

Collecting and Interpreting Chinese Ceramics Found in the Philippines



Baldomero M. Olivera

Introduction

Since my early childhood in *Manila*,¹ I have been a collector. My interest in collecting sea shells and in understanding their basic taxonomy started while passing time during my father's tennis club matches. In the Philippines at that time, most tennis was played on a surface of crushed sea shells with piles of dredged shells nearby for touching up the court. My fascination with the variety and beauty of these shells during my childhood years became the central interest of my career as a biochemist. Later, my wife Lulu and I were introduced to fossils and began to collect specimens from various geological periods, both in Germany, where we lived for a year, and then in the Western United States.

My passion for collecting Chinese and Southeast Asian ceramics found in the Philippines began over six decades ago when, as a teenager, I purchased several random objects as souvenirs on family trips. I was drawn initially by the aesthetic qualities of the ceramics, particularly by two that were purchased in *Zamboanga* (see Figure 1) in the 1950s and early 1960s. One was a small Jingdezhen² blue and white snuff bottle with Chinese characters on both sides (Figure 1A), which was reportedly an heirloom on the Zamboanga Peninsula. The characters revealed a charming poetic quality; the inscription on one side is translated as "lying in the moonlight under the plum trees" and on the other "a clear spring flowing down the canyon." I was fascinated by the poetic imagery which has led me, over five decades, to purchase many antique ceramic vessels with Chinese characters. The translation results have often been surprising and have led to many notable insights about Chinese ceramics. The second ceramic specimen that fascinated me was a spherical green jarlet (Figure 1B) made in Vietnam in the 15th century. Its lip had been ground off, but otherwise it

¹ Philippine place names are italicized at first mention & mapped in Figure 2.

² Figure 21 summarizes major Chinese ceramic styles & dynastic periods.

About the Author

Baldomero M. Olivera ("Toto") is a Filipino biochemist known for the discovery of many cone snail toxins important to the field of neuroscience. These molecules, called conotoxins, led to a breakthrough in the study of ion channels and synapses. Earlier in his career, he discovered and first characterized *E. coli* DNA ligase, a key enzyme of genetic engineering and recombinant DNA technology.



Olivera graduated with a B.S. in Chemistry from the University of the Philippines, and received his Ph.D. from the California Institute of Technology in Biophysical Chemistry, followed by postdoctoral work at Stanford University in Biochemistry. In 1970, he moved to the University of Utah, where he is now a Distinguished Professor of Biology. He was the Harvard 2007 "Scientist of the Year." Olivera was elected into the American Philosophical Society, and is a member of both the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and the U.S. National Academy of Medicine. Olivera and collaborators were recognized for science innovation with a 2022 Golden Goose Award from the American Association for the Advancement of Science and its supporting partners.

He served as a member of the Visiting Committee of the Department of Molecular Biology and Biochemistry of Harvard University from 1988 to 1995 and the Advisory Committee to the Director of the National Institutes of Health from 1996 to 1999. Olivera was depicted on a Philippine postage stamp issued in 2022.

Olivera and his wife Lourdes ("Lulu") reside in Salt Lake City where he continues his academic work at the University of Utah.

was very well preserved. In the many decades since, I have not seen another similar ceramic vessel appear in the Philippines. Both of these were heirloom ceramics, probably handed down from generation-to-generation within the Subanon indigenous group that live in the mountains east of Zamboanga.

As my collection of ceramics has grown over the years, my intrigue in these beautiful objects expanded, centering on two questions: 1) how and why did these diverse pieces, whose origins span hundreds of years, come to be found in the Philippines, and 2) what does their presence tell us about early Philippine culture, a culture that is largely unknown as there is little surviving physical evidence of Philippine history predating the Spanish colonial occupation that began in 1565. What I have found, through an exploration of various archaeological and genetic evidence, and Song dynasty Chinese court records, supports the existence of a

wealthy and sophisticated society in the southeastern archipelago. These and other discoveries led to a plausible hypothesis that explains the origin of these ceramics and how they were acquired and transported from China to thriving Southeastern Philippine communities, beginning almost two millennia ago.

As supported by the collection presented in part here, the Philippine Archipelago is a vast and under-appreciated treasure trove of ancient Chinese ceramics. A key factor that helps explain the unusual richness of the Chinese ceramics recovered in the Philippines is the realization that several millennia ago, Filipino seafarers had developed balangay boats; these are likely the world's first large, ocean-going watercraft. The evidence for this is rooted in the settlement of Guam and the other Mariana Islands. This hypothesis is supported by both archaeological and genetic evidence that Guam was populated around 1500 BCE by immigration from the



Figure 1. Early purchases from Zamboanga. A: Qing dynasty snuff bottle with painted poem (H: 5.2 cm, both sides shown). **B: Vietnamese jarlet with filed mouth** (H: 4.4 cm).

Figure 2. Map of Philippine geographic place names mentioned in this booklet.
Each place name is italicized at its first mention in the main text. Not shown is the Santa Ana excavation site which is within central Manila



Philippines across over 2,000 kilometers of open Pacific Ocean. In addition to facilitating Austronesian expansion, the balangay boats, and accompanying navigational skills developed by the Philippine population, enabled trade between communities on the shores of the South China Sea, including southern and northern areas of China. A complex of at least nine buried balangay boats, 10-20 meters in length, dating to the 8th - 10th centuries CE was found in the late 1970s near *Butuan City* on Mindanao; the site is now a regional unit of the National Museum of the Philippines.

The remarkable richness and quality of the Chinese ceramics found in the Philippines arise from the long-established Austronesian custom of burying prestige goods with their owners. This custom was dramatically illustrated by the *Santa Ana* excavations in the 1960s. The findings from the excavation of this church yard,

near the first Spanish settlement in the Manila metro area, were documented in a groundbreaking study by Cecelia and Leandro Locsin in their book, *Oriental Ceramics Discovered in the Philippines* (1967), that describes the important collection of ceramics recovered from this and other sites in the Philippines.

In the modern era, Chinese ceramics continue to be unearthed in the Philippines through a combination of incidental and intentional diggings that include agricultural and civic construction projects, speculative prospecting of ancient burial sites, and too infrequently, formal archaeology. The Philippine-recovered ceramics, some apparently dating back to the Han dynasty (206 BCE to 220 CE), were likely acquired in exchange for gold, spices, tortoiseshell and other valuable natural products delivered to China for trade by balangay boats.

Figure 3. Philippine-recovered celadon jarlets from the collection's earlier period.

Celadon jarlets made in the Longquan kilns were a major type of Chinese export ware found all over the Philippines; most of the examples shown were made in the 13th and 14th centuries. The spherical jarlet in the upper right (H: 7.0 cm) was likely made in a provincial kiln that copied Longquan celadons. *Shown to scale, recovery locations not further specified.*



Plate 1.

Six of the ceramics in the original Leyte purchase from Terry Baylosis' Manila antique shop.
Recovery locations specified as Western Leyte. Not shown to scale.

A: Thai cover box, Sawankhalok kilns (H: 9.5 cm).

B: Small Jingdezhen jar with cover (H: 11.8 cm).

C: Vietnamese cover box. The Chu Dau kilns overglaze enamels have been eroded (H: 5.5 cm).

D: Jingdezhen dish with qilin (D: 21.2 cm).

E: Jingdezhen dish with long-necked qilin (D: 12.0 cm).

F: Jingdezhen dish with lion and streamers motif (D: 12.2 cm).



