which ceramic commodities were in great demand.

Asst. Prof. Malinee Gumperayanont is a lecturer of the Department of Art History, Faculty of Archaeology, Silpakorn University.

This article was originally presented at the SPAFA Technical Workshop on Ceramics held in Bangkok and Chiang Mai on December 1-12, 1985.

Continued from page 33

13. The clay used in most MON wares is inferior to that used at Sukhothai.
14. In addition to Ban Ko Noi, Ban Pa Yang and Sukhothai there are kiln sites at Phitsanulok and Nakorn Thai. See Don Hein and Prachote Sangkhanukit "Preliminary Report on the Excavations at Ban Tao Hai,

Phitsanulok, Northern Thailand", Research Centre for Southeast Asian Ceramics, University of Adelaide, 1985.

15. Pisit Charoenwongsa, "A Confusing Picture of Srivijaya History", p. 7.

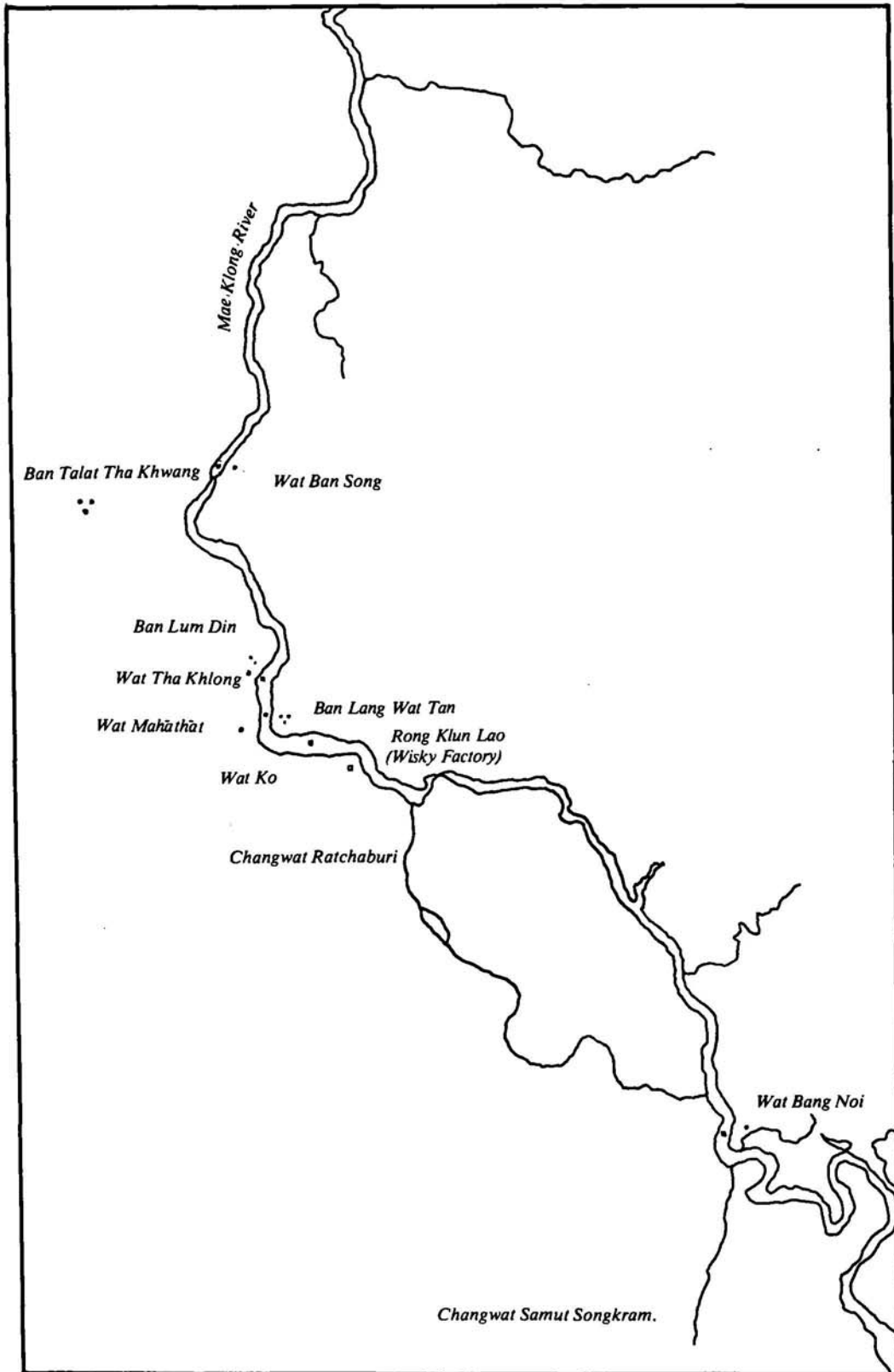


Figure 1. The locations of the underwater sites from Mae Klong River.

