

Ceramic Trade Between Early Qing China and Late Ayutthaya, 1644–1767

Pimpraphai Bisalputra¹

Since the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767, the remains of a huge amount of pottery and ceramics have been found around the city and the surrounding waterways. These include coarse everyday tableware, fine blue and white, and polychrome wares, including Bencharong, which is unique to Thailand. Many fine examples can be seen in museums and private collections, while shards are still being fished out of the earth and rivers. These ceramics are a valuable source material from the Ayutthaya era. Tracing how they came to be there throws light on ceramic technology, China-Siam relations, trading practices, Ayutthaya's Chinese community, and the prosperity of the Siamese capital before its fall.

This article is divided into three main sections. The first looks at the evolution of the ceramics industry in Early Qing China. In 1644 the Ming Dynasty fell, and the Manchu Qing dynasty came to power. This violent transition initially disrupted the ceramics industry and the China-Siam trade. Before long, however, the ceramics industry began to develop and prosper because of the personal interest and promotion of three early Qing emperors and strong demand from abroad. Technical changes, including a wider range of colors and capacity to produce shapes and designs for the tastes of different markets, made Qing ceramics popular in the rapidly expanding international trade of the era.

The second section surveys the evolution of China-Siam trade from the early 17th century to the late 18th century. The Ming-Qing transition and subsequent ban on maritime trade had an adverse impact on commerce between China and Siam which, at that time, was reduced to occasional tribute missions; while Ming Loyalists supported by the pirate network of Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga) gained maritime control of the South China Sea, thereby denying Manchu forces control of large swathes of

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the coast and offshore ports. After the ban was lifted in 1684, the junk trade rapidly expanded. After Siam became a valuable supplier of rice to China's famine-prone southeast, commercial relations became closer and warmer. Fine ceramics sent as gifts from the Chinese emperor to the Siamese king may have been the inspiration for the development of Siam's distinctive Bencharong. Initially this was made in China to Siamese specifications, drawing on the Chinese industry's ability to respond to such made-to-order demands.

The third section examines the remains of early Qing ceramics found in Siam, especially at Ayutthaya, and discusses where and when they may have been made, and how they were imported and distributed in Siam. As the evidence is sometimes as fragmentary as the pottery shards, the answers are not always firm, but hopefully point the way for future study.

Early Qing ceramics: Imperial taste and technological change

The Early Qing era is considered a golden age of porcelain production. The three emperors who reigned from 1662 to 1795 all appreciated ceramics. The artifacts produced in each reign have distinct characteristics reflecting the taste and personality of each emperor—unlike in times where rulers have no interest in ceramic art, and production of porcelain follows tradition. The surviving early Qing imperial wares are mostly products from two long reigns, namely those of Kangxi and his grandson, Qianlong.

Emperor Kangxi (1662–1722)

The Kangxi reign extended over sixty-one years. At his accession to the dragon throne in 1662, the emperor was only seven years old. He began to rule the vast empire himself at age fifteen. His reign lasted across four reigns in Siam, namely Narai, Phetracha, Sua, and Thaisa. Early in the reign, the harsh pacification campaign in the South and the fighting between Qing forces and Ming loyalists caused widespread damage in 1675 to the kilns at Jingdezhen, the porcelain capital of China. According to Barbara Harrison, a former Director of the Princessehof Museum, “the entire pottery district was pillaged and burnt, and remained in upheaval for four years. Workmen dispersed, disease spread, transport broke down, and taxation fell short.” At this point the emperor, still in his twenties, intervened and appointed an able man with local knowledge, Cang Xingyuan, as imperial supervisor, to rebuild and modernize China's porcelain industry.² Following Kangxi's personal intervention, the production of ceramic wares resumed during the 1680s; decorative schemes of all kinds, most notably those based on historical subjects that emphasized loyalty to the reigning ruler began to appear as common narratives on porcelains made for domestic and export markets.³ Trade routes were opened up: one by waterway through Nanjing to ports at the mouth of the Yangtse (Yangxi) River; and another by land to Canton (Guangzhou) via Poyang Lake, two rivers, and portage over

² Harrison, *Later Ceramics in South-East Asia*, 46.

³ Johnson, “Narrative Themes on Kangxi Porcelains in the Taft Museum,” 328-33.

the Meiling Pass.⁴ During this reign, Jingdezhen resumed production of high quality and beautiful ceramics that again delighted the world. The emperor opened customs stations in Guangdong, Fujian, Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces and foreign traders received permission to enter these Chinese ports in 1685.

Collectors all over the world value Kangxi blue and white as some of the most beautiful ever produced. In this era, Chinese craftsmen developed the ability to separate the tone of the underglaze blue pigment, made from domestic cobalt from Zhejiang province, into five shades, an advance on the two shades (light and dark) of the Ming era.⁵ In addition, the skill in selecting good-quality clay improved, resulting in a pure white porcelain⁶ which partook of a thin, smooth, and clear glaze; this resulted in items that were light and delicate.

The Kangxi emperor was interested in learning, as is evident from records of conversations with his sons in his *Ting xun ge yan* (庭訓格言): “Since my childhood I have always tried to find things out for myself and not to pretend to have knowledge when I was ignorant... Keep an open mind, and you’ll learn things; you will miss other people’s good qualities if you just concentrate on your own abilities.”⁷ He invited several advisors to the imperial court and favored the Jesuits, who came to teach many branches of knowledge, including astronomy, geometry, medicine and Western technology.

Among the gifts brought by European envoys, the emperor admired enamel work on copper of the Limoges type with opaque pink shades and painted with perspective, which were different from Chinese brushwork. In March 1716 Matteo Ripa wrote: “His Majesty was captivated by our European painted enamels and has gone to every length to introduce them into the Imperial workshops that he has set up within the palace.”⁸ He had the Jesuits bring experts and pigments from Europe to experiment with the European palette on Chinese ceramics.⁹ Such items made with colors from the West were known as 珐琅彩 *falangcai*, meaning “foreign colors.”¹⁰

Jean-Baptiste Gravereau, an expert French enameler, travelled to China in 1719 to collaborate with Jesuits already working in the Beijing court including Giuseppe Castiglione and Matteo Ripa.¹¹ They experimented at painting porcelain bowls sent from Jingdezhen with pigments imported from Europe. Initially the colors were dull.

⁴ Harrison, *Later Ceramics in South-East Asia*, 47.

⁵ Fang, *Chinese Ceramics*, 84.

⁶ Porcelain means a ceramic made of fine white clay, fired at a temperature of 1280-1400 Celsius, with a high-gloss glaze. Porcelain wares are durable and easy to clean, resulting in high market demand.

⁷ Spence, *Emperor of China: Self-Portrait of K’ang-Hsi*, 65.

⁸ Thompson, “The Palette of Famille-rose,” 28.

⁹ Fang, *Chinese Ceramics*, 105.

¹⁰ Color designs on Chinese ceramics have a long history. A technique was developed in the Ming dynasty called *wucai*, literally five colors: namely red, yellow, pale green, deep green, and deep purple. In the Kangxi era, a further two colors were developed, black and translucent blue as well as multiple shades of translucent green, showing the texture of the porcelain. Western collectors call *Kangxi wucai* with a prominent green glaze “famille verte” and use the term “famille rose” for *falangcai* and *fencai* works in which the prominent color is pink along with opaque white.

¹¹ Scott, “Jesuit Missionaries and the Porcelains of Jingdezhen,” 237-9.

Only in 1721, almost at the end of the reign, were they able to produce a high quality European-style famille-rose palette.

Emperor Yongzheng (1723–1735)

The Yongzheng emperor loved the arts, and even knew the names of his master craftsmen. This was the first reign when a registry of palace craftsmen was compiled. Those whose work won royal favor were rewarded. The Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione drew designs in both traditional and contemporary styles that won him imperial favor.¹² At that time, apart from nine imported colors, the Beijing palace craftsmen succeeded in developing an additional nine shades.¹³ Chinese academics use the term 粉彩 *fencai* for the famille-rose palette, such as the decoration on the dish in Figure 1. The term includes the *falangcai* work of the previous era.



Figure 1. Dish painted in *fencai* polychrome enamels with flowers of magnolia and apricot blossoms, Yongzheng reign, 1723-1735. Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

¹² Krahl, *China: The Three Emperors*.

¹³ Fang, *Chinese Ceramics*, 108.

A new Yongzheng style soon emerged: the decorations on porcelain looked more like a painting than a brocade. As a result of the emperor's fondness for ceramics, when Siam sent tribute in 1724, the second year of the reign, the emperor commanded that the return gifts should include jade and ceramics in addition to the traditional items of dragon-patterned satin and various other silks.¹⁴ From then on, imperial porcelain figured on almost every occasion among the list of items that Chinese emperors sent as return gifts to the Siamese king.

In the Yongzheng reign, French, Dutch, Danish, and Swedish merchants were permitted to open factories in Canton, following the English in the previous reign. This quarter in Canton became known as the "Thirteen Factories."

Emperor Qianlong (1736–1795)

The Qianlong emperor was a strong ruler who expanded the nation's territory with the conquest of Xinjiang. Chinese history describes him as an avid collector of artifacts who brought Chinese antiquities from the empire's far-flung regions to conserve within the imperial palace, especially Chinese brush painting. The artifacts that he collected, including brassware, paintings, ceramics, jade, enamelware, and clocks, can be seen today in the world's leading museums in China, Taiwan, Paris, and London.

The imperial ceramics of the Qianlong reign differ from the delicately attractive products of the brief Yongzheng period, as they were influenced by Qianlong's personal fondness for very elaborately decorated objects as well as Western artifacts. His predilection for European subjects combined with extremely ornate scrollwork is amply illustrated in the magnificent double-walled vase in Figure 2.