Part 1: Drawn In

In the late 1960s, ceramics recovered from burial sites began to appear regularly in the commercial Manila antique market. There was a big tourist boom at the time, with a large influx of Japanese tourists. Some tourists were knowledgeable about Chinese ceramics and patronized the Manila antique shops, supporting their growth. During this period, I was traveling back-and-forth between the U.S. and the Philippines, and my faculty position at the University of the Philippines College of Medicine put me in the neighborhood of these antique shops. The most notable of the ceramics that began to appear were jade-like Longquan celadons, particularly jarlets. Occasionally, I bought an attractive celadon jarlet (see Figure 3); these were reportedly mostly from the diggings near Manila, and were of Southern Song, Yuan, or early Ming dynasty provenance.

I was transformed from an occasional buyer to a life-long ceramics collector by a specific incident that, in hindsight, I now understand more fully. My cousins Phyllis and Toti Zaballero were much more serious collectors with impeccable artistic taste (Phyllis later became one of the leading Filipino painters). One of their favorite dealers was Terry Baylosis, who had a shop in the Malate area of Manila. On a visit to his shop with Phyllis and Toti, Terry showed us a set of newly arrived ceramics and said he wanted to sell the whole lot.

It turns out that the ceramics had just been brought in by one of his agents from *Leyte Island*, and Terry was short of cash to pay him. Also, Terry needed additional money to make a payment toward a striking Ming blue and white crescent-shaped vessel of a very classical type that he had reserved from the *Laguna*-area diggings. Terry was one of the main suppliers of the Locsins who had organized the Santa Ana digging and were known to pay high prices for any notable finding from diggings at other sites. To acquire this important

Ming vase, which did end up in the Locsin collection, he needed to turn around the Leyte ceramics quickly. He therefore offered the whole lot at a very reasonable price to my cousins. They were hesitant, as they already had many pieces that were similar to the more important ceramics present in the lot. Terry reduced the price even further, and asked Lulu and me whether we were interested. We never intended to be serious collectors, but P2000 for the 24 ceramics in the lot was an unquestionably good deal (less than \$15 for each individual vessel), and as there were several ceramics that intrigued us, impulsively, we decided to buy the lot. Because of this purchase, instead of having a few jade-like Longquan celadon jarlets, we now were owners of a much more diverse set of the export ware³ ceramics that had circulated through the Maritime Silk Road many hundreds of years earlier. Some of the diverse ceramics that were included in that group are shown in Plate 1.

Part 2: The Social Collecting Phase: towards the Changsha Ewer

The craze for collecting Chinese ceramics spread in 1970s Manila and many friends became interested in acquiring some of the products of diggings that were taking place not far from the city. The demand for these newly recovered ceramic vessels made it attractive for an increasing number of antique dealers to feature the newly found ceramics in their shops, along with their usual offerings of furniture, textiles, and wooden and ivory carvings of saints. There were also freelance agents and middlemen who offered to bring ceramics for sale directly to your home. It became a social pastime among a group of our friends to get together, and show what we had recently purchased, either from shops, or

³ While 'export' grade goods are often perceived as higher quality and better than domestic goods, Chinese export ware ceramics from this period were most often a middle-grade product, produced in bulk for common trade. The highest quality Chinese ceramics were produced only for the high-end Chinese domestic market and for the emperors and imperial court.

from these itinerant dealers. Ultimately, we became part of an informal group that would gather for brunch on the weekends, share observations, and have several of the free agents come to show us what new pieces they had for sale. This was a pleasant social affair, and there were enough potential buyers gathered together that the number of dealers that would come to show their wares grew over time.

Each of these freelance dealers had connections to specific sites where ceramics were being unearthed. In addition to the agents who brought newly uncovered ceramics from the increasingly productive Manila-area sites, a group of other dealers who obtained their ceramics from the Southern Philippines, including *Mindanao*, began to show us new material. Often, the ceramic dealers based in Mindanao would bring unusual vessels that were distinctly different from

the bulk of ceramics then being dug up from sites in Laguna and *Batangas* provinces near Manila, or the nearby island of *Mindoro*. The unusual ceramics from Mindanao were an early suggestion of previous trading relations between China and maritime kingdoms in the Philippines. Many years later, I proposed that these all came from an Austronesian federation of chiefdoms in the Southeastern Philippines, called the Kalaga-Putuan Crescent (KPC), that traded directly with China for over a thousand years (Olivera 2021; Olivera et al. 2023).

One confounding issue back in the 1970s was an unconfirmed rumor that Chinese dealers were smuggling ceramics out of China, through Macau and Hong Kong, and exchanging them for ceramics found in the Philippines. For this reason, unusual ceramics that were sold in the Manila stores, mostly from shops that had sources from Mindanao, were suspected by Philippine

Figure 4. Philippine-recovered hand-painted Tang dynasty pottery figurines. (H: 22, 21, 23 and 23 cm). *Recovery locations not further specified.*



collectors to be imports from China. Whether true or not, this rumor was doubly supportive to the Manila dealers' interests at the time: the story helped to explain the growing variety available in their shops and suggested that Philippine-found Chinese ceramics were valued as authentic by the market abroad. It was only gradually that I came to realize that the vast majority of the Tang dynasty and other unusual antique ceramics on offer in the Manila market were likely actually recovered within the Philippines; as far as I can determine, the rumored smuggled-out-of-China sourcing of Chinese ceramics, had little, if any truth. One distinctive example of Tang dynasty ceramics that I obtained from the Manila shops is a set of painted pottery figurines, unique in style, but undoubtedly of Tang dynasty provenance (Figure 4).

The most notable of the ceramics that I purchased during this early social phase of my collection, which peaked before the 1973 declaration of martial law in the Philippines, was a Changsha ewer from the 9th century (Figure 5). This ewer was brought by a freelance dealer named Mr. Mendoza who visited sites that were in the provinces of Laguna and Batangas, close to Manila. During one of our group gatherings, he presented this large vessel, which had been partially repaired; none of us had any idea what it was. I was instantly intrigued, however, and his asking price (equivalent to about \$30 at the time) seemed reasonable so I decided to buy it. Most of my friends were very skeptical, and in any case, we usually did not buy ceramics that had been repaired.



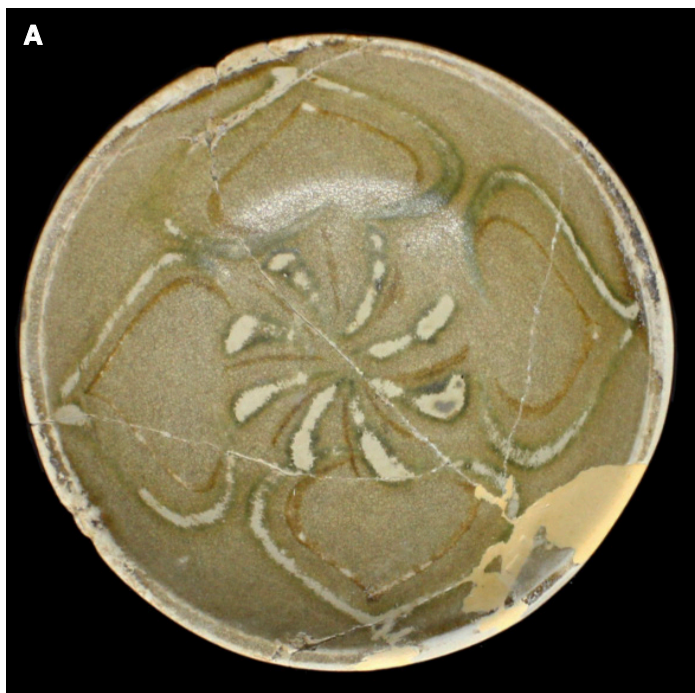
Figure 5. Recovered Changsha export ware ewers. A: Ewer recovered from *Batangas, Western Luzon*, in the author's collection since circa 1970 (H: 23.5 cm). **B:** Two ewers recovered from the *Belitung shipwreck* over 25 years later in 1998, now in the Asian Civilizations Museum, Singapore. The medallion on the left of the two Belitung ewers is similar to the applied medallion on the Philippine-recovered ewer. (image: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ewers_with_palmettes_from_the_Belitung_shipwreck,_ArtScience_Museum,_Singapore_-_20110618.jpg).



