

Ayutthayan Port Towns and Ceramics Trading in Southern Thailand

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Abstract

Between 1350 and 1767 CE, the Ayutthaya Kingdom became one of the most important trading centers in the region and a magnet for explorers, missionaries, ambassadors and merchants from around the world, specifically from China, Japan, Southeast Asia and Europe. Crucial to its success was the location of the capital of the Ayutthaya Kingdom on the Chao Phraya River Basin and its territories in the northern, northeastern, western, and especially the southern region. The southern region is situated on the Malay Peninsula which the peninsula lies between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, and has long been a vital strategic and communications link. Archaeological evidence and historical records reveal that the important Ayutthayan port towns in the southern region are comprised of Nakhon Si Thammarat, Chaiya, Thalang, Songkhla and Pattani. A lot of Ayutthayan infrastructure, religious artworks and utensils, such as temples, fortresses, town walls, Buddha images, rock art and mural paintings, as well as trade ceramics were found there. The trade ceramics found in these five port towns were from northern Thailand, Vietnam and China and they were used for architectural decorations, luxury goods and kitchen utensils.

Key words: Ayutthaya, Southern Thailand, Port Town, Ceramics

Introduction

Between 1350 and 1767 CE, the Ayutthaya Kingdom became one of the most important trading centers in the region and a magnet for explorers, missionaries, ambassadors and merchants from Southeast Asia, India, Persia, China, Japan and Europe to make relations and settle in the capital named Ayutthaya. Crucial to its success was the location of Ayutthaya, which was amidst the irrigated fertile Thai heartland, set in a vital strategic and communications link. The kingdom was ruled by the king with the royal court in Ayutthaya and the kings were absolute monarchs with semi-sacred status that derived from the ideologies of Hinduism and Buddhism as well as from natural leadership (Garnier, 2004). The kingship was founded in 1350 by King Ramathibodi I (1350-1369 AD) and lasted for over 400 years. The war between Ayutthaya and Burma began in 1548 under the reign of King Mahachakkraphat (1548-1568 AD) and after that

a combined strong force of Burmese armies invaded the northern and western territories first, and Ayutthaya later capitulated during the reign of King Ukathat (1758-1767 AD) (Garnier, 2004).

A Brief History of Ayutthayan Port Towns in Southern Thailand

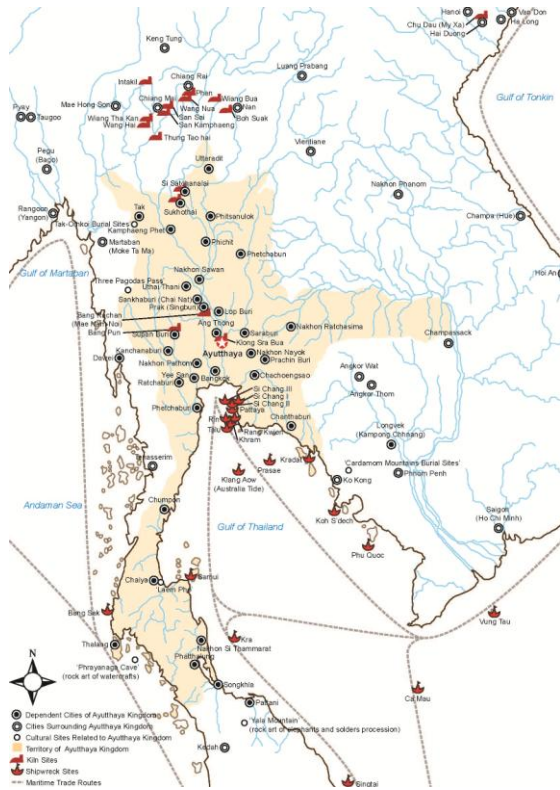


Fig. 1 A map of the territory of Ayutthaya Kingdom and related archaeological sites. (Atthasit Sukkham)