Meanwhile, private craftsmen developed colors to suit the taste of a new era. As pink and opaque pastel shades became more popular, ceramic design followed suit, embodied in famille-rose porcelain. But private craftsmen who had limited capital were unable to afford expensive pigments from Europe and hence sought alternatives. Historians believe that around 1720–1725 private craftsmen began to produce pastel designs, such as a plate with designs of pink lotus petals which was exported to Batavia (Jakarta) (Figure 3).¹⁵ In the early examples of the famille-rose palette taken to Southeast Asia, the enamel tends to stand out in relief much like the impasto of oil colors on canvas, but unlike the finer enamels on imperial wares.¹⁶ Later in the reign, the imperial workshop in Beijing ceased to operate. The decoration of imperial wares was transferred to Jingdezhen, and the Beijing workshop became obsolete.¹⁷

In the 18th century, over eighty percent of all Chinese porcelain was produced at the kilns of Jingdezhen. The majority was exported to Europe, India, Southeast Asia, Persia, and the Ottoman Empire. Like tea and coffee, porcelain became a fashionable status symbol in Europe. Fine porcelain for tea services as well as dinner sets was *de rigueur* in well-to-do households. Traders arrived in China to order millions of pieces of porcelain.

¹⁴ Thongthae and Udom, "Prawatisat kan thut rawang thai-jin," 247.

¹⁵ Harrison, *Later Ceramics in South-East Asia*, color plates 35a, 35b.

¹⁶ Harrison, *Later Ceramics in South-East Asia*, 69.

¹⁷ Thompson, "The Palette of Famille-rose," 38-9.



Figure 2. Double-walled vase painted with flowers and gold floral scrolls on blue ground, Qianlong reign 1736-1795. Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Figure 3. A polychrome dish, the interior decorated with a lotus flower in semi-relief rose enamels, from a private collection in Sumatra. Picture from Harrison, *Later Ceramics in South-East Asia*.

In an effort to control trade with the West, the Chinese government confined trade to a single port under the “Canton System” (1757-1842). An edict in 1757 restricted Western merchants to Canton during the junk trading season when the port was invariably packed. This became the only window between China and the outside world. Enamel workshops for painting undecorated porcelain from Jingdezhen according to Western requirements proliferated in Canton where the traders could oversee samples and promptly correct any mistakes. These workshops were situated on the southern bank of the Pearl River (Zhujiang).

An American traveler, who surveyed the ceramic workshops in 1769, recorded that “In a workshop with a long span of space, about 300 artisans were painting images on porcelain wares... There were old-aged workers, as well as child laborers of around six or seven in age. It was most surprising that there were at least 100 of this type of workshops around.” The Chinese called these 廣彩 *guangcai* ware (literally Guangzhou colors).¹⁸ By this time, private craftsmen succeeded in making *fencai* products of high quality, but the quality of export wares was lower than imperial wares.

In summary, the Chinese ceramics industry flourished in the early Qing period because of imperial patronage as well as strong demand from abroad. With color pigments from the West, the imperial workshop in Beijing developed the ability to decorate porcelain with a wider range of colors, as well as Western-influenced designs. Private kilns in Jingdezhen and the enameling workshops in Canton were soon capable of copying these innovations in soft colors. The new famille-rose palette was also favored on armorial wares for Western markets. From 1724, during the Thaisa reign in Siam, the Yongzheng emperor added imperial porcelain to the return gifts sent to the Siamese king. These developments in China set the stage for the appearance of Bencharong (Figure 4).

China-Siam trade 1629–1767: government policies and private enterprise

Along with other Asian polities, Ayutthaya traded with China during the Ming and Qing dynasties under the tribute system. Siam sent envoys via Canton carrying a *khamhap*,¹⁹ and a royal missive on a *suphannabat* (golden sheet) along with articles of tribute to present to the emperor in Beijing every three years.²⁰ Each time the emperor presented the envoys with return gifts, usually bolts of silk and satin and other articles of value. The Siamese fleet of up to three junks, while on such tribute missions, also

¹⁸ Fang, *Chinese Ceramics*, 120.

¹⁹ *Khamhap*, according to Sresthabongsa Chongsanguan, was the identification pass (known as 勘合 *Kanhe* in Chinese) used since 1383 to identify tribute missions. *Phra ratchasan khamhap* was the accompanying document sent by Ayutthaya which inscribed the name of the king, name of the envoy, detailed description of the tribute and date of departure from Ayutthaya. Chinese officials checked to authenticate the *khamhap* pass given to the Siamese by the Chinese government, before permitting the envoys to proceed to the capital. This was to prevent foreign traders entering by falsely claiming to be a tributary mission.

²⁰ The Siamese were very erratic in sending tribute missions; in some years two missions were sent, but sometimes there was a gap of over twenty years between missions.

carried trade goods to sell at a profit in Canton and bought Chinese goods to carry back to Siam. These goods enjoyed reductions or exemptions from customs duties. Ceramics were one of the products taken back to Siam because they served as *apchao* (ballast)²¹ that would not be damaged by seawater. According to Jörg, porcelain was regarded by the Dutch and other East India Companies as an ideal item for the lowest layer of cargo as it gave off no smell or taste to taint the aromatic tea cargo, while also helping to check any seepage of seawater during the journey.²²



Figure 4. Ayutthaya Bencharong bowl, decorated with flower motif in predominantly pink palette. Courtesy of Mr. Praphaisith Tankeyura.

The China-Siam trade was influenced by the politics of the era, including the dynastic struggles in China, and the personalities in the Siamese *phrakhlang*,²³ the department that oversaw all overseas trade.

The junk trade under the Prasat Thong dynasty, 1629–1688

In the 17th century the junk trade between China and Ayutthaya was beset with many restrictions arising from politics on both sides. The Manchus captured Beijing in 1644 but did not immediately gain control of the south. Battles against Ming loyalists continued over many years. The Qing ruled indirectly through Chinese warlords who

²¹ *Apchao* derived from the word pronounced in Hokkien dialect as *apchang* 壓艙 (*yacang* in pinyin, translated as ballast). Ballast provides weight to counter the ship rolling during rough waves on the high seas. Captains preferred to use ballast goods that could be sold at their destination, including tin, lead, various timbers, cane, crockery, and stone sculptures. The term *apchao* included goods that were disguised as ballast in order to avoid customs duties.

²² Jörg, *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade*, 113.

²³ This term is used for both the ministry and its head. In this article, “*phrakhlang*” is used for the ministry and “*Phrakhlang*” for the minister at its head.

threw in their lot with Beijing in exchange for local power. The government could not control trade in the South China Sea. From 1625 to 1681, control of the seas fell into the hands of a pirate network operated by the Zheng clan, headed successively by Zheng Zhilong,²⁴ his son Zheng Chenggong, better known as Koxinga, and his grandson Zheng Jing.

Once the Qing achieved some level of stability, King Prasat Thong sent tribute to Shunzhi, the first Qing emperor, at Beijing in 1652. The mission requested a new *khamhap* token, which was granted, and the Siamese tribute ships were allowed to trade at Canton.²⁵ Four years later in 1656 an imperial edict banned Chinese from traveling on the seas—a measure aimed at Ming diehard loyalists.²⁶ The ban remained in place for twenty-eight years, almost to the end of the Narai reign. This ban effectively placed Chinese private junk traders outside the law. Meanwhile Zheng Chenggong drove the Dutch East India Company (VOC) out of Taiwan and set up a base there. Later Zheng Jing expanded the clan’s territorial influence on the mainland during the period 1674–80.

At that time, the attempt by the Qing government to reduce the influence of the Han warlords in the south sparked a widespread war, known as the Revolt of the Three Feudatories (Yunnan, Fujian, and Guangdong). In the campaigns against the forces “opposing Qing to restore Ming” and the forces unwilling to submit to Qing authority, the government depopulated coastal villages to cut off support to the enemy. The coastal seaboard was thrown into chaos and many millions died.

In the history of Chinese ceramics, the period of disorder—from the death of the Ming emperor Wanli in 1620 until the Qing emperor Kangxi captured and reopened the southern sea ports in 1684—is known as the “Transitional Period.” During this time, Western merchants could not acquire Chinese ceramics as easily as before. They consequently turned to the Zheng pirate network on the mainland to carry ceramics out to the market, as well as ships to deliver them to various ports around the South China Sea including Ayutthaya. For instance, in 1665 Zheng Jing sent ten junks to Ayutthaya.²⁷ While the Qing ban on overseas travel remained in force legal junk trade came to a halt. During this Transitional Period, Siamese junks, including both tribute and private ships, made good profits because there was no competition, especially when the influence of the Zheng clan waned and eventually collapsed in the wake of Qing victories.

During the Narai reign (1656–1688), Siam had many skilled Chinese junk traders. According to the English merchant George White, “This place’s merchants who are keepers and traders for the king are all Chinese. Among the king’s merchants, the highest ranking and most capable is Okphra Sivepott.”²⁸ Chinese sources from the same period confirm the skills of officials in the Port Department manned by ethnic Chinese.

²⁴ Zheng Zhilong was the head of a wealthy pirate gang. He had been appointed as navy commander by the Ming court, and defeated a Dutch fleet in battle in 1633. He opposed the Qing until 1646, but then switched sides and fell in with them. Zheng Zhilong died in Beijing in 1661 as a result of his son Zheng Chenggong’s role in opposing the Qing.

²⁵ Sarasin, *Tribute and Profit*, 31.

²⁶ Ng, *Trade and Society*, 52.

²⁷ Sarasin, *Tribute and Profit*, 45.

²⁸ Sarasin, *Tribute and Profit*, 41.