Table of the Findings and Provenances from Mae Klong River.

Findings											Provenances
Miscellaneous			Blue & White Wares.			Lead Glazed Wares	Brown Wares	Green Wares	White Wares	Shipwreck.	
coins	inscriptions	bronze Mirrors	Yüan dynasty	Ming dynasty	Qing dynasty						
											Ban Song
											Tha Khwang
											Wat Tha Khleng
											Wat Tan
											Wat Ko
											Rong Klun Lao (Whisky Distilled Factory)
											Ban Bang Noi

The specimens which had been viewed can be categorized as follows :

Group I : White wares in various shapes with glaze ranging from light green/blue to pale greyish qingbai glaze, some of it almost white, came from Fujian and Guangdong Provinces. This kind of white wares were found in large

amount at the sites of Wat Tan, Wat Koh and the Whisky Distilled Factory. Their shapes can be categorized into :

1.1 Small bottle vases from Wat Tan and Rong Klun Lao sites with ribbed neck and sprayed mouth, probably from Guangdong Province ; Northern Sung Dynasty (late 10th-12th centuries A.D.) See

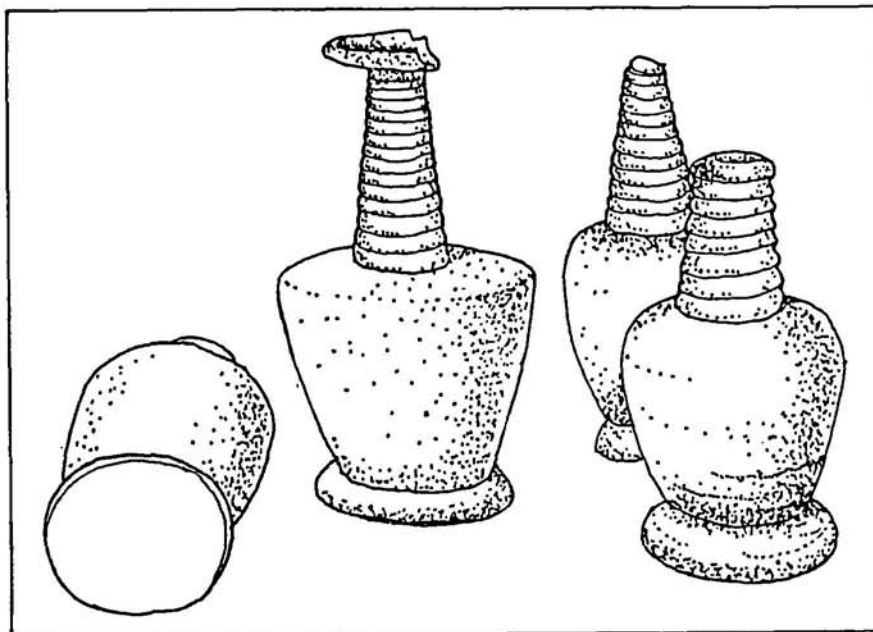


FIGURE 2 :Small bottle vases with ribbed neck and sprayed mouth. Height 12, 11, 10 cms.

figure 2.