Some months later Lulu and my cousin discovered the true identity of this vessel. While visiting a well-known dealer in the Makati area of metro Manila, the del Rosario Gallery, they were thumbing through some Chinese ceramics literature recently acquired by the gallery. In browsing through a catalog of the Brundage collection in the de Young museum in San Francisco, they discovered a picture of a ewer (Object# B60P1807) that was virtually identical to the one that we had bought. This connection finally convinced me that there were Tang dynasty ceramics present in the Philippines. Some years later, I discovered a third almost identical ewer which is one of the prized possessions of the Pusat Museum in Jakarta, likely collected in Indonesia during the Dutch colonial period. These ewers are very rarely found in China; one of the few examples being in the Palace Museum, Beijing (TCPL 1996, Figure 139).

More than 25 years after I had bought the Batangas Changsha ewer, similar ewers were discovered in the now famous Belitung shipwreck, an Arab dhow carrying 60,000 Changsha ceramics that sank in the second quarter of the 9th century. The shipwreck was discovered off the Indonesian coast in 1998, in the shallow waters of the Java Sea's Gaspar Strait, by fishermen harvesting sea cucumbers. Because the Changsha ewers were among the most striking of the ceramics recovered from the Belitung shipwreck, this particular ewer form has become an iconic symbol of Chinese ceramic export ware distributed through the early Maritime Silk Road trading route in the 9th century. This trading route was the first to bring Chinese ceramics in bulk to the Middle East. Export ware of this type has been found in Samarra (Syria) and Nishapur (Iran), the Mediterranean (notably Fostat, near Cairo in Egypt), and East Africa.

Figure 6. Changsha Bowls. **A:** National Museum of the Philippines Changsha export ware bowl (IV-2011-F-7928) recovered from Bondoc Peninsula (image: <https://www.nationalmuseum.gov.ph/our-collections/archaeology/stoneware-and-porcelainware/>). **B:** Changsha export ware bowl in the National Palace Museum Taiwan (000540N000000000) recovered from the Belitung shipwreck, discovered in 1998 in the Java Sea (see Yu et al. 2018; image: <https://digitalarchive.npm.gov.tw/opendata>).



Changsha ceramics made in the 9th century have been recovered at many archaeological sites from these areas, providing evidence for the first maritime world-wide trade network. Our Batangas-recovered ewer was clear-cut evidence for the importation of 9th century Tang dynasty ceramics into the Philippine Archipelago. Previously, Otley Beyer had concluded that there were Tang dynasty sites all across the Philippines (Beyer et al. 1930). As a highly knowledgeable archaeologist, he was undoubtedly drawing upon extensive information in making that assessment, but regrettably he did not publish the basis for his conclusions. Thus the Tang dynasty sites he identified have unfortunately not been systematically studied.

The Batangas site, however, has been analyzed intermittently through the years; the Arturo DeSantos collection had a Middle Eastern turquoise-glazed jar (Peralta 1982) that came from what is known as the Laurel site in Batangas. This piece is one of the most intact of the Middle Eastern ceramics found in Southeast Asia, further cementing the conclusion that the early Maritime Silk Road serviced at least some areas in the western Philippine Archipelago. The National Museum of the Philippines has also obtained evidence of Changsha ceramics being imported to the *Bondoc Peninsula* in Quezon province; the bowl that was recovered there is almost identical to one of the many types of bowls found in the Belitung shipwreck (see Figure 6), and is almost certainly contemporaneous.

Part 3: From Peak Popularity to a Buyers Market

In addition to our widening circle of collecting friends, the 1970s saw a frenzy of interest in the ceramics recovered from the Philippine Archipelago. This interest was fanned by Cecilia and Leandro Locsin's book (1967) describing their diggings in the Santa Ana

churchyard site in Manila, and by scholarly articles by the United Kingdom's Ambassador to the Philippines, J.M. Addis. The publication of the Manila symposium on ceramics, which contained definitive booklets by Addis, including one on the wide availability of Yuan dynasty early blue and white ceramics in the Philippine recoveries, increased the international attention (Addis 1976a). Serious collectors knew that the earliest blue and white Chinese ceramics were made in the 14th century, but there were no such examples available in the commercial market prior to the widespread digging at sites in Laguna and Mindoro, which provided a constant supply of these heretofore very rare ceramics. The even rarer Yuan dynasty vessels decorated with underglaze copper red painting were also documented by Addis (1976b). This information spread, and as a result, an international clientele particularly from Japan and Europe began to come directly to the Philippines.

Increasing interest in the ceramics being uncovered in the Philippines meant that prices were very high for those that could be sold to international customers. Lulu

Figure 7. Lidded Longquan jarlet. This ribbed celadon jar with a cover shaped like a lotus leaf was one of the most expensive of the early purchases for our collection (P840, about \$120 at the time). Similar cover jars were recovered both from the Santa Ana site in the Philippines (Locsin 1967) and the Sinan shipwreck off of Korea, suggesting an early 14th century provenance (H 7.6 cm).



and I managed to obtain an attractive set of Longquan celadons of smaller sizes (example shown in Figure 7), but these stretched our rather modest budget. Often I had to reserve ceramic vessels that we wanted, paying the dealers through an installment plan to complete the purchase. During the peak ceramics interest in the 1970s, four large shops in Manila regularly obtained the best products from the diggings: the shops of Terry Baylosis and Vin Magbuhos in the Malate district, and the del Rosario Gallery and Mrs. Ongpin's shop in the Makati area. All of these dealers had a small subset of customers that they knew were willing to pay top prices for favored pieces, and so they were unwilling to sell their more notable ceramic vessels until they had been

shown to their best customers. Terry Baylosis clearly reserved the choice pieces for the Locsins to see first, while Mrs. Ongpin reserved her most interesting material for Imelda Marcos, who was also assembling a collection of ceramics. If these favorite customers passed on a vessel, it would often become available at a much lower price. Most of these ceramics were completely out of our reach, as the prices were far beyond our budget.

However, there was a constant stream of ceramics that reached the Manila market from throughout the archipelago, often offered by smaller dealers in the tourist belt of metro Manila. There were striking ceramics

Figure 8. Examples of the diversity of Southeast Asian ceramics found in the Philippines. A: Anthropomorphic figurine, Vietnamese (H: 28.8 cm). B: Small elephant figurine, Vietnamese (H: 8.0 cm). C: Khmer jarlet, Angkor period Thailand (H: 9.5 cm). D: Khmer vase, Angkor period Thailand (H: 31.6 cm). E: Jar with a caparisoned elephant motif, Sawankhalok kilns, Thailand (H: 15.6 cm). F: Plate with fish, Sukhothai kilns, Thailand (D: 28.3 cm).



made by Thai kilns, as well as Vietnamese ceramics. Much more rarely, Khmer and Cham ceramics would appear. All of these were always much more modestly priced than the Yuan underglaze blue, or the large Longquan celadon dishes. During this period, I began to add interesting Southeast Asian ceramics to our collection and now have a number of unique vessels; some examples are shown in Figure 8.