For instance, when a Siamese junk was detained at Boca Tigris (Humen)²⁹ and the cargo seized by Chinese officials deteriorated, a missive sent from Siam resulted in the Kangxi emperor issuing an edict to Guangdong officials, decreeing that thereafter Siamese ships reporting at Boca Tigris could proceed to Canton to sell their goods.³⁰ However, the Siamese took advantage of loopholes in Chinese regulations. Narai sent several support ships to accompany the three permitted tribute ships. While these three had to remain at the Chinese port while the envoys traveled overland to Beijing, the support ships were allowed at Narai's request to travel to-and-from Siam for "reconditioning," thus achieving two duty-free trading trips within one tribute mission.³¹

By the early 1680s the Qing had suppressed their opponents, and retaken the port of Amoy (Xiamen) in Fujian Province. South China was stabilized. The government lifted the ban on private overseas traders, and maritime customs administrations were set up in 1684 in Guangdong, Fujian, and the Jiangnan region (comprising parts of Jiangsu, Anhui, Jiangxi and Zhejiang provinces). However, prohibitions against immigration and trade to Southeast Asia were occasionally enacted in succeeding years, but the institutionalization of maritime trade under the *haiguan* (海關) system after 1684 marked a change to a more permissive outlook.³²

Fujian traders, in particular, streamed out to ports in Southeast Asia. As Fujian was a mountainous region, with only a third of the territory available for agriculture, most of the population made a living from the sea. The junk trade of the seafaring Hokkiens made Amoy a flourishing port in the early Qing era. After the reopening of Chinese ports, the French cleric Nicolas Gervaise recorded in 1685 that fifteen to twenty Chinese junks visited Ayutthaya each year laden with the finest goods of China and Japan, compared to seven to eight illegal junks before the lifting of the ban.³³

Throughout the Prasat Thong dynasty a large quantity of quality Chinese ceramics was imported into Siam. The Jesuit Guy Tachard described the house prepared to accommodate the French envoys in 1685 as "the fairest and most commodious House of the Town, which belonged to a great Mandarin, a Persian by Nation ... splendidly furnished ... Which way soever one cast his Eyes, there was nothing to be seen but fine China of all sizes, placed in niches; in a word, every thing lookt cool and pleasant."³⁴ Among the gifts from Narai to Louis XIV which the French envoy, the Chevalier de Chaumont, carried back to Paris in 1685 were 1,500 to 1,550 pieces of Chinese ceramics, all of high quality and great beauty, reckoned "the best and most curious of all the Indies."³⁵

Today in Ayutthaya remnants of 18th century Chinese ceramics from the Kangxi era can still be seen in the decoration of several *wat*. For example, shards are used to fashion the scales of the *naga* framing the staircases at the *prang* of Wat Phutthaisawan

²⁹ A strait at the entry of the Pearl River leading to Guangdong province.

³⁰ Sarasin, *Tribute and Profit*, 37.

³¹ Sarasin, *Tribute and Profit*, 32-4.

³² Cushman, *Fields From the Sea*, 128.

³³ Gervaise, *Natural and Political History of the Kingdom of Siam*, 49.

³⁴ Tachard, *Voyage to Siam*, 148.

³⁵ Smithies, *Aspects of the Embassy to Siam 1685*, 140.

(Figure 5). The dating of these pieces shows that this *prang* was built or renovated in the late Narai or early Ban Phlu Luang era. Chinese porcelain shards are also used in the decoration of Wat Mahathat as seen on an image of Hanuman kept in the Chao Samphraya National Museum (Figure 6). Most of the shards used in such decorations are blue and white, while a small amount is polychrome ware. This stands in contrast to



Figure 5. Porcelain shards decorating the naga staircases at Wat Phutthaisawan. Author's photo.



Figure 6. Hanuman decorated with 18th century Chinese porcelain shards, Chao Sam Phraya National Museum. Author's photo.

Wat Arun in Bangkok constructed during the early Rattanakosin era where almost all of the shards are colored wares.

The Chinese junk trade during the Ban Phlu Luang dynasty 1688–1767

The transition from King Narai to King Phetracha in 1688 meant that the pattern of trade with China changed. With the withdrawal of the French and the British from Ayutthaya and the according reduction in the activity of the Dutch, Siam's trade was concentrated more than before on China. Yet there was no tribute mission for twenty-four years after 1684. Why should this have been?

Siam did not lack people with ability and experience in the tribute trade. The nobles overseeing the *phrakhlang*, such as Okya Kosa Pan, were experienced in foreign relations. After the death of Kosa Pan, the Port Department came under the care of Okya Sombathiban, an ethnic Chinese and a royal favorite,³⁶ who had been a subordinate of Constantine Phaulkon³⁷ and was well-versed in the workings of the Port Department. The post of Phraya Yommarat was held by a learned Chinese.³⁸ There were over 3,000 people of Chinese ethnicity in Ayutthaya.³⁹ Hence the lack of tribute missions was clearly not due to lack of personnel. The change of dynasty in Siam was a complicating factor though. The Chinese imperial court valued continuity in the ruling families of its tributary states.⁴⁰ The fact that King Phetracha was an in-law of King Narai should have made it easier to explain the succession. Whether the dynastic break was the reason for the gap in tribute missions awaits further research.

Perhaps the method of trading with China changed in this era because so many Chinese junks came to trade in Siam that preparing tribute missions was no longer necessary for selling the products that *phrakhlang* collected. Ayutthaya could buy goods from China, as well as earning good revenues from customs duties, without sending tribute missions which were complicated to organize and risky to undertake. A parallel development can be seen at Batavia. In 1689 Hoge Regering, director of the VOC at Batavia, stopped sending ships from Batavia to China, and instead bought goods or commissioned goods from Chinese junk merchants calling at Batavia because the goods were cheaper.⁴¹

Allowing merchants from Guangdong, Fujian, and the Jiangnan region to trade

³⁶ Okya Sombathiban had formerly helped Phaulkon in the Port Department, and was jailed after the succession of King Phetracha. Through the intercession of Prince Sorasak's mother, he was released and was re-employed in a rather lowly post in the bureaucracy. After bringing the king information about the revolt at Nakhon Ratchasima, he returned to favor and was appointed to the post of Okya Sombathiban as well as the overseer of the Port Department. King Phetracha trusted him to look after Prince Khwan, which led to his execution under King Sua. See Dhiravat, "Dutch and French Evidence Concerning Court Conflicts at the end of King Phetracha's Reign, 1699-1703."

³⁷ Dhiravat, "Western Evidence Concerning the Role of the Chinese at the Siamese Court," 4.

³⁸ Kaempfer, *Description of the Kingdom of Siam*, 38.

³⁹ Sarasin, *Tribute and Profit*, 46.

⁴⁰ After the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767, King Taksin waited fourteen years before gaining recognition, and the news did not reach his capital at Thonburi until after he had been overthrown.

⁴¹ Jörg, *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade*, 19.

overseas from 1684 allowed Chinese goods to flow out to the world market, and especially to Batavia. In 1694 Chinese junks carried over two million pieces of Chinese ceramics to Batavia. Of these, 1.2 million pieces were for local and regional markets, 400,000 taken to Europe by the VOC, and around 400,000 bought by private merchants and VOC employees to sell in Europe.⁴² There were around thirty shops in Batavia selling Chinese ceramics. European merchants could order ceramics with the designs they required including the requisite family coat of arms. At the National Archives in Jakarta there is a contract dated May 1706 between a German officer of the VOC and a Chinese junk merchant to buy a large garniture consisting of three jars with covers and two beakers with the coat of arms of Frederick the Great, King of Prussia (1701–1713).⁴³



Figure 7. Bowl and plates decorated with boys holding a flower, found in Lopburi and Ayutthaya respectively. Courtesy of Mr. Praphaisith Tankeyura.

Kangxi-era ceramics found in Siam are mostly bowls produced for export similar to those carried by Chinese junks to Batavia. Some, such as the underglaze blue plates found in Ayutthaya and a bowl found in Lopburi with a design of a young boy with a flower (Figure 7), may have arrived in Siam via Batavia. Similar patterns have been found in the Vung Tau wreck, a junk that sunk off the coast of Vietnam while en route to Batavia in the Phetracha reign.⁴⁴

King Sua (1703–1708)

Aernout Cleur, the VOC director (or Chief Factor) in Ayutthaya, heard from Thai nobles that after King Sua ascended the throne, Okya Sombathiban, who oversaw the *phrakhlang* late in the Phetracha reign, had been arrested as part of the rival faction of Phra Khwan, stripped of his property, and executed. The Department of Trade fell under the responsibility of another Chinese individual who was awarded the title of Okphra

⁴² Jörg, “Chinese Porcelain for the Dutch in the Seventeenth Century,” 197.

⁴³ Jörg, “Chinese Porcelain for the Dutch in the Seventeenth Century,” 201-2.

⁴⁴ Jörg and Flecker *Porcelain from the Vung Tau Wreck: The Hallstrom Excavation*, Fig. 14.

Sombathiban, and presented by the king with the property seized from his predecessor.⁴⁵

King Sua was acquainted with trade. Since the Phetracha reign, he had been regularly sending junks to trade on the Coromandel coast, in Japan, and at Batavia. The new Sombathiban had risen in the bureaucracy due to his cleverness, and probably still held the post six years later when the VOC reported that Ayutthaya had sent a junk with a missive to Batavia in 1709-1710.⁴⁶ He could also be the man who organized a tribute mission to China in 1708 after the gap of 24 years.

King Thaisa (1709–1732)

In 1711 Okya Sombathiban, who was in charge of royal trade was promoted by King Thaisa, to head the *phrakhlang*. According to Monseigneur Louis-Armand Champion de Cicé, writing in 1714, the *phrakhlang* minister was much loved and esteemed by Thaisa, as he had been by the king's father, King Sua.⁴⁷ The Chinese Phrakhlang was ordered to command a fleet with 10,000 men to attack Cambodia. Though he was skilled in trading, he had no talent for warfare. The Ayutthaya army won the war, but the navy led by the Chinese Phrakhlang was defeated by the Vietnamese at the Phutthaimat estuary. King Thaisa imposed only a light punishment for this failure, namely a fine of guns, ammunition, gunpowder and boats.⁴⁸ A British document from the Fort St. George Diary in Madras (Chennai) mentioned that the Chinese Phrakhlang had relatives in the Amoy government; most likely he was a Hokkien.⁴⁹ De Cicé, a French cleric resident in Ayutthaya, reported:

The new king [Thaisa] being young and pleasure-loving, discharging the greater part of the burden of the government of his realm to his Barcalon [Phraklang], this mandarin, knowing the ways of the court, has taken all possible measures to strengthen his position, and render himself formidable to his enemies.... He has put Chinese into the most eminent posts, above all those which have some connection with trade, so that at present it is the Chinese who do all the trading in this kingdom.⁵⁰

With the reopening of private trade, more Chinese joined those who had fled during the Ming–Qing transition. In Ayutthaya and Ligor (Nakhon Si Thammarat), an important tin center, new arrivals were assisted by the older settlers to find work or to bid for tax farms.