1.2 Covered boxes of various shapes were found in large amount from different sites, consisting of :

1.2.1 Covered boxes with straight side of melon shape, from Guangdong Province (10th-12th centuries A.D.). See figure 3.

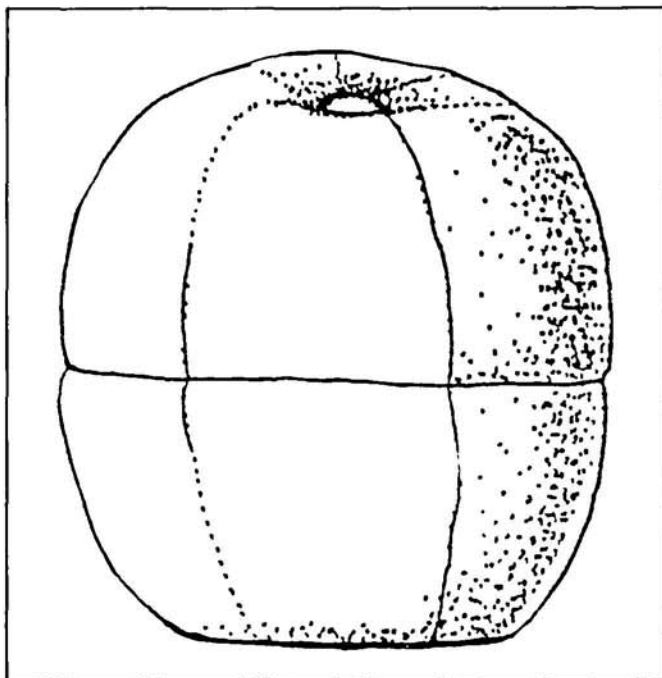


FIGURE 3 : Covered bowl of melon shape with straight side. Height 8.5 cm. Base 5.5 cm.

1.2.2 Small covered box with straight side, flat top, from Guangdong Province (10th-12th centuries A.D.). See figure 4.

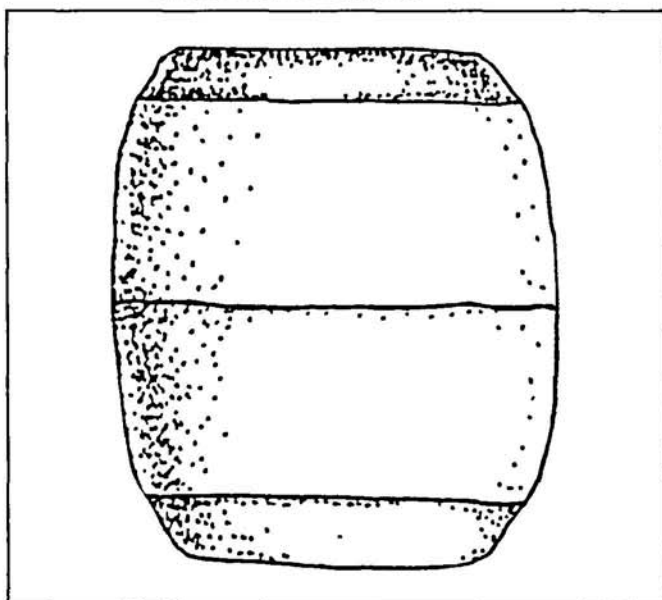


FIGURE 4 : Small Covered bowl with straight side. Height 6 cm. Base 3.7 cm.

1.2.3 Moulded covered box with glaze stop short of the foot : concave base, with Chrysanthemum scroll decoration appeared on the lid and leaf scroll on the body, probably from Dehua kilns, Fujian Province (around 12th-14th centuries A.D.). See figures 5a, 5b.

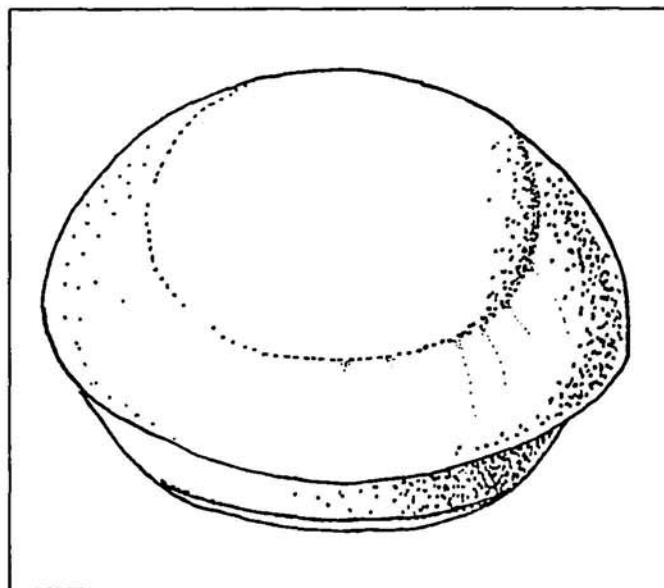


FIGURE 5a : Moulded covered bowl with floral design on the lid and leaf scroll on the body. Height 6 cm. Base 8.5 cm.