The Malay Peninsula is a peninsula in Southeast Asia. The land mass runs approximately north-south and is the southernmost point of the Asian mainland that lies between the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea. The environment is tropical rainforest and seasonal rains. The peninsula also is affected by the Southwest and Northeast monsoon winds. Ayutthaya expanded its territory through conquests, especially towards the south, where port towns leading were located. Since the reign of King Ramathibodi I (1350-1369 AD), Ayutthaya sent troops to conquer all city-states of the southern region. They became to be dependent cities under the Ayutthaya Kingdom, especially Nakhon Si Thammarat. The reforms in the

reign of King Boromtrailokanath (1448-1488 AD) adopted a Mandala-style (based on influence areas) tributary system and systematically developed new local government organizations for all cities in the northern, northeastern, central, western territories and especially southern territory. There were recognized to be three levels of city comprising of “Inner Cities” (governed by the senior noblemen who were representatives of the kings, situated close to Ayutthaya and listed to be quaternary-rank cities with lowest level of security), “Outer or Chief Cities” (Phraya Maha Nakhon, governed by the senior noblemen who were representatives of the kings, situated far from Ayutthaya to control other dependent cities and listed to be primary-rank, secondary-rank and tertiary-rank

cities depending on distance from Ayutthaya and level of security to protect the rebellion) and “Tributary City-states” (self-government but Ayutthaya still requested them to send tributes and military assistances), as well as independent city-state. A few Ayutthaya archives from the Early Ayutthaya period (1350-1488), contemporary Chinese, Arabian and European archives, and 16th to 17th centuries European maps (Suarez, 1999) have identified the most important port towns in the southern territory of the Ayutthaya Kingdom as:

1. *Nakhon Si Thammarat* as the chief primary-rank city (Fig. 1)
2. *Phatthalung, Chumpon, Thalang and Chaiya* as the outer tertiary-rank cities as well as dependent cities under Nakhon Si Thammarat (Fig. 1)
3. *Pattani* as the tributary city (Fig. 1)
4. *Songkhla* as the tributary city between Early (1350-1448) and Middle (1448-1630) Ayutthaya periods and liberated to be independent city-state in Late Ayutthaya period (1630-1767 AD) (Fig. 1) (CNAL, 1999).

Ceramics Trading and Traditions

Since the late 14th century, Ayutthaya was also regarded as the strongest power in mainland Southeast Asia. It began its hegemony by conquering the neighboring kingdoms like Sukhothai and the surrounding cities of Kamphaeng Phet, Si Satchanalai and Phitsanuloke (Fig. 1) during the reign of King Boromarachathirat I (1370-1388 AD). Meanwhile, it also established official and unofficial relations with China and Vietnam, especially regarding trade. Hence, the ceramics were one of the important products that they exchanged. The Chinese Yuan (1280-1368 AD), Ming (1368-1644 AD) and Qing (1644-1911 AD) ceramics, as well as the Vietnamese Tran (1226-1400 AD) and Le (1428-1527 AD) ceramics were exported around the regions that were believed to be the prototypes for Thai potters who tried to copy, specifically on the Si Satchanalai, San Kamphaeng, Wang Nua, Phayao and Boh Suak kilns of the Sukhothai and Lanna Kingdoms (Wong-on et al., 2013) (Fig. 1). As the domestic trades, the ceramic productions and other businesses in the neighboring kingdoms were transferred to Ayutthaya after the conquest, specifically the Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai kilns in the northern territory (Wong-on et al., 2013). It also operated its own ceramic productions in the central territory at the Bang Pun kilns in Suphan Buri (FAD, 1988), the Bang Rachan