In the early Ban Phlu Luang era, tea drinking began to catch on in Europe. Once tea drinking became a part of the everyday life of the middle class, tea became China's

⁴⁵ Dhiravat, "Western Evidence Concerning the Role of the Chinese at the Siamese Court," 5; Dhiravat, "Dutch and French Evidence Concerning Court Conflicts at the End of King Phetracha's Reign."

⁴⁶ Dhiravat, "Western Evidence Concerning the Role of the Chinese at the Siamese Court," 5.

⁴⁷ Dhiravat, "Princes, Pretenders, and the Chinese Phrakhlang," 117.

⁴⁸ *Phratchaphongsawadan krung si ayutthaya chabap Moh Bradley*, 391.

⁴⁹ Dhiravat, "Princes, Pretenders, and the Chinese Phrakhlang," 117.

⁵⁰ Dhiravat, "Western Evidence Concerning the Role of the Chinese at the Siamese Court," 14.

leading export. As a result, tin which was used to line tea chests as well as to make spirit money for worshipping ancestors and gods, was in great demand in China. According to Imel Christiaen Cock, Chief Factor (or director) of the VOC in Ayutthaya from 1726 to 1727, in both Khao Daeng and “Dinlemo” districts of Ligor, supervision over the tin deposits and the collection of the tin to be sent as tribute (*suai*) to Ayutthaya changed hands. The Chinese paid large sums to obtain these positions. A Chinese tax farmer who controlled tin production in Dinlemo was appointed Okluang Chaiphakdi. At Khao Daeng the amount of tin due to the king was increased from 15 *bahar* to 42 *bahar*. The Dutch, who had been granted a monopoly on the purchase of tin at Ligor since the Narai reign, were not able to buy enough for their needs.⁵¹ In the second decade of the 18th century, when China had an almost insatiable demand for tin, Chinese traders as well as Siamese crown junks manned largely by Chinese sailors, exported large amounts. Imports of Chinese porcelain back to Siam increased accordingly.

In 1717 the Kangxi emperor again imposed a new maritime restriction forbidding junks from Guangdong, Fujian, and Zhejiang to trade with Southeast Asia (usually referred to as Nanyang, literally “Southern Ocean”). But on this occasion the policy was not enforced as strictly as during dynastic transition. The domestic commercial network was allowed to function, and in the following year trade with Japan, Ryukyu (Okinawa), and Annam (central-southern Vietnam) was allowed to resume. Hence Fujianese, or more specifically Hokkien (because the sailors spoke Hokkien, the Minnan dialect), junks sailed to Siam or Batavia under the pretext that they were heading for Macao or Annam. Meanwhile foreign ships could still go to trade at Chinese ports in the usual way.⁵² The renewed ban thus increased the business for Siamese junks, and the Siamese kings sent tribute missions more frequently.

The flow of Chinese settlers into Siam was related to political disorder in China, resulting in a number of Ming loyalists settling in Siam during the dynastic transition.⁵³ During the overseas trading bans in the early 18th century, several Hokkien who made their living from marine trade relocated their business to Siam because they received protection there. For instance, one royal missive requested a pardon for Chinese crews working on the King of Siam’s tribute ships. The missive asks Chinese officials not to punish them as well as granting them permission to sail back to Siam. The Chinese Phrakhleng was considered to be the patron of the Chinese junk crews, and his influence may have played a part in the “Nai Kai Uprising” (see below).

Apart from the Chinese Phrakhleng, the names of several other rich merchants appear in the records, including Chen Zhaoka 陳昭誇 (born in Amoy, moved to Siam, titled Luang Jinjulisamutphakdi);⁵⁴ Phraya Lauja, described by Wijbrand Blom as the most

⁵¹ Dhiravat, “Princes, Pretenders, and the Chinese Phrakhleng,” 118.

⁵² Ng, *Trade and Society; The Amoy Network on the China Coast*, 57.

⁵³ In 1660, Li Tin Gua, the last descendant of the Ming, escaped to Burma (Myanmar), where several loyalist mandarins joined him. Chinese sources state that an old mandarin named Kan Kua Tai escaped to Ayutthaya and later married a member of the Ayutthaya royal family. At the same time the ancestors of another Ming loyalist, Jao Khrua Ngoen sae Tan, the maternal grandfather of King Mongkut (Rama IV), took refuge and lived around the Sugarpalm Road Canal in Ayutthaya.

⁵⁴ Sarasin, *Tribute and Profit*, 61.

eminent private merchant in the country;⁵⁵ and Luang Sisombat, or Wang Xingquan 王興全 (from Amoy), who later became the Phrakhlang.⁵⁶ In this era, Ayutthaya prospered from trade and there was a rich community of Chinese immigrants.

An important change in China-Siam relations occurred in 1722, the last year of the Kangxi reign, when rice was in short supply and increasingly expensive in southeastern China. Siam sent an envoy to inform the Chinese court that rice in Siam was cheaply available. As a result, the emperor gave permission for Siamese junks to import 300,000 *picul* of rice duty-free for sale in China's coastal provinces to ameliorate conditions there.⁵⁷ Over the following years, the import of Siamese rice became steadily more frequent. Understanding the importance of these imports to well-being and political stability, the imperial court granted more and more concessions to the junks carrying rice, including waiver of taxes on other goods carried, and rewards to the captains.⁵⁸

As noted above, when Siam sent tribute to the Yongzheng emperor in 1724, two years after the start of the rice imports, jade and imperial ceramics were included for the first time in the return gifts to King Thaisa.⁵⁹ This practice was repeated on the occasion of another tribute mission in 1729. Imperial ceramics were considered articles of high value and prestige, reserved as gifts to those who rendered special services to the emperor, such as generals victorious in war, or tributary kings considered of importance to China. Siam's rice surplus thus seems to have played a part in the history of Thai ceramics.

In this period, Siam sent orders for large amounts of Chinese ceramics, including not only blue and white but also polychrome ware decorated in *fencai* pastel shades with Thai designs—the style that would become known as Bencharong.

The Borommakot (1732–1758) and Ekathat reigns (1758–1767)

The royal transition at the end of the Thaisa reign was violent and disruptive. When the king fell fatally ill, he appointed one of his sons, Prince Aphai as his successor, and the Chinese Phrakhlang threw his support behind Prince Aphai. In the struggle over the succession, however, Aphai was defeated, and the Chinese Phrakhlang took refuge in the monkhood.⁶⁰ According to Aumond, the new king sent some thirty Malays to seize him, and he was later executed while still in his robe.⁶¹ King Borommakot, who

⁵⁵ Dhiravat, "Western Evidence Concerning the Role of the Chinese at the Siamese Court," 9.

⁵⁶ Kulap, *Mahamukhamattayanukulawong*, 275-89.

⁵⁷ Cushman, *Fields from the Sea*, 129.

⁵⁸ Sarasin, *Tribute and Profit*, 42-90.

⁵⁹ Thongthae and Udom, "Prawatisat kan thut rawang thai-jin," 247.

⁶⁰ The Phan Janthanumat chronicle states, "Sang, the Racha Bòriban, fled to be ordained as a senior monk. He was able to be caught at a district of the Municipality of Bò Chum. [The King] had both of Their Holy Lordships executed with sandalwood sections. Khæk and Chams stabbed Sem, the Phichai Racha, and Phun, the Yommarat, to death outside the gates of the Monastery of Sappanwood. Sang, the Racha Bòriban, was defrocked and taken to be done away with at the execution grounds." Cushman, *Royal Chronicles*, 419; *Phraratchaphongsawadan krung si ayutthaya chabap Moh Bradley*, 401-2.

⁶¹ Dhiravat, "Princes, Pretenders, and the Chinese Phrakhlang," 121. Unfortunately, the personal name of this Chinese Phrakhlang has been lost, probably as a result of his unfortunate demise.

succeeded to the throne, appointed Phraya Chamnan Borirak (Uu) from a Brahman lineage as Phrakhlng. But the matter did not end there. Over a year later in 1734, some in the Chinese community in Ayutthaya rose in revolt and invaded the royal palace in the hope of replacing the king. The reasons behind the revolt are not reported in the chronicles, but possibly the supporters of the former Chinese Phrakhlng were behind it because they had lost benefits in the succession and wished to take revenge for their masters and colleagues who had lost their lives in the conflict.⁶² This event is known as the Nai Kai Uprising, taking the name from the largest Hokkien quarter in Ayutthaya at that time.⁶³

The fall of the Chinese Phrakhlng and the Nai Kai Uprising, however, did not do any lasting damage to the position of the Chinese at Ayutthaya. Chaophraya Chamnan Borirak (Uu) held the post of Phrakhlng for several years, and was succeeded by Chaophraya Phrakhlng (Chim),⁶⁴ who was related to him by marriage.⁶⁵ A third holder of the Phrakhlng post in the Borommakot reign was Wang Xingquan 王興全. Although he became Phrakhlng only late in the reign, his influence had been significant much earlier. In his study of the great households, K. S. R. Kulap relates that Wang Xingquan was a Hokkien merchant who came to Ayutthaya during the Thaisa reign, bringing goods to exchange against forest and other goods (aromatic woods, ivory, rhino horn, lac, tin, dried meat, dried fish, rice, salt) for export to China. Later he was appointed as Thong Sua, interpreter of the Siamese tribute mission to China, and rose to the title of Luang Sisombat before the end of the reign. During the Nai Kai Uprising in 1734 he had many followers whom “he mobilized to suppress the villainous Chinese, killing some and arresting many hundreds of them. Of those arrested, the king ordered the execution of 53 ... jailed 164 ... and had the remaining 700 cut off their queues to become Thai, and demoted all of them to be royal *phrai*, with tattoos on the faces, looking after the boatyard for the royal navy war boats at the mouth of Ironwood Canal.”⁶⁶ As a result of the royal favor won in this incident, Wang Xingquan was promoted to

⁶² The Phan Janthanumat chronicle states that officials “seized two hundred and eighty-one persons.... The ten people constituting the instigators of the incident were ordered to be executed. Their accomplices in that incident were ordered to be incarcerated in prison.” Cushman, *Royal Chronicles*, 427; *Phraratchaphongsawadan krung si ayutthaya chabap Moh Bradley*; “two hundred Chinese rebels were arrested, forty leaders were executed,” 404.