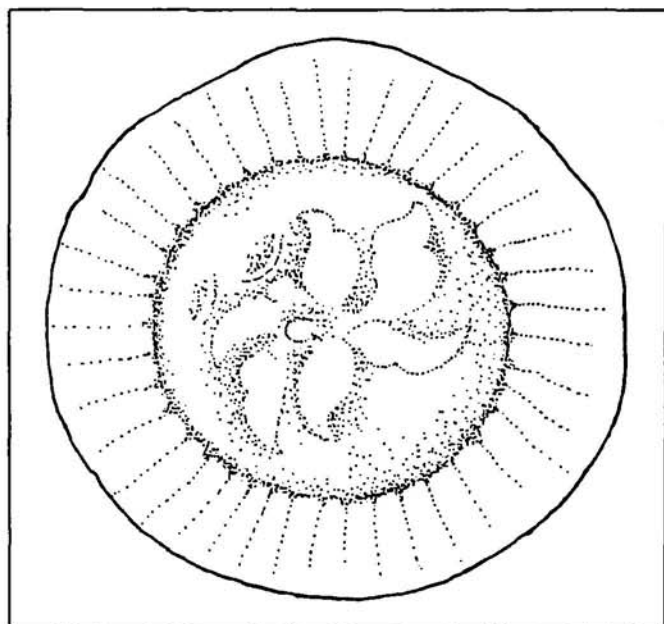


FIGURE 5b : On top of the covered bowl with moulded chrysanthemum design.

1.2.4 Cosmetic box with inside containing immovable floral scrolls and three small cups which only one left half broken. This type of box was found in large numbers from Wat Ko site. (Sung Dynasty).

- 1.2.5 Kendi shaped vessel, probably from Dehua kilns Fujian Province ; Yuan Dynasty. See figure 6.

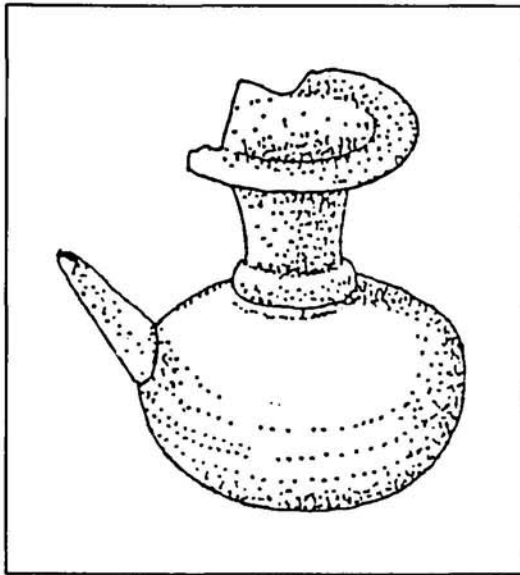


FIGURE 6 : White ware of kendi shaped vessel, sprayed mouth.

Group II : Green wares from Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong Provinces were found in large quantities at Wat Koh. The green wares from Zhejiang Province can be categorized into :

- 2.1 Yue type ware was found in a form of squat jar, grey stoneware with pale matt, olive green glaze. It is dated around 10th-12th centuries A.D., probably from Zhejiang Province. There was a local report that a large amount of Yue type wares had been found but only a few were in perfect condition.
- 2.2 Longquan wares were found in a large number of various shapes and patterns of decorations. All from Longquan kilns, Zhejiang Province, consisting of :
- 2.2.1 Jarlet of a compressed globular form with a narrow mouth and two ring handles on the shoulder ; decorated with a moulded pattern of floral scroll, with the unglazed base ; probably from the Yuan Dynasty.
- 2.2.2 Bowl with moulded two fishes in the middle from 13th-14th centuries A.D.
- 2.2.3 Bowl with carved lotus petal outside, from the Sung Dynasty.
- 2.2.4 Incense burner with moulded decoration in Pa Kua design (Eight Trigram) found in a large number at Wat Koh site, probably from the Yuan Dynasty.
- 2.2.5 Bowl with carved design of leaf scroll on the inside wall ; and outside with floral decoration within a panel, with thick and unglazed base ; probably from the Yuan Dynasty.
- 2.2.6 Large barbed saucer dish which shallow sides

and fluted cavetto inside and outside. The characteristic of Yuan dynasty is seen on the moulded floral scroll in the centre, while the base is partly unglazed.

- 2.3 Green wares from Fujian and Guangdong Provinces could be categorized into :

- 2.3.1 Bowl with incised design of lotus on the inside and vertical lines on the outside under a yellowish green glaze, unglazed base, probably from Fujian Province (12th-13th centuries A.D.).
- 2.3.2 Jarlet with pale green glaze with crackled, three brown spots applied above the vertical foot, sandy base of Northern Sung Dynasty, probably from Guangdong Province. See figure 7.