Towards the end of the 1970s, interest in ceramics in the Philippines reached its peak and there was a noticeable decline after that. This was partly because of political unrest in the country; many of our friends were

engaged in protest movements and therefore had little time to indulge in ceramics collecting. The ceramics interest went further downhill as the Asian financial crisis took shape; essentially, the international market for ceramics, particularly in Asia, collapsed. Suddenly, with few interested buyers, the inventories of all of the shops began to balloon.

By that time, our family had moved to the U.S. full-time where I had assumed a faculty appointment and my scientific research work began to focus on neuroscience and new pharmacological tools developed from

Figure 9. Examples of the diverse new types of ceramics found in the Philippines. *Recovery locations, where specified, are shown in italics. A:* Small ewer and jar, Jingdezhen kilns, 14th century (H 9.0 and 13.4 cm). **B:** Ding ware plates with impressed decoration, Northern Song, 11th - 12th century (D: 20.2 and 20.5 cm). **C:** Jun ware vases, Northern Song, 11th - 12th century (H: 26.5 cm, and 26.0 cm - *Lanao del Norte*). **D:** Yaozhou bowls with carved and impressed decorations, Northern Song, 11th - 12th century (D: 11.6 - *Panguil Bay area*, and 11.2 cm - *Central Leyte*).



venomous marine snails. This required field collection trips which took me back to the Philippines three or four times a year. I retained my deep interest in ceramics and often would visit all of the Manila antique shops when I first arrived for science-related trips, and, later, visit them again before returning to the US. The bloated inventories that antique shops had accumulated made it a buyers market; prices fell with the lack of demand, and I had a much broader selection from which to choose. These were plum years for our personal collection, because essentially, during this period, I had the pick of what was coming out in the Manila antique market. This gave me an opportunity to buy the types of ceramics that I could not afford at all in the early 1970s; in addition, there was an increasing diversity of new source locations within the Philippines, from which novel items would appear in the Manila shops.

The financially and politically challenging times meant that there were very few buyers for the exciting new ceramics that were appearing. Blue and white pieces of the Yuan dynasty (Figure 9A), that were much more striking and impressive than any that were previously available, were now offered at modest prices. Even more exciting was the regular appearance of products of famous Northern Chinese kilns that had not previously been found outside China, such as Ding ware (Figure 9B), Jun ware (Figure 9C), and Yaozhou celadons (Figure 9D).

During this period, our collection grew very rapidly; on each trip to the Philippines I bought several dozen ceramic pieces. Each dealer had hundreds of ceramics for sale and I would look over their whole inventories and only buy the most outstanding or interesting pieces; the diversity and quality of what I was able to acquire was unprecedented. The visits to the best dealers also provided me with a unique hands-on education: each dealer had selected the best material from their agents for their store's inventory, and I would typically carefully

examine one or two dozen pieces for each ceramic vessel I would end up buying. I would discuss the probable provenance of each object I was considering with the dealer.

Some ceramics were so striking that I knew as soon as I saw them that I would buy them; in most cases however, only after a close examination did I get focused on that particular object. My usual routine was to visit the dealers and buy the pieces I definitely wanted, but to reserve a larger number. I would then think about what I had reserved, and by the next morning, it was always very clear to me which I should definitely buy. It was most often the unusual ones, that became more intriguing or puzzling upon reflection, that made the cut and were included in my purchases.

Part 4: Gold, Balangays and New Types of Ceramics

The late 1970s saw a marked change in the types of ceramics that reached the commercial antique market in Manila. Two major factors catalyzed this change. The first was the discovery of sites for Chinese ceramics from the 9th or 10th century near *Butuan City* in the *Agusan Province* of Northeastern Mindanao. These highly productive sites initially yielded ceramics not found at other Philippines sites as the pieces from the usual sites were made primarily by the kilns near the South China ports that served the early period of Maritime Silk Road trade. The Butuan area was so productive that it reignited an interest among Manila collectors who all wanted some of the new Agusan-found material, particularly after the first scholarly articles about their early provenance were published (Brown 1989). Interest also intensified after nine buried balangay watercraft, which were contemporaneous to the recovered ceramics, were found by pot hunters in the mid 1970s. The excavation of several of the boats was rightly heralded as a major archaeological discovery.

A second, more important factor, however, also changed the spectrum of ceramics being recovered: the widely-publicized discoveries of ancient hand-worked gold objects. The most spectacular finding was the so-called Surigao Treasure, which yielded over 10 kilograms of intricately crafted gold jewelry and other objects, from an irrigation construction project near the rural village of *Magroyong* in 1981 (Capistrano-Baker 2015). As a result of this amazing discovery, prominent customers in Manila that had previously focused on ceramics, such as the Locsin family, now concentrated on buying sophisticated gold objects that were being unearthed at an accelerated pace. The hand-worked gold of the Surigao Treasure was fortunately largely preserved (Villegas 2004), as were many objects from other sites, through the efforts of Cecilia and Leandro Locsin, and Jaime Laya, the Governor of Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (the Philippines central bank). The Bangko Sentral gold collection is on public exhibit, and the Locsin collection is among the highlights of the Ayala Museum in downtown Makati. These striking, unique, and culturally important objects have been the subject of international interest, with a 2015 exhibit entitled “Philippine Gold: Treasures of a Forgotten Kingdom” featuring the fine jewelry and other gold pieces in the collections, held at New York City’s Asia Society Museum.

A Changing Market

A little-noted effect of the discovery of gold was its dramatic and profound effect on the ceramic market. Because the Surigao Treasure included many large and spectacular gold objects that were more sophisticated than any previously known from the Philippines, their discovery led to expanded speculative digging in the historically gold-rich areas of Mindanao and *Samar* provinces,⁴ as prospectors hoped for similar bonanzas. During this period, the price of gold was rising steeply and a significant premium was paid if the gold jewelry pieces were attractive. Therefore the diggers knew,

Figure 10. Mongol dancer in coat and hat. Yuan dynasty, 14th century. Similar in form to ceramic dancer in 2011 Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibit (Watt 2010, Figure 68). *Recovery location reported as Palawan* (H: 18.0 cm).



based on weight and workmanship, the approximate value of any found gold objects. Gold objects, with their inherent baseline elemental value, were lucrative for the diggers and could be sold immediately.

One of the methods for detecting the possibility of underground gold involved probing rain-soaked soils at suspected burial sites in the hopes of striking and sensing contact with accompanying buried ceramics. Probing methods that did not break buried pottery were developed and became routine (Estrella 2018). Ceramic pieces that were found with gold could be kept until an

⁴ Antonin Pigafetta, a diarist and chronicler of the Magellan expedition of 1521, wrote of the remarkable gold adornments and porcelain serving ware that were present among the first peoples that the expedition encountered after its crossing of the Pacific and reaching the Southeastern Philippines. He also described this area as a place where “pieces of gold of the size of walnuts or eggs, are found by sifting the earth.”

arrangement could be made for a ceramics middleman to buy them. Ceramics recoveries from Mindanao and Samar became, essentially, a byproduct of a widening prospecting effort to find ancient buried gold. Sites containing buried gold objects made the returns from burial site digging in the Southeastern Philippines far greater than in the sites near Manila that tended to yield only ceramics. As a result, starting in the late 1970s and early 80s, a flood of new ceramic types that had never been seen before in the Manila market, arrived from the Southeastern Philippines.