(Mae Nam Noi) kilns in Sing Buri (Sukkhram 2013) and Klong Sra Bua kilns in Ayutthaya (Yukongdi, 2009) (Fig. 1) but there was no any ceramic production in the southern territory. The Si Satchanalai ceramics are only a group of Thai ceramics that were found in the southern territory especially in Nakhon Si Thammarat. A Middle Si Satchanalai celadon dish with engraved lotus and classic scroll designs dated in the first half of 15th century were found in Nakhon Si Thammarat but the provenance is unknown (FAD, 2000). The Late Si Satchanalai underglaze black and brown and white jarlets (Fig. 2) with floral designs dated from the late 15th to mid-16th centuries were buried surrounding the Sri Lankan style of round stupa in the Chedi Yak Temple on the north of Nakhon Si Thammarat but they have no human remains inside (FAD, 1986: 44). Other Late Si Satchanalai brown and white jarlet was put inside the great stupa of the Chanthat Tharam Temple or Khao That Stupa on the north of Nakhon Si Thammarat but it has no human remains inside as well (FAD, 2013). All of these were produced and exported from the Si Satchanalai kilns in the northern territory between the first half of 15th century and 16th century when the kilns were already transferred to Ayutthaya. However, the ceramics from the Bang Pun, Sukhothai, Bang Rachan and Klong Sra Bua kilns were not found in Nakhon Si Thammarat or other dependent cities in the southern territory.



Fig. 2 Late Si Satchanalai underglaze black jarlet (top) and brown and white jarlet (bottom), late 15th to mid-16th century, found in the Chedi Yak Temple. (Nakhon Si Thammarat National Museum)

Regarding international trade, very few Vietnamese ceramics were found in Nakhon Si Thammarat as well. The first group comprises of a Chu Dau blue and white jarlet with painted flower and panel designs as well as a blue and white covered box with painted chrysanthemum, lotus and square panel designs. These were put inside the great stupa of the Thao Khot Temple on southwestern side of Nakhon Si Thammarat (FAD 2000). The second group is a Chu Dau blue and white jarlet with painted flower and panel designs which was put inside the great stupa of the Chanthat Tharam Temple (FAD, 2013) (Fig. 3). These ceramics were produced and exported from the Chu Dau



Fig. 3 Le Chu Dau blue and white jarlets, 15th century, found in the Chanthat Tharam Temple. (Nakhon Si Thammarat National Museum and 14th Regional Office of Fine Arts Department)

kilns in Hai Duong, northern Vietnam in the Later Le Dynasty around the 15th century. The third group is from other kilns as a Go Sanh brown glazed jar with four handles and the glaze stopping at the middle of the exterior which was also put inside the great stupa of the Chanthat Tharam Temple (FAD, 2013). This jar was produced and exported from the Go Sanh kilns in Binh Dinh, central Vietnam dated to the 15th century. Another international trade is Chinese porcelain. The ceramics trade between China and Southeast Asia appeared during the Tang dynasty (618-907). Since Yuan (1280-1368 AD) until Qing (1644-1911 AD) Dynasties, Ayutthaya had a good relation with China especially on ceramics trading.

The Yuan ceramics marked as the oldest Chinese ceramics found in Nakhon Si Thammarat in the Ayutthaya period (1350-1767 AD) are of unknown provenance. They are two Longquan celadon dishes with vertical fluted on the interior that produced and exported from the Longquan kilns in Zhejiang from the 13th to 14th centuries (FAD, 2000) (Fig. 4). Between Middle Ming and Early Qing Dynasties around the mid-15th to late 18th centuries, the Jingdezhen kilns in Jiangxi, the Longquan kilns in Zhejiang as

well as the Dehua, Cizao and Pinghe (formerly called Zhangzhou) kilns in Fujian exported ceramics to Ayutthaya. The white glazed, celadon, green and yellow, blue glazed, blue and white and overglaze enameled wares were found on the east coast of the southern territory in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Chaiya, Songkhla and Pattani, rather than in the west territory of Thalang (Chandavij, 1994). The details of typology and provenance are detailed in (Table 1).