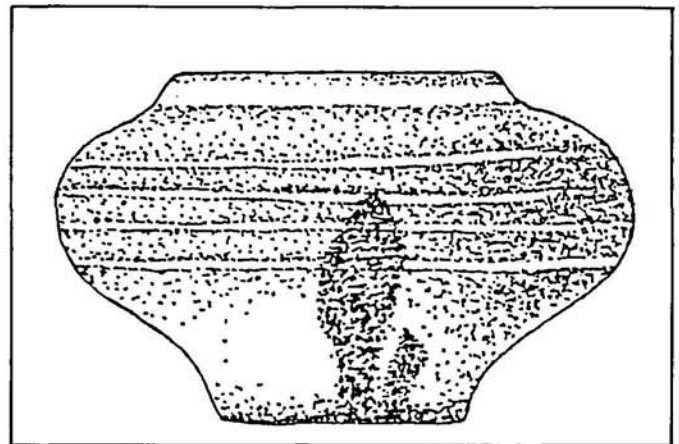


FIGURE 7 : A green jarlet with brown spots round the foot. Height 5 cm. Base 4 cm.

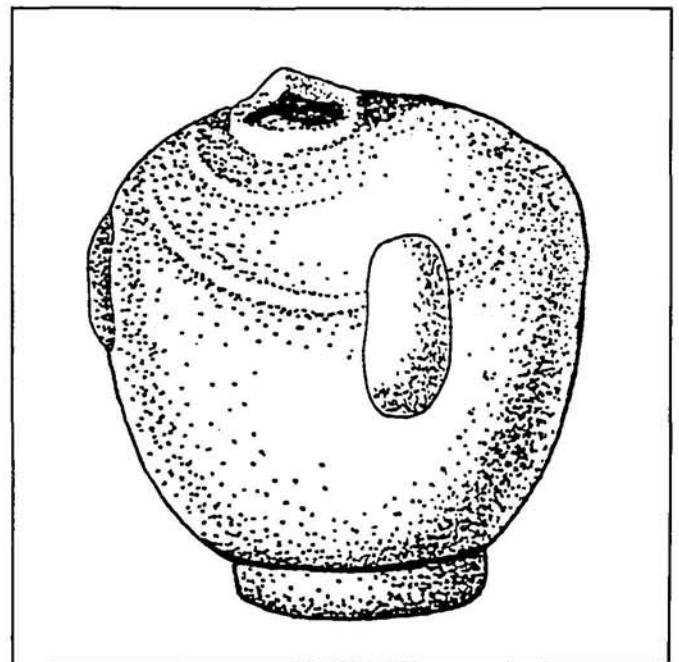


FIGURE 8 : A small bottle with monthrim missing. The olive green glaze is dabbed with three brown spots round the shoulder. Glaze falls short of the foot.

2.3.3 Small bottle with mouthrim missing. The body is covered with olive green glaze with three brown spots round the shoulder. Glaze falls short of the foot of Northern Sung Dynasty, probably from Guangdong Province. See figure 8.

2.3.4 Ewer with double strap handle and two small lug handles on the shoulder flat base. The olive green glaze falls short of the foot. Some have the bodies decorated with bands of vertical lines, tall neck and wide mouth. This kind of green ware was locally reported found in larger amount in front of the Whisky Distilled Factory, but only a few pieces were in a perfect condition : Northern Sung Dynasty, probably from Guangdong Province, (11th-12th centuries A.D.)

Group III : Brown wares were found in large quantities in front of Whisky Distilled Factory site. Thorough investigation revealed that the provenances of the brown wares are from Jiangsu, Fujian and Guangdong Provinces, dated back to the 12th-14th centuries A.D. The brown wares could be categorized into :

1.3 Small-mouth bottle or Mei-ping vase found in large quantity. It is believed that this kind of bottle was used as container for wine or liquid. The body is coarse, grey paste and unglazed except round a small mouth which was glazed in brown ; probably from Quanzhou kiln, Fujian Province (12th-14th centuries A.D.) See figure 9.

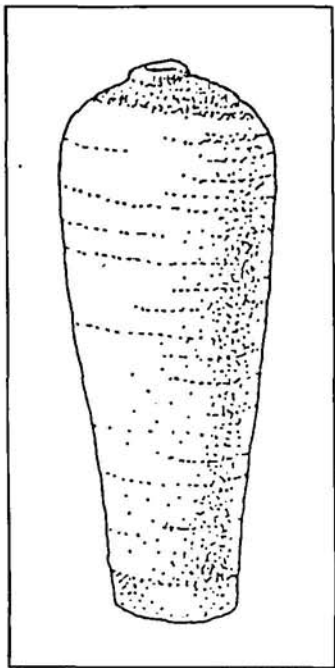


FIGURE 9 : Small-mouth bottle or Mei-ping vase ; the body is unglazed except round a small mouth with brown glaze. Height 22.5 cm. Base 5.5 cm.