Distinctive New Entrants

I noticed a recurring pattern in the Manila antique shops. A new ceramic type would appear, sometimes only a single, or a few examples, sometimes a larger group, and then that type would disappear, in many cases never to reappear again. There were some notable ceramics that fit this pattern, new types which I did not recognize when I bought them, but I have since figured out what they are. Two examples are

Figure 11. Philippine-recovered Sui or early Tang dynasty straw-glazed figurines and horse.
(H: 22.0, 16.5, and 19.5 cm).



shown in Figures 10 and 11. The very unique dancer modeled in detail, and wearing a coat and distinctive hat (Figure 10) was said by the dealer to have been found on *Palawan*. It was only many years later that the Metropolitan Museum had an exhibit focused on the Mongol rule of China in the 14th century in which similar Mongol ceramic sculptures were shown. The catalog of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition (Watt 2010, Figures 68 and 10) suggests that such figurines served as tomb furniture, but the exhibit curators were unable to identify the manufacturing kiln.

Another example is a group of figurines, clearly all from the same kiln source, shown in Figure 11. These are straw-glazed pottery figurines that I purchased from a dealer who hung out in one of the antique shops in the Ermita neighborhood of Manila; he offered these three figurines within a period of six months; I never saw any other examples in other shops or collections. Years later, passing time in a bookstore in Seattle, I found two books that showed similar figurines. One was a volume by Prodan (1961) on Tang ceramics. The other was

Figure 12. Dark olive celadon vases with bow string lines and a similar gui cup (vases from left to right, H: 14.2, 15.2, and 15.3 cm, and cup H: 7.7 cm).



a book which I purchased that described the famous Barlow collection in England (Sullivan 1963); a similar female figurine was on the cover of that publication. The small horse is apparently a unique example of this small class of Sui or early Tang dynasty figurines.

In certain cases, there are groups of distinctive ceramics that have appeared sporadically for which I have been unable to assign a definitive provenance even after many decades. One example is the set of dark olive-glazed vessels that popped up in the Manila commercial market over a few months; examples of these are shown in Figure 12. They are all expertly potted, with a very distinctive thick, finely crackled glaze and simple bowstring decoration. Although the group comprises forms characteristic of the Song dynasty, to my knowledge, there are no comparable examples published in the ceramic literature. After many years of speculation, my best guess is that these ceramics are a very distinctive type produced by the second official kiln of the Southern Song dynasty. There is no direct supporting evidence for this speculation, which is based exclusively on the structure of the vessels' foot rims.

Because of the sporadic flow of new ceramic forms into the antique market of Manila, I tried to familiarize myself with all the relevant literature. As a consequence, I accumulated a large number of books that specialize in specific types of Chinese ceramics, as well as those that described the most important international collections. Even a cursory reading of this literature made clear that the ceramics surfacing in the Southeastern Philippines at that time were very different from the Maritime Silk Road export ware, which was increasingly well-defined. The ceramics that were found around Manila, as well as in classical sites in the Western Visayas such as *Oton*, Iloilo on *Panay Island*, and also around *Cebu*, all fit the pattern of the Chinese ceramic export ware that was assembled in the great port cities of Southern China and sent via the Maritime Silk Road to Island Southeast

Asia and west across the Indian Ocean all the way to Middle Eastern, Red Sea and East Africa ports. From the 9th century on, Chinese ceramic export ware was distributed widely, and the literature on the kilns that produced these objects provided a detailed definition of the range of export ceramics made in each period. The dominant export market positioning of the kilns in Jingdezhen and Longquan in Zhejiang province, and of export-oriented kilns in Canton and Fukien province is now very well understood. As a result, the provenance of practically all of the ceramics that were distributed via these routes can be identified with confidence.

In contrast, the constant stream of new types of ceramics appearing in the Manila commercial market in the period following the Surigao Treasure discovery are notable in several respects. First, many of these ceramics were products of kilns that were active earlier than the well-accepted 9th century starting date of the Maritime Silk Road. A second notable characteristic is that most of the new ceramics appearing in the Philippines could be reliably identified as products of kilns in Northern China, whereas the ceramics exported via the Maritime Silk Road were primarily from kilns in Southern China. These newly discovered ceramics included not only distinctive northern kiln products such as Junware, Yaozhou ware, Liao and Cizhou ware, but also products of earlier kilns such as Xing whiteware of the 8th - 9th century and Tang dynasty 7th to early 8th century Sancai pottery. A third distinctive characteristic of the new ware was a bewildering diversity of forms. In many cases, these forms could be identified as ceramic copies of ancient Shang dynasty (1600 - 1046 BCE) ritual bronzes, another class that had never previously been documented outside of China.

The Importance of Location

From the influx of new types of ceramics, a geographic distribution of the discovery sites within the Philippines began to emerge. These new ceramics all came from a very confined area of the Philippine Archipelago, rather than from the well-known, highly productive export ware sites on the western side of the Philippines nearest to the South China Sea (Western Luzon, Mindoro, and the Western Visayas). Rather, as previously mentioned, they appeared in Mindanao and sites in the Southeastern Philippines facing, or near the Pacific Ocean. These ceramics were likely transported by a different, more eastern sailing route that bypassed the areas of the Western Philippines served by the Maritime Silk Road.

As this geographic pattern began to emerge, I began to systematically strengthen my nascent impressions

by asking various commercial dealers to more precisely provide the location of the pieces they had on offer. Once most of the dealers realized that I was more likely to buy a ceramic vessel if the general recovery locality was shared, they became more forthcoming in providing locations, typically at a town or village level. This information allowed me to informally evaluate the general locational context provided by different dealers, and from the same dealer over time. While some dealers provided only regional or other somewhat vague context, the dealers I considered most reliable began to gather and keep location notes from their suppliers. Gradually, I gained confidence that the information provided was consistent and reliable.

Figure 13. Two Changsha ewers with Tang poetry.

A: Corroded Changsha ewer with poem (H: 15.3 cm - *recovery location identified as Eastern Samar*).

A

B: Another Tang dynasty poem but on a Changsha ceramic ewer preserved in pristine condition (H: 22.0 cm - *recovery location not specified*).

B



Part 5: Consolidation and Integration of the Collection

In reflecting on the diverse ceramic acquisitions made over five decades of frequently sampling the Manila market's offerings sourced from all over the Philippines, it is clear that a number of specializations within the collection have received consistent attention. My purchase of a snuff bottle souvenir with characters led to my systematic acquisition of any older ceramic vessels inscribed with Chinese characters that I've encountered in Manila's antique stores. Similarly, my purchase of the Batangas ewer that turned out to be Tang dynasty Changsha ware naturally led me to gravitate to Changsha ceramics – since these rarely appear, it is always exciting to discover a new one. I have been doubly motivated to collect a small set of Changsha ceramics which are inscribed with Tang poetry. Although I generally do not purchase badly degraded ceramics, I have bought every Changsha ewer or bowl with poetry inscribed that I have seen, no matter its condition (see Figure 13). In retrospect, this has been a good decision since with the advent of the internet one can reconstitute a ceramic vessel poem, even if only a few characters are intact.

In cases when an original purchase piqued my interest, I have subsequently sought to acquire related pieces. Our original purchase of ceramics from Terry Baylosis' shop triggered some of these specializations. The lot of 24 ceramics from Leyte that we purchased not only included 15th century blue and white ceramics, but also eight Thai vessels from the Sawankhalok kilns and three Vietnamese ceramics. As a result, as I continued to frequent the antique shops in the tourist belt of Manila after work at the College of Medicine, I examined a broader range of the ceramics on display, and our collection of Longquan celadons, Ming dynasty blue and white, Thai, and Vietnamese vessels rapidly expanded.