⁶³ Thavorn Sikkhakoson states that *nai kai* is Hokkien meaning “inner street,” meaning a market on the inner city road.

⁶⁴ Some sources say he was Phrakhlng under King Thaisa; see the history of Phraya Mahintharasakdithamrong (Pheng), the founder of the Phenkun family.

⁶⁵ Kulap’s information is inconsistent. Page 176 states that Phraya Thepworakhun, the son of Phraya Phrakhlng (Chim) married the daughter of Chaophraya Chamnan Borirak, while Page 215 states that Chim was a son-in-law of Chaophraya Chamnan Borirak (Kulap, *Mahamukhamattayanukulawong*, 176, 215). The first is consistent with the history of Phraya Mahintharasakdithamrong which states that Chim was working in the *phrakhlng* in the Thaisa reign. The second reference is supported by a genealogical chart of the family tree of Chaophraya Chamnan Borirak published by the Fine Arts Department. David Wyatt has also given credence to this interpretation. Given the confusion in the sources of reference it is difficult to reconcile the conflicting statements. At best we can show that there are two contradictory stories about the man.

⁶⁶ Kulap, *Mahamukhamattayanukulawong*, 280.

be Okphra Chodukratchasetthi, and many years later, “Okphra Chodukratchasetthi (Wang Xingquan) was made Chaophraya Phrakhleng, one of the four-pillar ministers, as the office was then vacant, and he was called *jao khun phrakhleng jin* (the Honorable Chinese Minister of Phrakhleng) because he had not cut off his queue.”⁶⁷

Before coming to Siam, Wang Xingquan had a family at Guangnan 廣南, possibly meaning Quang Nam province in Vietnam where Hoi An port was located. Many Chinese merchants had settled there because one year after the Kangxi emperor reimposed the maritime ban in 1717, an exception was made allowing Chinese ocean junks to visit Japan, Ryukyu, and Annam. Fujianese junks that were covertly trading with Siam and Batavia had to call in at Vietnam or Macao.⁶⁸ As a result, a small community of Chinese seafarers settled in Vietnam during the maritime ban which lasted about ten years. Consequently, we find that some Chinese who eventually settled in Siam came from Vietnam, like Wang Xingquan.

Although the followers of the old Chinese Phrakhleng lost out in the succession at the end of the Thaisa reign, a new group of Chinese merchants was promoted in the Borommakot reign with scarcely a break. The need for Chinese to man the junks and trade with China, East Asia, and Southeast Asia, under the Phrakhleng continued until the early Rattanakosin era.

When Qianlong ascended the throne, as a result of his liking of porcelain, Siam continued to receive royal gifts of ceramics. According to the Chinese records, these included:

1749: imperial ceramics, 146 pieces.

1753: imperial ceramics, 140 pieces; *falangcai*, 6 pieces.

1757: imperial ceramics, 140 pieces; *falangcai*, 13 pieces.

1762: imperial ceramics, 140 pieces; *falangcai*, 13 pieces.

1766: imperial ceramics, 140 pieces; *falangcai*, 13 pieces.⁶⁹

In summary, the China-Siam trade was severely disrupted by the Ming–Qing transition in the mid-17th century and by the maritime trading ban that followed. Commerce continued through the tributary trade as well as pirate networks, and ceramics figured prominently in the imports to Siam. In the early 18th century, several factors combined to boost the trade of ceramics from China to Siam: Chinese private trade boomed after the maritime ban was lifted; the Chinese immigrant community in Ayutthaya grew large and wealthy; many ethnic Chinese became prominent in the administration of the trade with China; and the need of China for Siamese rice resulted in trading concessions and warm relations, resulting in the emperor including fine imperial ceramics among the gifts to the Siamese king.

⁶⁷ Kulap, *Mahamukhamattayanukulawong*, 281.

⁶⁸ Ng, *Trade and Society: The Amoy Network on the China Coast*, 57.

⁶⁹ Thongthae and Udom, “Prawatisat kan thut rawang thai-jin,” 248-53.

Chinese porcelain found in Siam

At the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767, many valuable ceramics were lost. Hundreds of items of fine ceramics disappeared from the royal palace. Today not a single piece remains that can be identified as part of the return gifts brought back from Beijing by the Siamese envoys. However, there remains a considerable quantity of ceramics from China. These fall into two categories: first, Thai-style pieces that Ayutthaya ordered to be produced in China; and second, Chinese commercial wares that were imported for sale in the markets and neighborhoods where ethnic Chinese had shops. The shards found scattered around Ayutthaya suggest that Chinese commercial wares far outnumbered the articles commissioned from Ayutthaya in Siamese style.

Sources of Chinese ceramics found in Siam

A majority of the Chinese shards found in Ayutthaya were underglaze blue porcelain. Blue and white ware was the main production in Jingdezhen 景德镇, Jiangxi province, which had become China's main porcelain producing center. In Thai the products of Jingdezhen are known as *kangsai* ware (based on the Chaozhou (Teochew) pronunciation of Jiangxi). Among the shards found at Ayutthaya are also pieces from several kilns in Fujian and Guangdong provinces and from Longquan 龍泉 in Zhejiang province.



Figure 8. A Kraak bowl from Jingdezhen recovered from the Gulf of Thailand. Author's collection.

Jingdezhen is situated in an area endowed with the raw materials needed for fine porcelain production, and has a tradition of craftsmanship stretching back to the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368).⁷⁰ Porcelain used in imperial ceremonies as well as the return gifts presented to tributary rulers, both blue and white and polychrome ware, were almost all produced there. Jingdezhen ware also enjoyed strong demand in overseas markets. Porcelain exports to European markets were almost exclusively from Jingdezhen, as is evident from museum holdings all over Europe and the Middle East, and is further testified by shipwreck finds during the past few decades. According to Pariwat Thammapreechakorn, chief curator of the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum, the majority of Ming underglaze blue shards found in Siam were products of Jingdezhen.



Figure 9. Shards of Jingdezhen underglaze blue found in Ayutthaya. The bird piece on top was picked up by the author near Khlong Tho (คลองจันทน์) just outside the palace wall. Author's collection.



Figure 10. A late Ming Fujian bowl on the right compared with a Jingdezhen bowl on the left. Author's collection

⁷⁰ Royal kilns from the Northern Song (960–1127) were in Kaifeng and those of the Southern Song (1127–1279) in Hangzhou. Throughout the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, Jingdezhen produced ceramics for the imperial court.

From the 16th century onward, however, Dehua 德化, Anxi 安溪, Pinghe 平和, Zhangzhou 漳州 and other kilns in southern Fujian, along with the Raoping and Dapu kilns in Guangdong, started to produce ceramics for export. In Fujian province, kiln sites were scattered across many villages (see Figure 11). The products of these Ming-Qing non-official kilns in coastal Southeast China were inferior in quality to Jingdezhen wares, as the clay had more impurities. The Jingdezhen clay was not only finer but also was better prepared, washed, and immersed for a longer time. These factors contribute to fine potting.⁷¹ Although the products from provincial kilns were lower in quality than those from Jingdezhen, they were popular because of their cheaper price and ready availability. These kilns lay closer to the major ports, namely Quanzhou 泉州, Yuegang 月港, Fuzhou 福州, Zhangzhou, and Xiamen 廈門 in Fujian Province, and Canton (Guangzhou 廣州) in Guangdong Province.



Figure 11. Kiln sites and ports of Fujian; from Tan, *Zhangzhou Ware Found in the Philippines*, 18

In Ayutthaya, many shards of Fujianese ceramics have been found, originating from several production centers in the Zhangzhou region of Fujian,⁷² which had a long history of trading with Siam.⁷³ Fujian wares are mostly everyday bowls of low quality painted simply in underglaze blue. The kilns there were severely damaged during the warfare that raged in the coastal region for over thirty years during the Ming-Qing transition. Many of the kilns ceased production, and the local industry never really recovered, unlike in Jingdezhen.

⁷¹ Tan, *Zhangzhou Ware Found in the Philippines*, 19.

⁷² Formerly this was known in the West as Swatow ware, but recent excavation in China over the past two decades shows these were made in Fujian province in several villages around Zhangzhou, not around Swatow (Shantou) in northern Guangdong province, which was only a small fishing village and not a maritime port until the 19th century.

⁷³ Several Thai-Chinese families hail from here. In the Ayutthaya period Zhangzhou was called “Zhiangzhiu” and Quanzhou to the north was called “Zhazhiu” which derived from the Hokkien pronunciation of the names. Interview with Thavorn Sikhakoson, who noted that the Ayutthaya-era poem, *Klon suat subinkuman*, mentioned people from “Zhazhiu” operating puppets.

Another important center in Fujian was Dehua, some eighty kilometers to the north in the mountains where there was a good supply of fine clay. This center was known to the Portuguese and Dutch in the late Ming era. It had a reputation for making



Figure 12. Commercial ceramics for everyday use found in Ayutthaya. This pattern was produced both in Anxi, Fujian and Jingdezhen during the Ming to Qing transition. Courtesy of Mr. Chanchai Supanichvoraparch.