Fig. 4 Yuan Longquan celadon dishes, 13th to 14th century, found in Nakhon Si Thammarat. (Nakhon Si Thammarat National Museum)

Nakhon Si Thammarat and Chaiya where the most complex Chinese ceramics are found and those details are mentioned in Table 1. They provide data to categorize the chronology in four different periods:

- 1. From the 13th to 14th centuries:* the Yuan Longquan celadon dishes were found only in Nakhon Si Thammarat but the provenance is unknown (Fig. 4).
- 2. From the 15th to 16th centuries:* the Middle Ming ceramics between Chengtong (1436-1449 AD) and Hongzhi (1488-1505 AD) reigns were exported to the east coast in middle part of the southern territory. Most of them were used for religious purposes, being buried around and put inside the great stupas of Buddhist temples. The ceramics were found in temples in the town of Nakhon Si Thammarat, and just only one sample was found in Chaiya. The Chai Na Temple on southwestern side of Nakhon Si

Thammarat is where the Longquan celadon dishes of Chengtong to Hongzhi reigns were found, with foliate rim and fluted fret designs on the interior sticking on a pair of wooden pillars in front of a Buddha image inside the Early Ayutthaya style (1350-1488 AD) the great hall Maha Ut. The interior walls of the great hall also have a mural painting with the stories of god, goddess and animals in the forest Himmavanta. A Jingdezhen blue and white bowl of Chengtong to Tianshun (1457-1464 AD) reigns with false unglazed rim and peony designs both on interior and exterior was found in Nakhon Si Thammarat. Blue glazed jarlets of Chengtong to Tianshun reigns were found in Chaiya.

3. *During the first half of 16th to early 17th centuries:* Ming Zhengde (1506-1521 AD), Jiajing (1522-1566 AD), Longqing (1567-1573 AD) and Wanli (1573-1619 AD) reigns exported the ceramics to the east and west coasts of the southern territory. Most of them were buried in the earth surrounding the pedestal of stupa in many temples. The Cizao green and yellow kendis and jarlets of Jiajing to Wanli reigns with engraved flower designs was found in the Phra Khian Temple on the west of Nakhon Si Thammarat, as well as in the temples of Thao Khot and Chedi Yak. A couple of Pinghe blue and white jarlets of Jiajing to Wanli reigns with underglaze flower designs were found in the Nangtra Temple on the north of Nakhon Si Thammarat. Pinghe blue and white jarlet of Jiajing and Wanli reigns with deer designs associated with Jingdezhen blue and white jarlet with flower designs dated from the same period were found in the Wiang Temple in Chaiya. The ceramics produced at the Jingdezhen and Pinghe kilns – which comprise of white glazed kendis, overglaze enameled dishes and kendis as well as blue and white dishes, bowls, and jars from the Zhengde to the Wanli reigns– were also found in every city, specifically Nakhon Si Thammarat, Pattani, Thalang and Songkhla in the areas of Sathingphra and Hua Khao Dang Mountain. Moreover, a couple of Jingdezhen blue and white dishes or Kraak wares of Wanli reign with complex designs such as duck, flower and eight circle panel were found on the cave ceiling of the Singkhon Temple. They were found together with other Chinese ceramics of the Qing Dynasty that were assumed to have been used for architectural decoration in the later period from the mid-17th to early 18th centuries.

4. *From the mid-17th to early 18th centuries:* Qing ceramics between Kangxi (1662-1722 AD) and Yongzhen (1723-1735 AD) reigns were exported only to the east coast of southern territory. They were used for architectural decoration on several kinds of buildings in Buddhist temples. The Phra Mahathat Temple at the center of Nakhon Si Thammarat (UNESCO, 2012) was found various types of ceramics comprise of the Bencharong small dishes with flower and floral designs as well as the figure of deva those ordered by Thai to produce at Dehua kilns around Kangxi and Yongzhen reigns, a Dehua blue glazed dish, a Jingdezhen overglaze enameled dish with Arabian alphabets or called “Chinese Islamic magic square” design as well as the Jingdezhen blue and white dishes with complex designs such as basket of flowers, Artemisia and Thai designs (Fig. 6). They were used for architectural decoration on several parts of the great stupa of the Phra Mahathat Temple, specifically four sides of the pedestal of stupa throne called Harmika and four side miniature stupas. The stupas were believed to build since Sukhothai period (the 13th to 15th centuries) but the ceramics were possibly decorated onto them in Late Ayutthaya period (1630-1767 AD). Between 1990 and 1991, the 14th Regional Office of Fine Arts Department at Nakhon Si Thammarat in association with temple clergymen restored the stupas as well as the original ceramics decorated on them were moved for preservation and display in the temple museum. New replicas of ceramic for decoration on the stupa were made and placed in the same position.