Ceramics Literature, a Complementary Collection

Several books were invaluable to my exploration of the ceramics that I purchased. The book *The Calatagan Excavations: Two 15th Century Burial Sites in Batangas, Philippines* by Robert Fox (1959), then the chief archaeologist of the National Museum of the Philippines, established that the Leyte ceramics lot we purchased was similar to those excavated from Southern Luzon, the first carefully documented archaeological analysis of a ceramic-rich site in the Philippine Archipelago. The landmark study by Alexander Pope of Ming blue and white ceramics in the Persian court collection assembled at the Ardebil Shrine in Iran (now in the National Museum in Tehran), provided a very different artistic and historical perspective. Fox's archaeological

Figure 14. The qilin motif illustrated in the literature.

A: Figure from Fox (1959): dish recovered from Calatagan. **B:** Frontispiece drawing from Fox. **C:** Figure from Pope (1956): large dish from Ardebil Shrine collection. **D:** Small dish from Pope collection. Compare A and D to Leyte dishes shown in Plate 1F and 1D, respectively.

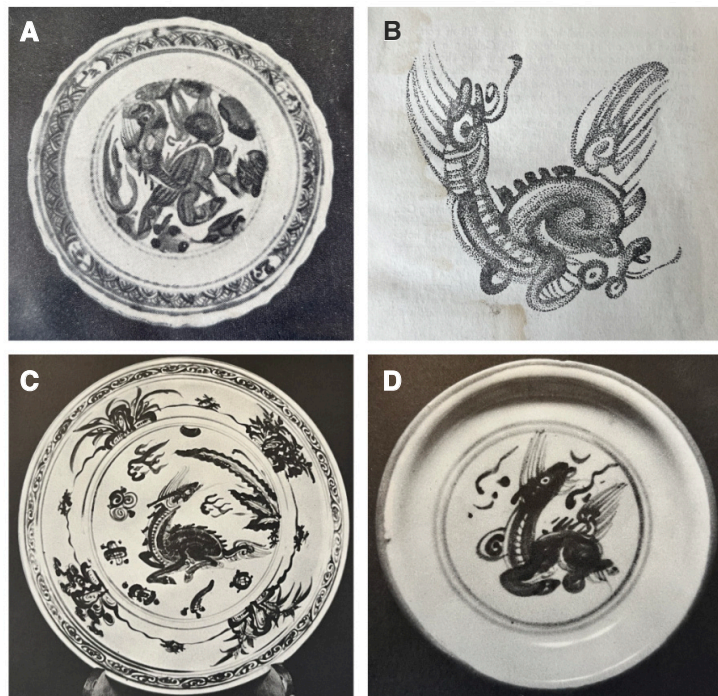


Plate 2.

The qilin motif in diverse ceramics recovered from the Philippine Archipelago.

Note that only the qilins depicted in A and D below have longer necks.

A: Ming dynasty dish, Interregnum, mid-15th century (D: 18.5 cm).

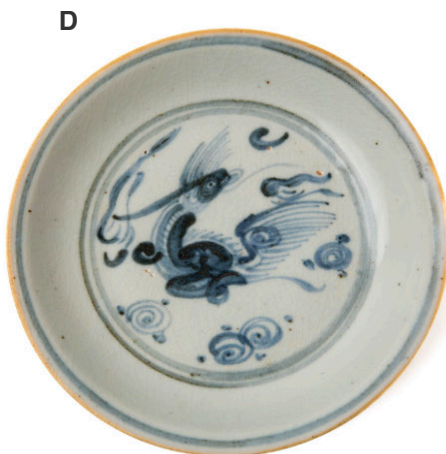
B: Tang dynasty lead-glazed qilin figurine, 7th century (H: 11.0 cm).

C: Yuan dynasty blue and white pilgrim's flask, 14th century (H: 16.5 cm).

D: Ming dynasty dish, Interregnum, mid-15th century (D: 18.5 cm).

E: Large Vietnamese blue and white dish, 15th century (D: 25.0 cm).

F: Ming dynasty export ware dish, late 15th - early 16th century (D: 16.4 cm).



analysis coupled with the context provided by Pope's art history framework greatly stimulated my interest in specific Leyte ceramics. Both Fox and Pope discussed a motif present in two of the Leyte plates (see Plate 1D and 1E), and both authors referred to it as a qilin, one of the auspicious mythical animals of Chinese iconography. Fox included four blue and white dishes with the qilin motif found in *Calatagan* (example in Figure 14A), and used the motif as the frontispiece of his book (Figure 14B). Pope (1956) illustrated a much more elaborate dish with the same motif from the Persian court collection (Figure 14C), and discussed the unique painting style of the dish at great length, but was uncertain as to its precise provenance.

My interest in qilins was piqued and as a consequence, I continued to read the relevant literature and to examine every ceramic vessel with this motif that I ran into. Five decades later, I have accumulated a diverse collection of qilin-themed pieces (see Plate 2), and I now understand the provenance of that first small qilin dish I purchased in the Leyte lot from Terry Baylois. Similar dishes have now been found in the Pandanan shipwreck off Southern Palawan (Brown 2009, Plate 55) and in an excavation of the old Ming Palace grounds in Nanjing, China (Lam et al. 1996). Both of these documented recovery sites strongly suggest that the Leyte-recovered qilin dish was made in Jingdezhen in the 2nd quarter of the 15th century, a period known as the Interregnum in China. During the Interregnum period, the private production of blue and white ceramics was officially banned which stimulated manufacture and export by Thai and Vietnamese kilns.

Cross-comparisons

One of the benefits of an extensive collection of both ceramics and ceramics literature is that it enables cross-comparisons of diverse vessels sharing the same form or motif. For example, a subset of vessels with the qilin motif shown in Figure 14 and Plate 2, including the

small plate in the original Leyte purchase (Plate 1E) and the two dishes in Pope's catalog of the Persian court collection in Figure 14 (C and D), share characteristics that distinguish them from other ceramics with this motif. In this subset, the rims of two of the dishes are unglazed and stained brown, and the central qilin motif on all three is depicted with a long neck. This unusual aspect of these qilins suggests that these particular ceramics were made in the second quarter of the 15th century. A few decades earlier, the first giraffe had been brought to China and was ceremoniously presented to the Yongle emperor; the fawning courtiers wanted to flatter the emperor, and presented the giraffe to him as the appearance of a mythical qilin, which only occurred during auspicious reigns (the emperor was apparently unimpressed and responded by saying that auspicious reigns result from officials doing their duty, not from the purported appearances of a qilin). Nevertheless, qilin became the word for giraffe in Chinese, and for a few decades afterward, representations of qilin continued to resemble giraffes. Note that the qilins from other periods (Plate 1D, 2B, 2C, 2E, and 2F) have short necks.

This type of cross-comparison also applies to ceramics that have the same shape. When the new types of ceramics recovered from the Southeastern Philippines began to appear in the late 1970s, one type was a distinctive ritual vessel known as a gui (an example of a dark olive gui is shown in Figure 12's foreground). Ceramic guis take the form of ancient bronze guis that were often placed in Shang dynasty tombs (Rawson 1990), some of which were unearthed during the Song period, 2,000 or more years after their initial burial. The Song Court ordered ceramic copies of recovered bronze ritual vessels made in an effort to reproduce rituals that aligned with heightened antiquarian interests (Sena 2019). Once I realized that the ceramic guis were based on ancient ritual bronzes, I tried to acquire them whenever the opportunity arose. Shown in Figure 15 are several other gui-form ceramics in the collection.

Interestingly, a comparison of the diverse gui from the Philippines with previously documented gui ceramics reveals that there is a paucity of Song vessels illustrated in the accessible literature. This form apparently continued to be made for the imperial court in later dynasties, where it was used as a censer. In contrast to the Philippine-recovered gui, most of the gui censers illustrated in the Chinese ceramics literature are from the Ming and Qing dynasties, usually decorated with polychrome enamels. The Chinese ceramic gui ritual vessels found in the Philippines appear to be the most diverse collection from the earlier Song dynastic period.