3.2 Small storage jar with a broad folded back mouthrim and four small vertical handles. The dark grey oval body is covered with dark brown glaze, some of which have the glaze peeled off, probably from Yixing kilns, Jiangsu Province (12th-14th centuries A.D.) See figure 10.

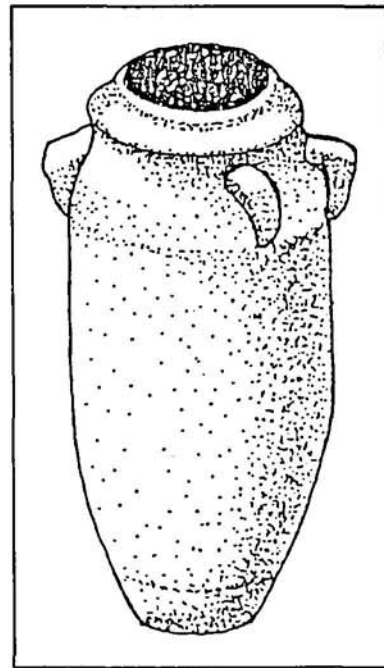


FIGURE 10 : Small storage jar with dark brown glaze.

3.3 An olive-brown glazed jar with six vertical handles and two moulded dragons on the shoulder ; probably from Quanzhou kiln, Fujian Province (12th-14th centuries A.D.) See figure 11.

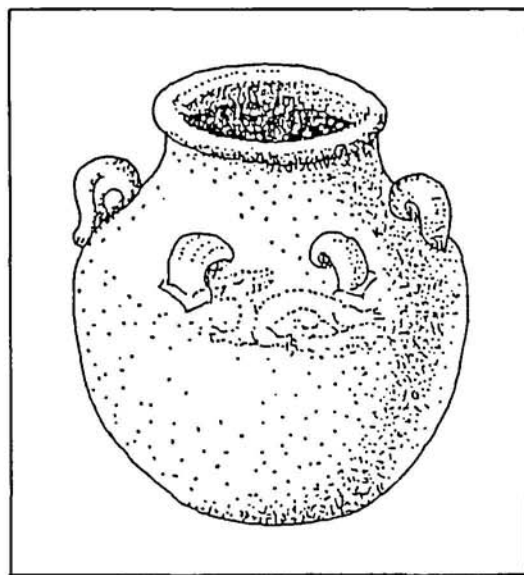


FIGURE 11 : An olive-brown glazed jar with six vertical handles and two moulded dragons on the shoulder.

3.4 A brown storage jar with ovoid body, narrow, rounded mouth. The coarse greyish buff stoneware covered with brown glaze ; probably from Guangdong Province, Sung/Yuan Dynasties. See figure 12.

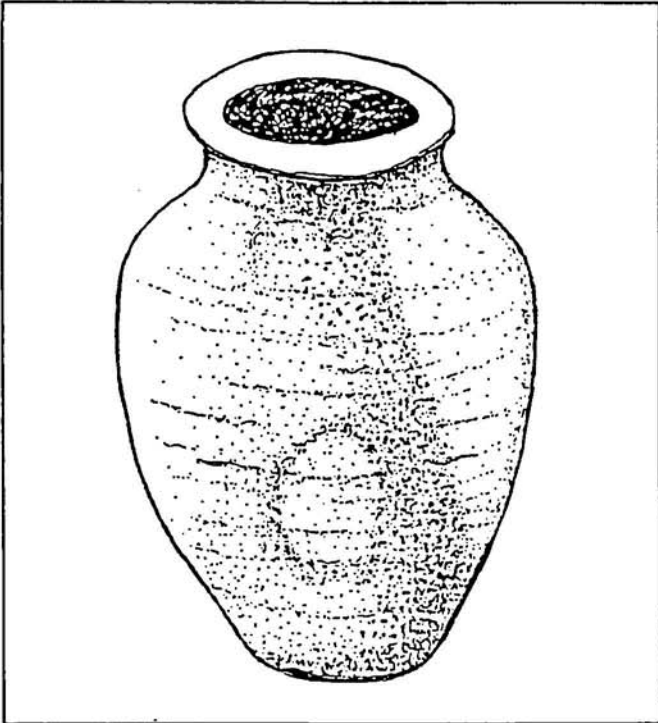


FIGURE 12 : A Brown storage jar with ovoid body, narrow rounded mouth. The coarse greyish buff stoneware covered with brown glaze. Height 19 cm. Base 6 cm.