Figure 13. White glazed figurines found in Bang Kaja, Ayutthaya, probably from Dehua, Fujian. Author's collection.

porcelain figurines in the style known as *blanc de chine*. As it was distant from the coast, Dehua was not greatly affected by the dynastic transitional warfare. As at Jingdezhen, production has continued to the present day. In the late Ming and early Qing period, Dehua also produced a great amount of blue and white ware, distinguished by a greyish blue color, which was not popular in Europe, but sold to port cities from Batavia to Cape Town as part of the intra-Asian trade.⁷⁴

Exported Fujianese wares have been found at many places in Siam,⁷⁵ testifying to the long-standing relations between Siam and Fujian ports, especially in the late Ming and early Qing period. Apart from these two provinces, other local kilns also produced ceramics found in Siam. Many shards are remnants of ceramic containers for Chinese products such as pickled garlic, medicine and gunpowder. According to Pariwat Thammapreechakorn, shards of gunpowder jars were found at Pomphet, the fort at the southeast corner of Ayutthaya, and at Wat Nakhon Kosa and Phaulkon's House in Lopburi. Such small glazed jars with a narrow mouth, wide shoulders and no decoration originated from the Shaowu kiln in Guangdong and have been found throughout Southeast Asia. Other finds include blue and white bowls from the Chaozhou kilns in Guangdong province, teapots from Yixing in Jiangsu province, and green-glazed bowls from the Longquan kilns in Zhejiang province.⁷⁶

Made-to-order Thai-style ceramics

After inspecting the pottery excavated in the old capital by Phraya Boranratchathanin and kept at the Front Palace (Chandra Kasem) Museum, Prince Damrong Rajanuphap categorised the various Ayutthaya made-to-order ware as follows:

The items which were made in China in the Ayutthaya era according to designs sent from Siam, and which have been found in great quantity, are three in number: bowls, stem-plates, and covered jars (โถ, *toh*). There are also two other forms: small bowls (ถ้วย, *thuai*) for chili sauce (*nam phrik*), fish sauce, and medicine; and spittoons for disposing of betel nut residue (*nam mak*).

The bowls found in the old capital have two common shapes. The first type, *song bua*, sports a characteristic everted lip, while the other type is shaped like a lime cut in half. Characteristically both are Chinese shapes; consequently, the distinguishing feature is the Siamese motifs decorating the surface. Another distinguishing Thai feature is the lid or cover, which is almost never found on Chinese (rice) bowls. In terms of decorations of these *kangsai* bowls, there are three types found: underglaze blue; polychrome enameled on white background such as a broken piece with dancing *kinnari* motif with a remnant of some gilding which was found near Wihan Somdet Palace and is now kept at Ayutthaya Museum; and Bencharong meaning the polychrome ware with color applied to the background

⁷⁴ Kerr and Mengoni, *Chinese Export Ceramics*, 130.

⁷⁵ Pirawat, *Khrueang thuai jin*.

⁷⁶ For details of Chinese ceramics found in Thailand, see Natthapatra Chandavij, *Khrueang thuai jin thi phop*; Pirawat, *Khrueang thuai jin*; and Paothong Thongchua, *Kan sueksa khwam samphan thang kan kha*.

as well as the motifs. There are more Bencharong types of glaze found compared to those with color motifs on white background.

Stem-plates by their very shape are characteristically Thai. They were imported to order for Thai-style entertaining. The large stem-plates are used for serving *yam*, fresh vegetables and fish (*phak pla*), and individual servings of rice. Small stem-plates are used for serving Thai dishes, condiments and sweets. Stem-plates are often arranged on low portable tables with decorative legs....

Ayutthaya also ordered dishes with pink lotus decorations. A similar motif is found on a large holy water jar. Not many pieces with this red lotus decoration have survived.

Numerous *toh* (โถ, covered jars) were ordered in different shapes and sizes. The largest found are around five spans (*kam*), followed by the medium-sized ones used for food and perfumery. Smaller ones are used for serving curry dishes and desserts in syrup as part of the Siamese dinner service. The smallest jars are used as cosmetics containers. The large and medium ones are usually melon-shaped topped with a plain knob lid. Those used for curry and sweets are sometimes gourd-shaped or urn-shaped, with lotus-bud knob covers. Those for cosmetics, perfume, powder and toiletries tend to be more attractive; the knob on the lid is often set with gold decoration. These are called *toh prik*.⁷⁷

The ceramics that were “made-to-order” in Siamese style, such as have been found, were manufactured no earlier than the mid-17th century as they are mostly Qing porcelain.



Figure 14. An 18th-century tea bowl with half-lime shape decorated with Siamese motif. Author's collection.

⁷⁷ Damrong Rajanuphap, *Tamnan khrueng to lae thuai pan*, 233.



Figure 15. Bencharong bowls with everted lip called *song bua* by Prince Damrong. Courtesy of Mr. Praphaisith Tankeyura.



Figure 16. Ayutthaya stem plates. Courtesy of Mr. Praphaisith Tankeyura.



Figure 17. Bencharong covered jars with *thepphanom* motif, Ayutthaya period. Courtesy of Mr. Praphaisith Tankeyura.



Figure 18. Small toiletry jarlets. Courtesy of Mr. Praphaisith Tankeyura.



Figure 19. Tea caddy with Ayutthaya motif. Courtesy of the National Museum Bangkok.



Figure 20. Covered box and various containers such as lime pots similar to those found in abundance buried in the Ayutthaya palace. Courtesy of Mr. Praphaisith Tankeyura.



Figure 21. Ayutthaya period *toh* jar found in Ratchaburi. Courtesy of Mr. Chanchai Supanichvoraparch.



Figure 22. The wall at Wat Tha, Ayutthaya.

Blue and white with Thai designs

In the early Qing era, the ordering of blue-and-white made in shapes and designs specified by a foreign purchaser took a long time. Underglaze blue decoration has to be drawn directly on the biscuit before glazing. Unglazed pottery is fragile and cannot be transported over a long distance. Foreign motifs had to be painted in Jingdezhen, located far from the coast, and overland travel was slow. The time taken to send the specifications to the kilns in Jingdezhen for production and transport the goods back to Canton was several months, often longer than the sailing season determined by the monsoon. An agent was needed to store the goods at the port until the next year's sailing season. If a ship wanted to complete its business within a single season, it had to be content with the overglazed decoration done in Canton on ready-made glazed wares available for sale in the market at the port. Ceramics were the first goods that had to be loaded in the hold.⁷⁸

Items with underglaze decoration had to be ordered in one season for shipping in the next. The fact that so much Chinese blue and white with Thai designs produced in the 18th century has been found in Siam shows that the marine trade between China and Siam was regular and constant. Whether these goods were carried in Chinese junks or Siamese junks is unknown.

Some features of the made-to-order ceramics in the Ban Phlu Luang era can be easily traced to Ayutthaya art. For instance, the knob on the lids of a covered jars found in Ratchaburi (Figure 21) is the same shape as the capping on columns in the walls at Wat Tha (now Wat Tha Ka Rong) in Ayutthaya (Figure 22).

⁷⁸ Jörg, *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade*, 97.

Bencharong made to order

Bencharong is the name given to overglaze polychrome porcelain with Thai designs. In the Ayutthaya era, none was made in Siam. All was ordered from China.

Bencharong is translated from the Chinese *wucai* using the Pali words, *pañca ranga*, meaning five colors. *Wucai* porcelain was first known in the Jiajing reign (1522–1566) of the Ming dynasty. Although the name literally translates as five colors, it really implied a multitude of colors.⁷⁹ *Wucai* was the combination of overglaze colors combined with underglaze blue. It was in the Kangxi reign of the Qing dynasty that *wucai* porcelain reached its pinnacle, with a range of enchanting translucent green tones. Kangxi *wucai* was called “famille verte” by European collectors. Although the term “Bencharong” derived from *wucai*, most Bencharong pieces are not famille verte, but famille rose, namely *fencai* in Chinese. This is a later technique using pastel colors developed during the early 18th century. Examples of Bencharong made with *wucai* technique are rare and difficult to find. Some fragmentary, but very beautiful, examples can be seen on the *prang* of Wat Phutthaisawan in Ayutthaya (Figure 23).



Figure 23. Remnant of a Chinese polychrome plate with a Thai motif on the stair wall at Wat Phutthaisawan, Ayutthaya. Author's photo.

It is possible that Qing imperial wares in *fencai* style, which the Yongzheng and Qianlong emperors sent to Ayutthaya as return tribute gifts, influenced the types of ceramics which Siam commissioned from China. It seems that the Siamese court from the Ban Phlu Luang era until King Rama III of the Rattanakosin era preferred polychrome ware, and ordered more Bencharong than blue and white.

Chanchai Supanichvoraparch, an expert on ceramics, suggests that the painting on Bencharong commissioned in the Ayutthaya era obtrudes the surface, as if color was

⁷⁹ Feng, *Chinese Ceramics*, 92.



Figure 24. Items with designs of *thepphanom* and *norasingh*, the most popular Thai motif. Courtesy of Mr. Praphaisith Tankeyura.



Figure 25. 18th-century Chinese overglaze colorware of various shapes found in Siam. Courtesy of Mr. Praphaisith Tankeyura.

applied over the opaque white slip/glaze. Interestingly this might be the same technique initially used to make pastel *fencai* wares in private kilns in China. *Fencai* wares with pale pink and opaque white were produced in China only from 1720 onwards. Previously color shades tended to be transparent rather than opaque. Opaque famille rose is an 18th century innovation. The fact that most Ayutthaya-era Bencharong objects have this pink and opaque white in the style of *fencai* suggests that they originate between the Thaisa reign and the Rattanakosin era, not from an earlier period.

A large number of Bencharong objects are decorated with the design of votive deities, *thepphanom* and *norasingh* (Figure 24). Examples were found in a shipwreck in the Gulf of Thailand from around 1728 during the Thaisa reign and are now kept in the Princessehof Museum at Leeuwarden in the Netherlands.⁸⁰ This design was repeatedly ordered by Siamese customers from the Thaisa reign to the early 20th century. Prince Damrong explained:

During the Ayutthaya days bowls with the *thepphanom* and *norasingh* design were very popular. These are found in various old towns, even in remote cities. In old houses, and in places as far flung as Kamphaeng Phet and Ban Hua Wiang in Chaiya, such bowls are still found. When royalty visited such places, the dining sets which locals brought to serve them consisted of Ayutthaya-era *thepphanom* and *norasingh* bowls which were still in use. These must have been imported in large quantities for them to have spread to such far-off places.⁸¹

Most designs from the Ban Phlu Luang era featured foliage, flowers, and Himaphan creatures such as *kinnari* and *norasingh*. These items have traditional Thai shapes and motifs, with no suggestion of influence from the West, unlike the late 19th century when the Thai elite wished to be “international”. The lotus figured prominently because of its Buddhist symbolism.