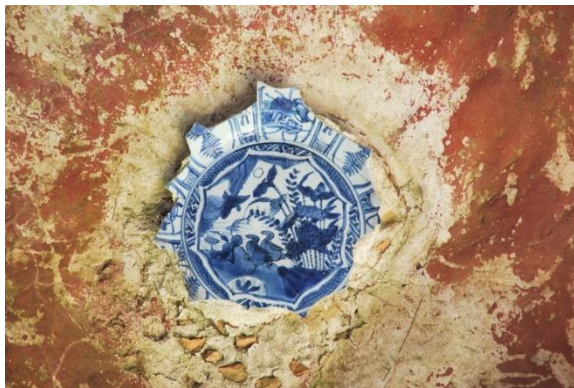


Fig. 5 Kraak ware dishes, early 17th century, sticking on the cave ceiling of the Singkhon Temple. (Atthasit Sukkham)

The Singkhon Temple on the northwest of Nakhon Si Thammarat is other temple that used Chinese ceramics for architectural decoration. Qing ceramics of Kangxi and

Yongzhen reigns were found there, specifically the Jingdezhen and Dehua blue and white dishes, as well as the Jingdezhen overglaze enameled dishes. However, they are also associated with the above mentioned couple of Kraak wares, possibly used for decorating the cave at the same time. All of them are still stuck on the stuccos and rock surfaces of the cave ceiling. The stuccos on the cave ceiling are assumed to be Late Ayutthaya designs (1630-1767 AD), but some archaeologists suggest the ceramics were stuck in the cave temple in the Late Ayutthaya period (1630-1767 AD) as well (Srisuchat, 1991) (Fig. 5). The square stupa called Phra That in Thai was built at the mouth of the cave temple has similar characteristics to the Phra Borommathat Temple in Chaiya and both were assumed to be from the Late Ayutthaya style (1488-1630 AD). This square stupa also used ceramics from the Qing dynasty and the Republic, specifically the Dehua blue and white stem dishes of Tongzhi (1862-1874 AD) to Xuantong (1909-1911 AD) reigns with foliate rim and underglaze Shiitake mushroom designs as well as the Jingdezhen overglaze enameled rids of Xianfeng (1851-1861 AD) to Xuantong reigns with flower scroll and shiitake mushroom designs. Although the square stupa was built in Late Ayutthaya period (1488-1630 AD), these Late Qing (1736-1911 AD) and Republic (1916-recent) ceramics contemporary with the Early Rattanakosin period (1782 to the recent period) suggests that the ceramics may have been used in the restoration of the square stupa around the mid 19th to early 20th centuries (Chandavij, 1994; Sukkham et al., 2012). All Chinese ceramics found in the towns and temples around the southern territory mentioned above are mirrored in many shipwreck assemblages in the Gulf of Thailand and the South China Sea, such as:

The late 14th to early 15th centuries shipwrecks: comprised of the Rang Kwien, Song Doc, Turiang, Si Chang II, Maranei and Bakau. *The mid-15th to late 15th century shipwrecks* comprised of the Nanyang, Khram, Longquan, Royal Nanhai, Pandanan, Phu Quoc II, Belanakan, Brunei and Santa Cruz. *The early 16th to early 17th centuries shipwrecks* comprised of the Hoi An, Samui, Si Chang III, Si Chang I, Singtai, Xuande and Wanli. *The mid 17th to late 19th centuries shipwrecks* especially the Ca Mau and Desaru (Flecker, 2001; Brown and Sjostrand, 2001; Sjostrand and Idrus, 2007; Sotheby's Amsterdam, 2007; Brown, 2009).