In some cases, my focus on a specific subset of ceramics developed only gradually. At present, the collection includes a broad selection of ceramics from the Six Dynasties; as my interest in these has grown, I've added pieces to the collection. The early stoneware ceramics made during the Six Dynasties are of course technically less sophisticated than, for example, the products of the five great kilns of the Song dynasty made over 500 years later. When Six Dynasties pieces first appeared in the Manila market, they were relatively crude compared to the ceramics from later periods and

were assumed to be products of some provincial kiln, like those in Guangzhou or Fukien province from a later dynastic period. I had purchased a hunping (soul urn) sometime in the 1970s or early 1980s, but at the time had assumed that it had been recovered in China, and had made its way to Manila via rumored smuggling through Macau. It was only when some of the most iconic Six Dynasties ceramics began to appear in the Manila market that I came to realize that these were most likely being recovered from Philippine sites. The most notable were bixies (Figure 16) which were an iconic product of the Old Yüeh kilns in the Western Jin dynasty of the late 3rd or early 4th century, probably made for scholars' desks to hold candles, brushes, or flags.

A dealer that I trusted insisted that these came from Mindanao. When I read about bixies in the literature, I discovered that other ceramics in the inventory of shops in Manila were, in fact, contemporaneous products from the Six Dynasties. These included chicken-headed ewers and toad jars which were idiosyncratic vessels characteristic of the period. The implications of finding 3rd and 4th century ceramics in the Philippine

Figure 15. Four Northern Song gui cups recovered from the Philippines (shown to scale, large gui H: 11.7 cm).



Archipelago began to dawn on me — this would push back the accepted first import of Chinese ceramics brought back to the Philippines by over 700 years. This was not even hinted at in the scholarly literature on export ceramics.

Consequently, my interest in Six Dynasties ceramics grew ever more intense. The synergy of regularly finding new vessels from this period in the Manila antique shops, and my expanded command of the increasing literature that became available on these ceramics (a story that was unfolding in China at the same time as more archaeological reports were published, Hai et al. 2016), led to my aggressively collecting all ceramic vessels I encountered that were conceivably from the Six Dynasties period. I believe that from the historical and cultural point of view, this has become one of the most unique segments of the collection; by systematically acquiring all available ceramics from this period, I could study and compare many different vessels. My confidence grew in recognizing hallmark features of vessels from the Six Dynasties.

In my effort to access all of the literature on Six Dynasties celadon stoneware, I became aware that there was another general location outside China from

which Six Dynasties ceramics had been recovered. The collection of the Pusat Museum in Jakarta had a number of these ceramics found at sites in Sumatra (Ridho 1982, see Plate 4). These continue to be found, and are occasionally listed online by dealers in Indonesia. I felt confident in purchasing a number of distinctive Six Dynasties ceramics (with the same hallmark features as the Philippine vessels from this period) that were offered by an Indonesian dealer. As was the case in the Philippines, there appeared to be little interest in these, and I suspect that even people knowledgeable on Six Dynasties ceramics assume that if offered from locations outside China, they could not possibly be authentic. The historical implications of finding a large number of these highly distinctive ceramics in two discontinuous geographic sites — the Southeastern Philippines, and Western Indonesia — can be rationalized from the historical background of the period. Being able to compare the Indonesian and Philippine-recovered pieces side-by-side has given greater depth and significance to the Six Dynasties ceramics that I have accumulated, which may now comprise the most comprehensive collection from this early period recovered from sites outside China.



Figure 16. Six Dynasties bixies. **A:** *Recovered in Northern Samar (H: 11.5 cm).* **B:** *Recovery location not specified (H: 8.5 cm).* **C:** *Recovered in Northeast Mindanao (H: 8.0 cm).*

Overview and Discussion

Two Timelines of the Collection

The Philippine-recovered ceramics in the collection, presented in part here, can be viewed through the framework of two separate chronologies. The first timeline is when each of the vessels was added to the collection. The second timeline is the range of dates when the recovered Chinese ceramics were produced by their respective, specific kilns.

The Collection's Acquisition Timeline (#1)

The first of these two timelines can be divided into three discrete phases: the earliest, starting in the late 1960s, was when most of the Philippine-recovered material available was being recovered from sites in Luzon and Mindoro that were relatively close to Manila. These were primarily late Southern Song to Ming export ware ceramics, with a very high proportion of Longquan celadons and Jingdezhen porcelains. These were the primary Chinese ceramic types that were acquired for the collection, along with Thai and Vietnamese vessels.

In the second phase, the appearance of new types of Chinese ceramics primarily from localities in the Southeastern Philippines, combined with a financial and political crisis in the Philippines that greatly reduced demand and prices, led to the collection expanding rapidly, both in size and diversity. Notably, high quality products of kilns active from earlier than the 9th century, and from renowned kilns in Northern China, began to appear regularly in the Manila antique market.

In the third and current phase of assembling this collection, a number of specializations have dominated. My primary interest as a collector is no longer to obtain the highest quality, most aesthetically pleasing ceramic vessels that come into the Manila antique stores. Rather, I am now mainly motivated by the cultural and historical significance of what is available. This has led

me to acquire ceramics from the Six Dynasties period that are not particularly impressive or of high quality, but which I feel provide a unique opportunity to gather together material objects that are, in a sense, concrete and datable historical records of an important (and forgotten) early culture that flourished in the Philippine Archipelago. Their significance should be comparable to that of the Kustiarsih ceramics collection (2019) from the Musi River near Palembang, Indonesia, which provided a historically important and dateable material record for the Sri Vijayan culture a few centuries later.

The Timeline of Production Kilns (#2)

A second chronology that serves as a framework for the collection is when specific Chinese ceramic vessels were actually manufactured. There are several lead-glazed vessels (examples in Plate 3) from the Han dynasty that come from Philippine sites, but these appear only very rarely, and almost always in small quantity. As a result, there is little reliable information regarding the provenance of this group whose production dates to between 206 BCE and 220 CE. If these pieces were imported to the Philippines shortly after their manufacture, they are the oldest known evidence of maritime trade involving Chinese ceramics.

During the Six Dynasties period, following the Han dynasty, there were 300 years of disunity in China. In contrast to the few ceramic pieces from the Han dynasty, the material in the collection from the Six Dynasties recovered in the Philippines is now a very coherent set of vessels numbering over 200, many with dealer-provided recovery locations. A map of the major locales that have yielded Six Dynasties ceramics is shown in Figure 17 and is the basis for the geographically defined region we have named the Kalaga Putuan Crescent.

Over the years, a wide diversity of Tang dynasty ceramics from the 6th to 7th century accumulated in the Philippines. A small sample of the recovered pieces

Plate 3.

Han dynasty lead-glazed ceramics. 200 BCE - 200 CE.

A: Censer (H: 27.5 cm).

B: Dragon-like beast with bowl (H: 19.3 cm).

C: Feline-like beast with bowl (H: 20.5 cm).

A



C





Figure 17. Map of frequently identified Six Dynasties ceramic recovery sites. These sites in the Southeastern Philippines form an area centered around Butuan and Surigao that I refer to as the Kalaga Putuan Crescent or KPC.

are shown in Figure 18. The most recognizable are the famous polychrome lead-glazed funerary ceramics (“sancai”), particularly the figurines.

Much better defined are the ceramics from the 8th to 9th century. These include vessels made for the late Tang dynasty imperial court by the Xing and Yüeh kilns (Plate 4). In addition, there is a fair distribution of 8th and 9th century products of the Changsha kilns, described in more detail in Olivera et al. (2024), which have become famous because of the Belitung shipwreck discovery.