3.5 Brown kendi with globular body, flared mouth and moulded dragon rounded the shoulder and neck with a spout jutted from the dragon's mouth. The paste is whitish grey covered with brown glaze which is almost peeled off ; probably from the Quanzhou kilns, Fujian Province (12th-14th centuries A.D.) See figure 13.

3.6 Brown tea bowl of "temmoku" type. This type of brown wares had been found in a larger amount from the Wat Koh site. The body was covered with dark/brown russet glaze with small unglazed base ;



FIGURE 14a : Brown lead glazed ware of kendi shaped vessel with deep carved design.

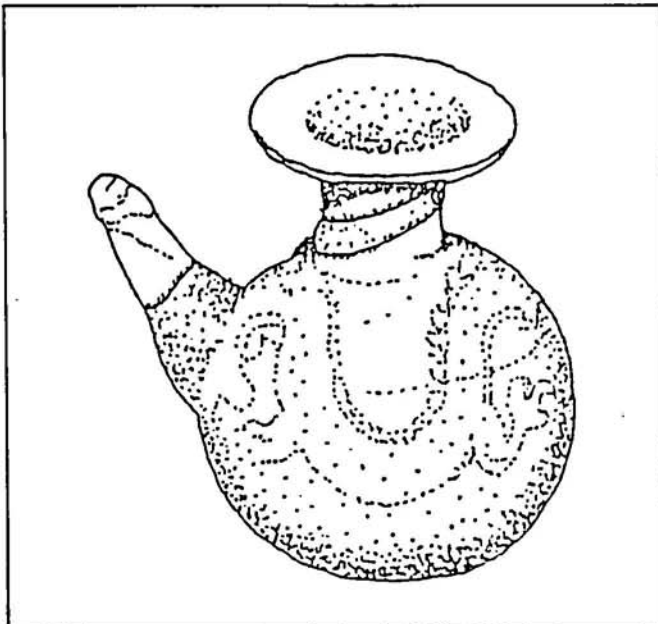


FIGURE 13 : Brown kendi with globular body, flared mouth and moulded dragon rounded the shoulder and neck. A spout jutted from dragon's mouth.

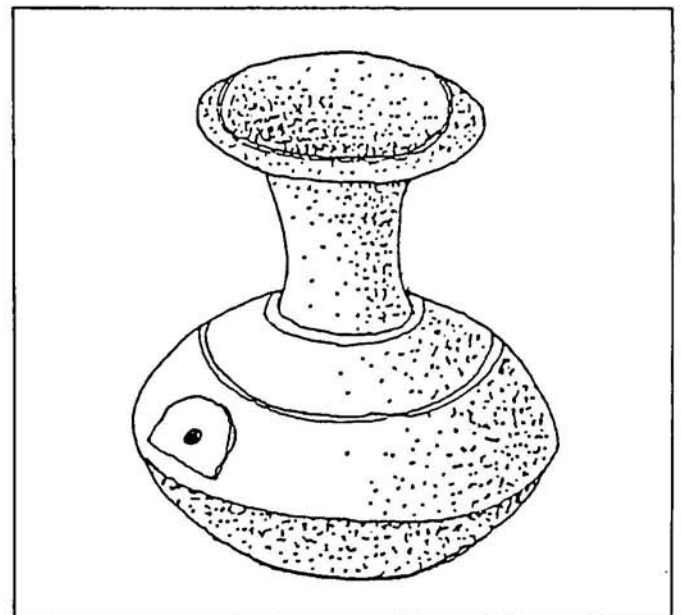


FIGURE 14b : Green lead glaze of kendi shaped vessel. Spout broken.

probably from the Guangdong Province, Sung Dynasty.

Group IV : Lead glazed wares were found in large amount from the Whisky Distilled Factory site. The shapes are mainly kendi with green or brown lead glaze ; probably from the Yuan Dynasty. Large storage jars are covered with green and yellow lead glaze. Its provenance is unknown. See figures 14a, 14b, 14c.