Ayutthaya-era Bencharong drew inspiration from the city and landscape of Ayutthaya. The blooming lotus design painted on the inside of many Bencharong bowls (Figure 26) is the same as the design on the wooden door handles of Wat Thammaram in Ayutthaya (Figure 27). The Bencharong plate at the National Museum in Bangkok (Figure 28) is decorated with a *kan kot cho hang to* (ก้านขดช่อหางโต), a popular motif in the Ban Phlu Luang era. The same motif appears in woodcarvings on doors of several *wat* including those of the teaching hall which King Sua moved from Ayutthaya to Wat Yai Suwannaram in Phetchaburi as a gift to his teacher.

One aspect that has been widely debated is where these Ayutthaya-era Bencharong with Thai designs were produced. Although most agree that the biscuits were usually produced in Jingdezhen, the location of the enameling center or centers that decorated the Bencharong remains to be confirmed. There are several speculative possibilities: first, at Jingdezhen; second at Canton, the enameling center for porcelain exports to Western markets; third, at Amoy and other ports of entry for rice imported from Siam;

⁸⁰ Harrison, *Later Ceramics in South-East Asia*, color plate 41.

⁸¹ Damrong Rajanuphap, *Tamnan khrueng to lae thuai pan*, 234.



Figure 26 (left). Shard of Bencharong bowl with lotus painted on the interior. Courtesy of Mr. Chanchai Supanichvoraparch.
 Figure 27 (right). Door carving at Wat Thammaram, Ayutthaya.



Figure 28. A polychrome plate decorated with *kan kot cho hang* to design. Courtesy of the National Museum Bangkok.

and fourth, in Siam itself. The first two possibilities are more likely than the last two. As Charnchai points out, the process of decorating porcelain is not difficult once the technique is known, although control of colors and shades remains a closely guarded trade secret.



Figure 29. Late 18th or early 19th century jarlet ordered from China for Siam. Courtesy of Mr. Praphaisith Tankeyura.

Dawn Rooney, a leading authority on Southeast Asian ceramics, has found from recent excavations in China that early 19th century shards of Bencharong have been found in Jingdezhen. Rooney is expected to discuss these findings and their implications on the history of Bencharong in a forthcoming book. In a recent paper, Luisa E. Mengoni argued that 19th century enameled copperwares with Thai design were made in Canton and its surrounding districts.⁸²

According to Prince Damrong, the commissioning of Ayutthaya-style ceramics from China continued well into the 19th century:

⁸² Mengoni, "Adapting to Foreign Demands: Chinese Enameled Copperwares for the Thai Market," 107-23.

In the early Rattanakosin period, King Rama I was determined to restore Thai arts and crafts lost in the fall of Ayutthaya.... He commanded court artists to draw the valuable old Ayutthaya crockery ... such as the polychrome bowl with Thai foliage *kan kot* motif, garuda, lion and *thepphanom* motifs and commissioned the Chinese to copy the old porcelain. These royal commissioned pieces are few in number and are not commonly known. The workmanship of the porcelains ordered from China during the King Rama I reign are superior to those of Ayutthaya.⁸³

The ceramics that Siam ordered from China are testament to the prosperity of the economy during the Thaisa and Borommakot reigns, probably as a result of the profits made on the export of rice to China, as well as to the existence of the trading networks needed for acquiring made-to-order ceramics. In the early Qing dynasty, the ceramic industry in China developed the ability to meet the demands of international customers better than in the Ming era. As a result, Siam in the Ban Phlu Luang era could acquire ceramics produced with Thai designs in bright and innovative colors, manufactured with technology that was modern for that era. These ceramics are evidence of the prosperity of the late Ayutthaya era.

Method of ordering and ships used for made-to-order ceramics in the late Ayutthaya period

After the Kangxi emperor permitted Chinese seagoing junks to trade overseas in 1684, Chinese junks flooded the South China Sea. In March 1733, Wybrand Blom recorded that on average eighteen Chinese junks called at Ayutthaya each year, while another four to five Chinese junks visited Chaiya, Ligor, Pattani and Trengganu.⁸⁴ All sorts of Chinese products including made-to-order ceramics became widely available in major ports such as Batavia. The appearance of many made-to-order underglaze blue and Bencharong wares with Thai motifs dating back to the same period indicates that a similar service was available in Ayutthaya. Although the majority of Thai-style porcelain is Jingdezhen ware, there were also blue and white covered jars with *thepphanom* motifs as well as everyday utensils which are Fujian ware. These were probably transported via ports in Fujian such as Zhangzhou, Fuzhou, Quanzhou or Xiamen. The ships importing the made-to-order ceramics were most likely Chinese junks because of their ease of dealing with upland trading networks in China.

Seven decades later the Qianlong emperor restricted foreign trade to Canton. Foreign merchants purchased ceramics there in two ways: first, from the Cohong, the guild of Chinese merchants licensed to facilitate trade with foreign merchants; second, from the specialist porcelain shops in the streets just in front of the walls of Canton. Ceramics were the first item for which traders placed orders after their ship arrived because of the long lead time for delivery and because ceramics had to be loaded first.

Western merchant ships calling at Ayutthaya probably carried the types of Chinese ceramics that were easy to buy and sell at port cities such as Batavia, Surat, and Malacca

⁸³ Damrong Rajanuphap, *Tamnan khrueng to lae thuai pan*, 234.

⁸⁴ Dhiravat, "Princes, Pretenders, and the Chinese Phrakhlung," 119.

(Melaka) which were centers for intra-Asian trade as well as places for assembling cargoes to be sent onward to Europe. These items were most likely to have been off-the-shelf trade ceramics rather than customized made-to-order ceramics like Bencharong. There are no records of Western ships carrying Bencharong or made-to-order blue and white with Thai motifs and design.

There are almost no records to show whether the Chinese dealt with Siamese junks in the same way as they dealt with Westerners. If the same laws were applied, then the Siamese would have had to purchase through the Cohong or the shops in Canton. By the 18th century, Siam had been trading with China for almost 400 years and their vessels were manned by Chinese sailors. They might thus have had some advantages in evading the strictures imposed on the Westerners. By the early 19th century, Western observers noted that Sino-Siamese junks called at ports scattered along the entire coast of China from Hainan to Tianjin.⁸⁵ A partial list of the Siamese junks sailing to China in 1813, while the Canton system was still in place, shows that two-thirds called at ports other than Canton.⁸⁶ There are no records showing whether or not the tribute vessels from Siam placed orders for ceramics in Canton during the Ayutthaya period but in the Bangkok period there are better records for orders from Siam of porcelain with Thai designs.⁸⁷

Shops and markets in late Ayutthaya

Shards of Chinese porcelain have been found in various quarters of Ayutthaya, both within the walled city as well as in the suburbs and small islets surrounding the city. Much has been fished out of the waterways around Bang Kaja–Pomphet, where the Pasak and Chaophraya Rivers meet.

In the Ayutthaya era, the markets became busier in the junk season when the monsoon brought vessels of various nationalities. Junks from China would arrive before Chinese New Year, as in this description:

In the monsoon season when the wind blows junks to the city, Chinese junk traders, Khaek sloop merchants, Farang clipper traders, Gujarati Khaek traders, Surat Khaek, Khaek from Java and Malayu, Khaek *thet*, French, Farang Losong, Dutch, Spanish, English, black Farang, Langkuni Farang, and island Khaek, merchants in charge of junks, sloops, and clippers sail up and drop anchor at the end of the canal. They carry goods up to deposit in buildings that they have bought or rented inside the walls of Ayutthaya, and open shops to sell goods according to type and language.⁸⁸

Chinese ceramics must have been distributed to the market areas where the Chinese traded in Ayutthaya. The largest and densest of these was in the southeast corner of the walled island near the junction of the Pasak and Chaophraya Rivers. Here there were

⁸⁵ Sng and Bisalputra, *A History of the Thai-Chinese*, 160.

⁸⁶ Cushman, *Fields from the Sea*, 18.

⁸⁷ Damrong Rajanuphap, *Tamnan khrueng to lae thuai pan*.

⁸⁸ Baker, "Markets and production," 58, translated from *Athibhai phaen thi*.

three brick-paved roads stretching between Chinese Gate Canal and Nai Kai Canal. One of these is called “Chinese Street” on the map by John Andrews from 1771 (Figure 30), and “Chinese Market Street” (*thanon talat jin*) on the map of the old city drawn in the early Bangkok era (Figure 31).