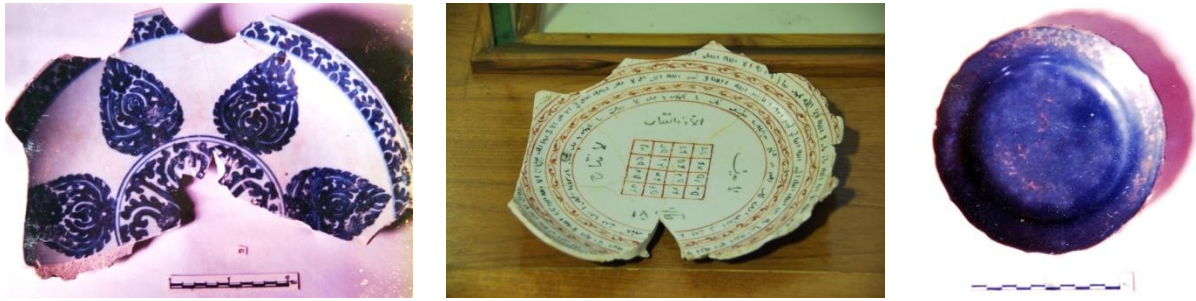


Fig. 6 Qing Jingdezhen blue and white dish (left), Qing Jindezhen overglaze enameled dish with “Chinese Islamic magic square” design (center) and Qing Dehua blue glazed dish (right), late 17th to early 18th century. (Phra Mahathat Temple Museum)

Conclusion

The port towns in the southern territory of the Ayutthaya Kingdom located on the coastal area of the Malay Peninsula connected the Southeast Asian, Chinese, Arabian and even European maritime trade routes in the Gulf of Thailand on the east and the Andaman Sea on the west. These port cities started their expansion from the late 14th century onwards. In history, India, Persia, China, Vietnam, Japan, Portugal, Netherlands, Britain and France established official and unofficial relations focused on trade with Ayutthaya and its dependent cities. They also got permission to settle and open trading stations in Ayutthaya as well as their branches in the port towns on the southern territory. The most important port towns recorded in the Ayutthaya archives and European maps since the reign of King Boromtrailokanath (1448-1488 AD) comprised of Nakhon Si Thammarat as the chief primary-rank city, Thalang and Chaiya as outer tertiary-rank city and dependent cities under Nakhon Si Thammarat, Pattani as the tributary city and Songkhla as the tributary city in Early (1350-1448 AD) and Middle (1448-1630 AD) Ayutthaya periods then after that it was later liberated to be independent city-states in Late Ayutthaya period (1630-1767 AD).

The dependent cities, foreign relations and trade benefited from Ayutthaya through agriculture products, forest supplies, ore mines and ceramic productions supplied for domestic usages and monopoly trade, receiving some cultural influences including tributes and military assistances and controlling travel and transportation between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean on the middle part of the peninsula. All port

towns in the southern territory have yielded Thai, Vietnamese and Chinese trade ceramics following Middle Si Satchanalai celadon (the first half of 15th century), Late Si Satchanalai underglaze black and brown and white (the late 15th to mid 16th centuries), Le Chu Dau blue and white (the 15th century), Go Sanh brown glazed (the 15th century), Yuan (1280-1368 AD) and Ming (1368-1644 AD) Longquan celadon, Ming Cizao green and yellow (1368-1644 AD), Ming (1368-1644 AD) and Qing (1644-1911 AD) Jingdezhen white glazed, blue glazed, blue and white and overglaze enameled, Ming Pinghe (formerly called Zhangzhou) white glazed, blue and white and overglaze enameled (1368-1644 AD) and Qing Dehua white glazed and blue glazed wares. These ceramics indicate the port towns in the southern territory specifically Nakhon Si Thammarat, Chaiya, Songkhla, Pattani and Thalang connected with Si Satchanalai kilns in the northern territory by the port of Ayutthaya, Chu Dau and Go Sanh kilns by the ports of Ha Long, Van Don and Hoi An in Vietnam as well as Longquan, Cizao, Jingdezhen, Pinghe (formerly called Zhangzhou) and Dehua kilns by the ports of Fuzhou and Quanzhou in China. Nakhon Si Thammarat was possibly a dependent city used to control the travel and transportation on the middle part of the peninsula to Ayutthaya since of the complexity of the ceramics assemblages suggests this port to be the first gate for international trading ships, especially the arrival of Chinese junks.