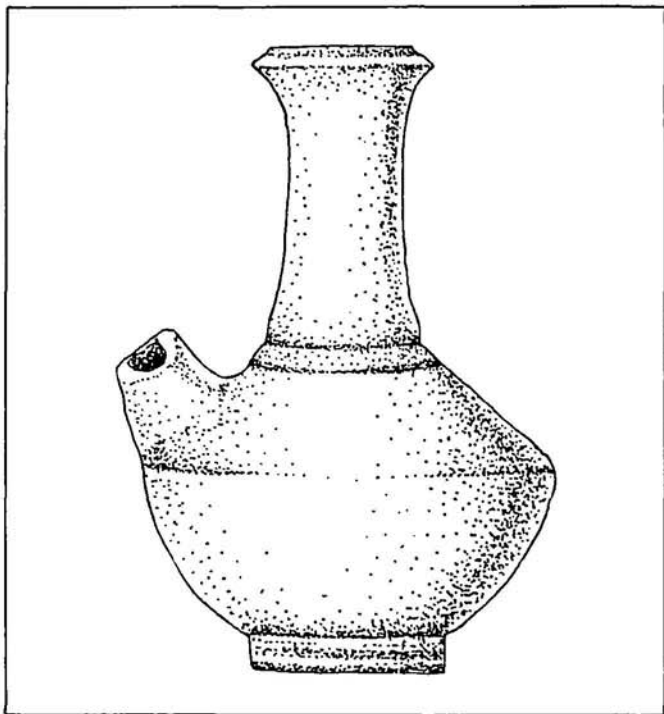


FIGURE 14c : Green lead glaze of kendi shaped vessel. Part of spout can be seen. Glaze partly flaked off. Height 17 cm. Base 5.5 cm.

Group V : Blue and white wares were found scattered among many sites. The blue and white wares of the Yuan Dynasty were found mainly from Wat Tha Khlong site while a few were from Ban Song site. The blue and white wares of 19th-20th centuries A.D. were found mainly from Ban Bang Noi site, Samut Songkhram Province. Examples of the blue and white wares from Mae Klong River are as follows :

- 5.1 A blue and white bowl with the characteristics of the 14th century A.D. decorated with painting of a couple of mandarin ducks leisurely swimming in the lotus pond. The base is thick and unglazed.
- 5.2 A large bowl with superb condition, with the inside decorated with peony scrolls and a small band of classic scrolls, while the outside was decorated with Buddhist emblems among the lotus scroll with a band of lotus flower heads or in another term "Fungus" or "Ling Chi" around the foot. The base is glazed with wide, low unglazed foot-ring ; probably from the Jigdezhen kilns, Jiangsi Province and is dated back to the 14th-early 15th centuries A.D. It is noted that only one piece of this type was found in front of Wat Tha Khlong.

5.3 Saucer with recessed base or hole bottom. The central medallion inside is filled with double vajra and the chrysanthemum scrolls on the cavetto, the outside being painted with lotus scroll ; probably from the Ming Dynasty (late 15th-16th centuries A.D.)

5.4 Bowl painted in dark purplish blue ground with four medallions of cranes in flight among cloud scrolls. The central medallion inside repeated the design outside. The glazed base written in four characters reads Chang Ming Fu Kui meaning - Long life, rich and royal ; probably from the Ming Dynasty during the reign of Emperor Jia Jing (1522-1566 A.D.)

5.5 A number of Ch'ing kitchen wares for everyday use were found in dish bowl, storage jar etc., probably from Fujian Province (19th-20th centuries A.D.)

In conclusion, the salvages of Chinese ceramics and other items from underwater are undoubtedly beneficial to an archaeological and historical studies. As evidence provides, though some are rather limited, the following assumptions on the findings of Chinese ceramics in the Mae Klong River can be drawn. Firstly, the Mae Klong River may be regarded as one of the water trade routes as far back as the 12th century A.D., possibly even a few centuries earlier. Secondly, it was possibly a place where Chinese ceramics had been embarked in order to be transported to the ancient settlements which situated further inland. Thirdly, the flourishing and expansion of the maritime trade as well as the fertility of Ratchaburi soil encouraged the Chinese to settle down along the river banks. Fourthly, the multicultural society in which art, customs and beliefs of both the new comers and the indigenous group of people existed in the Mae Klong River area.

RECOMMENDATION

— More research work should be carried out on ceramics in the Mae Klong River basin including scientific test on pieces of shipwreck found in order to search for the exact date.

— Systematic studies should be done on sherds of Chinese ceramics found in the ancient settlements situated along the Mae Klong River or further inland in order to associate them with the items found underwater.

REFERENCES

- ADHYATMAN, Sumarah, 1981. *Ancient Ceramics Found in Indonesia*, Jakarta.
- FENG HSIEN-MING and SOPHIA M.R. LEUNG, 1982 "Thirty Years of Archaeological Study on Chinese Ceramics, *Arts of Asia*, Vol II, No. 3.
- HUGES-STANTON, P. and Rose KERR, 1982. "Kiln Sites of Ancient China", *Oriental Ceramic Society, London*.
- KAMEI, Meitoku, 1980. *The Study of Chronological Sequence about Celadon Bowl in Ming Dynasty Excavated*,