Generally this area was known by its Hokkien name as the Nai Kai quarter (see note 62 above). Within this quarter there were four Chinese-sponsored temples, namely Wat Sam Jin, Wat Thanon Jin, Wat Jin and Wat Jek Chi. Fujianese porcelain (Figure 32) as

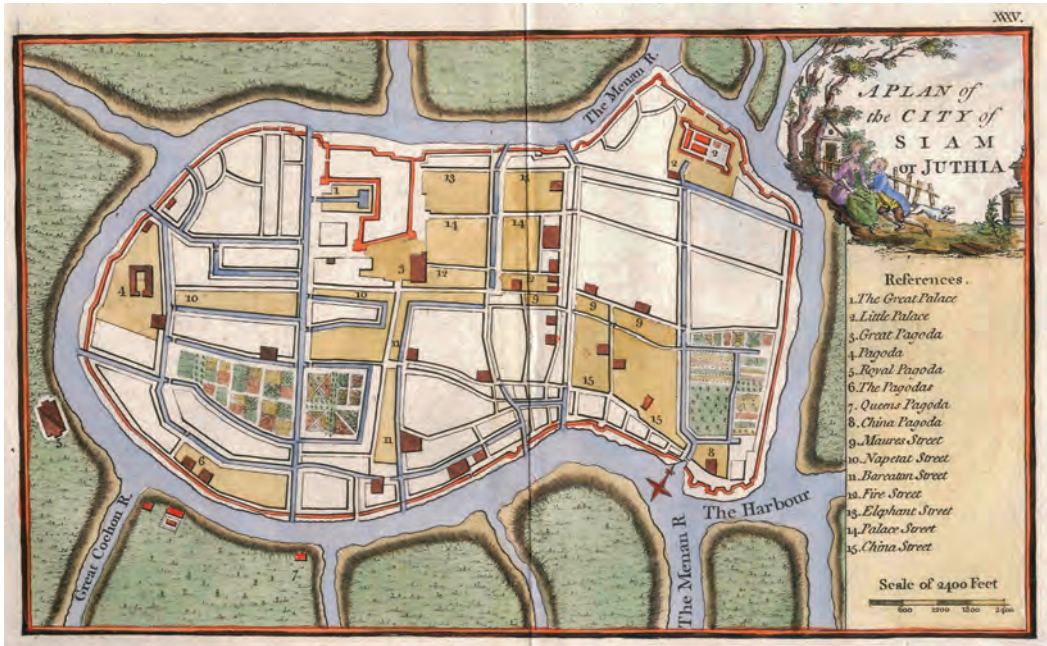


Figure 30. The Nai Kai quarter is marked as China Street on the 1771 map by John Andrews.



Figure 31. The southeast corner of Ayutthaya on the map drawn in the mid-19th century (south is at the top).

well as several stone Buddha images in Chinese style (Figure 33) have been recovered from the area and are now kept at the Chao Sam Phraya National Museum.



Figure 32. A small bowl from Dehua, Fujian. The small shard on the right was found by the author near Wat Sam Jin, Nai Kai Market. Author's collection.

The *Description of Ayutthaya* portrayed this “main market” (which was probably like Bangkok’s Sampheng) as follows:

There are Chinese brick shops on both sides of the main road. Thai and Chinese sit at shops selling goods from junks—brassware, white gold, tiles, pots, bowls, *phrae* silk of various colors of Chinese type, and silk of various colors, and metal tools. All kind of goods from China, including food and fruit, are displayed for sale in shops in the market. There is also a fresh market selling pork, duck, chicken, sea fish, freshwater fish, crab, and various shellfish of many types and descriptions. It is the biggest market in the city, called the Great Market of the Tail of the City, in the Nai Kai Quarter.⁸⁹

This Nai Kai Quarter and the nearby Three Horses Quarter were very busy and congested. At the south end of the Nai Kai Canal, there were five “tunnel gates”⁹⁰ in the walls, compared to only one or two at other locations. On the early Bangkok map, at the mouth of the Chinese Gate Canal is Phraya Ratchawangsan Wharf on the bank of the Chaophraya, probably the site of a government unit overseeing the comings and goings

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁹⁰ ประตูช่องกุด, *pratu chong kut*, a slit in the wall large enough for someone to walk through.



Figure 33. Torso of a Chinese stone Buddha image found at Wat Sam Jin, Nai Kai quarter, now kept at Chao Sam Phraya National Museum, Ayutthaya. Author's photo.

of seagoing ships and royal junks.⁹¹ In the Phetracha reign, this area of the city was occupied by wealthy people and foreign merchants, as described by Kaempfer in 1690:

The first Street upon entering the City is that which runs Westward along the turning of the Wall: it hath the best Houses, amongst which are those, that formaly belonged to the English, Dutch, and French, as also that in which Faulcon resided.⁹²

Usually when junks or Western vessels arrived, they would moor or anchor near their warehouses or stores. Around these places were shops and markets servicing the private trade of the ships' crews. Another Chinese market outside the city wall is described amongst those near the trading company warehouses, in the *Description of Ayutthaya*:

⁹¹ Phraya Ratchawangsan headed a department in charge of seagoing war craft, including a boathouse for thirty large junk-sterned craft in the mouth of the Ironwood (*takhian*) Canal. Rivergoing war craft came under Phraya Maha-Amat.

⁹² Kaempfer, *Description of the Kingdom of Siam*, 44.

the market at the ferry landing of Wat Nangchi in front of the Portuguese settlement ... the market behind the Dutch emporium beside Wat Mu; the market at Wat Sing in front of the Japanese building ... the market at Wat Tha Rap in front of the house of Jaosua Chi—here there is a long row of sixteen two-storey brick houses with shops in the lower storey and living quarters above; at the entrance to this market is an iron forge, a shoe workshop, and a maker of red pipe tobacco.⁹³



Figure 34. Mural painting of a Chinese shop at Wat Pradu Songtham, Ayutthaya.

After junks arrived carrying plates, bowls, jars, tea, sweets, silk of various colors and other goods from China, female vendors from the great Nai Kai Market would take these to sell to the people of the palace. In the south of the palace, there was a

large brick lodge with outer walls painted red, known as Khoha Sawan Lodge which was formerly for Somdet Phra Phanwasa, the queen of King Narai, and later became the Inner Treasury in the care of Thao Song Kandan. In the wall around the lodge, there is a gate called Sawan Phirom which leads out to Sanam Jan, and there turns onto a road beside the wall around a brick building of five rooms where royal lady-cooks prepare food for royalty. On this road, women from Nai Kai Village come to sit at shops to sell goods from Chinese junks.⁹⁴

Another way to sell goods into the palace was through the departments of the *phrakhlang* ministry, overseen by Okya Kosathibodi, to present to the king and the royal ladies. There is no firsthand description but there are hints such as the missionary de Cicé's account from 1714 (in the Thaisa reign):

⁹³ Baker, "Markets and production," 51. Wat Tha Rap is between Wat Phutthaisawan and the Cham Moat Canal. The Jaosua Chi mentioned here might be Chi sae Ong, the third son of Ong Eng Chuan (Wang Xingquan), said by K. S. R. Kulap to have fled to Nakhon Ratchasima when Ayutthaya fell in 1767. Kulap, *Mahamukhamattayanukulawong*, 284

⁹⁴ Baker, "Grand Palace," 97-8 from *Athibhai phaen thi*.

Barcalon (Phrakhlang), this mandarin, knowing the ways of the court, has taken all possible measures to strengthen his position, and render himself formidable to his enemies. He has found the means of introducing into the Palace Chinese women and girls to be near the queens and princesses continually.⁹⁵

Usually palace officials would present goods to the king, or take them into the palace for the royals to make their selection of silk, crystal, ceramics used as tableware and cosmetic holders, and other imported goods of value. The Phrakhlang who oversaw the importation of goods had female staff constantly coming and going to service the ladies in the palace. Many varieties of ceramics were imported, and the royals could order plates, bowls, and jars in whatever design they required, both shape and decoration, just the same as in the early Bangkok era.

The variety of ceramics imported to Ayutthaya is testament to the sophistication of the junk trading networks between China and Siam. Junks went back and forth constantly throughout the Prasat Thong reign and the Ban Phlu Luang dynasty. Blue and white and Bencharong wares could be ordered with Thai designs. In addition there was commercial import of coarser pottery for everyday use by the general population.



Figure 35. A small 18th-century underglaze blue covered bowl. A shard of the same design was found in the grand palace of Ayutthaya. Courtesy of Mr. Praphaisith Tankeyura.

⁹⁵ Dhiravat, “Western Evidence Concerning the Role of the Chinese at the Siamese Court,” 14.

Conclusion

The early Qing ceramics found in Siam offer insight into the social and political relations between Siam, which commissioned and purchased these items, and China, which produced and exported them. Several factors influenced the types and quantities of ceramic goods that entered into the China-Siam trade: on the China side, dynastic change, opening and closing of trade, and technical advancements; on the Siamese side, court taste, the growth of the Chinese immigrant community, and the level of prosperity.

Several conclusions arise from this study. First, the transition from Ming to Qing, and the maritime ban forbidding Chinese from trading to Southeast Asia, had a substantial impact on Siamese trade, especially on the policy of sending tribute missions to the Chinese imperial court.

Second, Bencharong wares started to arrive in quantity from the Thaisa reign until the end of the 19th century. Bencharong is a characteristic art form developed during the Ban Phlu Luang dynasty. The color glaze of Bencharong in late Ayutthaya was similar to ceramics that China exported to Batavia. Possibly Bencharong came from the same kilns or shared the same trade networks that fed the Indonesian market.

Third, large quantities of Bencharong were imported in the Thaisa and Borommakot reigns, reflecting the prosperity of Ayutthaya and the purchasing power of the settled Chinese community. This large surge in imports was partly made possible by a convergence of several factors: the boom of Thai rice exports to alleviate severe famine conditions in Fujian and Guangdong; the reopening of Chinese ports and the entry of Chinese junks into the market; and the cumulative impact of technological developments in China's ceramics sector which allowed the industry to respond to the preferences of consumers in the international market better than had been possible earlier.

Fourth, from the Ban Phlu Luang era to early Bangkok, the Hokkien merchant network was dominant in the trade to Siam, Malacca, and Batavia. This is evident from the prominence of Zhangzhou ceramics among imports, the role of Amoy in the import of Siamese rice, the name transliterated into Hokkien dialect of the main market place in Ayutthaya, and the presence of Hokkien natives as officials in the Siamese port department overseeing the Siam-China trade.

Chronology of Chinese and Siamese reigns

Ayutthaya: Prasat Thong dynasty	China: Qing dynasty
Prasat Thong, 1629–1655	Shunzhi, 1644–1661
Narai, 1656–1688	Kangxi, 1662–1722
Ayutthaya: Ban Phlu Luang dynasty	
Phra Phetracha, 1688–1703	
Sua, 1703–1708	
Thaisa, 1709–1732	Yongzheng, 1723–1735
Borommakot, 1732–1758	Qianlong, 1735–1796
Uthumphon, 1758	
Ekkathat, 1758–1767	

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