These ceramics were used for several purposes and can be categorized in four different periods:

1. *From the 13th to 14th century*, imported luxury or utilitarian products.
2. *From the 15th to 17th century*, ceramics were buried surrounding the pedestal of great stupa in a few Buddhist temples but no human remains inside them. They were used for religious purposes. In additions, some ceramics were used for architectural decoration but this did not become a tradition in the Early Ayutthaya period (1350-1488 AD).
3. *From the mid 17th to early 18th centuries*, ceramics were used as architectural decorations in a few Buddhist temples. By the number of ceramics, they seemed to indicate a decrease for other port towns in the southern territory in the period.

The ceramics found in land sites appear to be mirrored in ceramic assemblages recovered from 14th to 19th centuries shipwrecks that sank in the Gulf of Thailand and

the South China Sea. This confirms that the ceramics were shipped on maritime trade routes by Southeast Asian or Chinese ships (Green, 2013) to points of destination in the southern territory and other points of destination in Southeast Asia, India and Far East Asia.

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Biography

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	Types	Dating	Provenances
Nakhon Si Thammarat	Longquan celadon wares	Yuan	Nakhon Si Thammarat
	Jingdezhen blue and white wares	Ming Chengtong to Tianshun	Nakhon Si Thammarat
	Longquan celadons	Ming Chengtong to Hongzhi	Chai Na Temple
	Pinghe white glazed wares	Ming Jiajing to Wanli	Nakhon Si Thammarat
	Cizao green and yellow wares	Ming Jiajing to Wanli	Stupa of Phra Khian Temple
	Pinghe blue and white wares	Ming Jiajing to Wanli	Nangtra and Phra Mahathat Temples
	Pinghe overglaze enameled wares	Ming Jiajing to Wanli	Nakhon Si Thammarat
	Jingdezhen blue and white wares	Qing Kangxi	Nakhon Si Thammarat
	Jingdezhen overglaze enameled wares	Qing Kangxi	Phra Mahathat Temple
	Bencharong wares	Qing Kangxi	Phra Mahathat Temple
	Dehua blue glazed wares	Qing Kangxi to Yongzhen	Phra Mahathat Temple
	Jingdezhen blue and white wares	Qing Kangxi to Yongzhen	Phra Mahathat Temple
Chaiya	Jingdezhen blue glazed wares	Ming Hongzhi to Jiajing	Chaiya
	Jingdezhen blue and white wares	Ming Jiajing to Wanli	Wiang Temple
	Pinghe blue and white wares	Ming Jiajing to Wanli	Wiang Temple
	Jingdezhen blue and white wares	Ming Wanli	Singkhon Temple
	Jingdezhen blue and white wares	Qing Kangxi	Singkhon Temple
	Jingdezhen overglaze enameled wares	Qing Kangxi	Singkhon Temple
	Jingdezhen blue and white wares	Qing Yongzhen	Singkhon Temple
Songkhla	Dehua blue and white wares	Qing Yongzhen to Qianlong	Singkhon Temple
	Jingdezhen blue and white wares	Ming Zhengde to Jiajing	Songkhla
	Jingdezhen overglaze enameled wares	Ming Jiajing	Songkhla
	Jingdezhen blue and white wares	Ming Jiajing to Wanli	Sathingphra, Songkhla
	Pinghe blue and white wares	Ming Jiajing to Wanli	Sathingphra, Songkhla
Pattani	Jingdezhen white glazed wares	Ming Wanli	Songkhla
	Dehua white glazed wares	Qing Kangxi	Songkhla
Thalang	Jingdezhen blue and white wares	Ming Jiajing to Wanli	Pattani
	Jingdezhen overglaze enameled wares	Qing Kangxi	Pattani
	Pinghe blue and white wares	Ming Jiajing to Wanli	Phra Thong Temple, Thalang

Table 1. List of the typologies and provenances of Chinese ceramics found in the southern territory of the Ayutthaya Kingdom.