Perhaps the most surprising and unique of the ceramics in the collection are the great diversity dating from the 10th to the early 12th centuries (these include the Five Dynasties and the Northern Song dynasty). The sites in the Kalaga Putuan Crescent are particularly

enriched in a dizzyingly complex group of ceramics from this period that were the product of many different kilns. These pieces from diverse periods within this time range are from the ceramics point of view, perhaps the most important of all Philippine recoveries. Many of these have seals that portray details of their provenance. A few examples, ceramic copies of ancient bronze ritual vessels made in Northern China kilns, are shown in Plate 5.

However, Song-era ceramics recovered in the Philippines were not restricted to products of kilns in Northern China, but include previously unknown types

Figure 18. Tang Sancai vase and figurine. **A:** Amphora with two dragon handles, recovered in Palawan (H: 33.2 cm). **B:** Flute-playing figurine, recovery location not specified (H: 33.3 cm).



Plate 4.

Tang dynasty Xing ware and Mise celadons from the Yüeh kilns.

A, B, and C: Two dishes and a cup and stand from the Xing kilns; all of these are marked on their base with the guan character, indicating they were made for official use by the imperial court (D: 13.8 cm *recovery location not specified*; H: 10.3 cm *recovered from Southern Samar*; and D: 14.0 cm *recovered from Panguil Bay area*).

D, E, and F: Three examples of Mise celadon from the Yüeh kilns, probably 9th - 10th century (H: 26.7 cm *recovered from Northern Samar*; H: 17.9 cm *recovered from Panguil Bay area*; and H: 13.0 cm *recovery location not specified*).

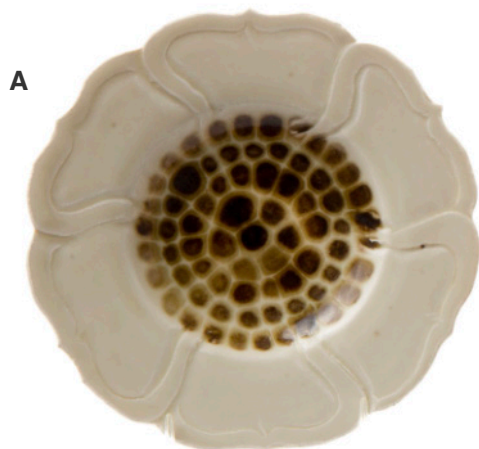


Plate 5.

Examples of Northern Song ritual vessels with multi-character base seals.

A: Light blue zun with 10 character seal indicating production in 1102 CE (H: 22.8 cm). **B:** Green ice crackle zun with 11 character seal indicating Wang family kiln production in 1106 CE (H: 24.6 cm). **C:** 'Golden thread, iron wire' glazed hu with fluorescing crackle (Olivera et al. 2025) and 11 character seal indicating Zhang family kiln production in 1106 CE. (H: 19.6 cm).

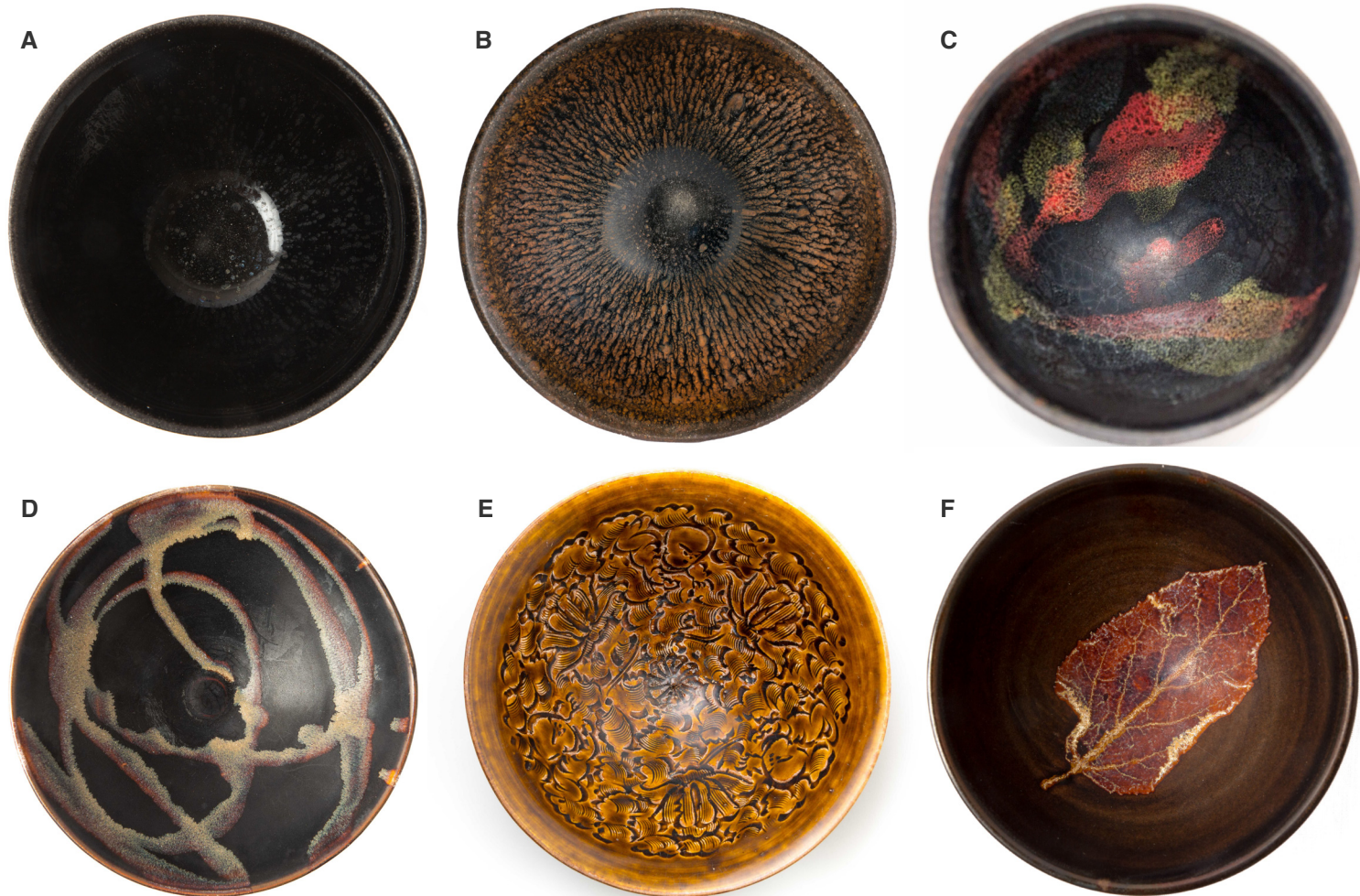


of ceramics made in well-established kilns in Southern China. Two such kilns later in the Song dynasty produced the black-glazed tea bowls that are widely known as Temmoku in Japan. Japanese Buddhist monks who had made pilgrimages to temples in China during the Southern Song and Yuan periods brought these tea bowls back to Japan, where they became treasured heirlooms of noble families. The classic Temmoku tea bowls were products of two kilns, Jian in Fukien province,

and Jizhou in Kiangsi province. However, the Philippine recoveries suggest that both kilns not only made the classical types of Temmoku, but they also experimented earlier with a much wider diversity of ceramics.

Examples of Northern Song era Jian products are shown in Figure 19 (A - C). These include a tea bowl which has an inscription at the base, indicating that it was made in the late 10th century. Shown in Figure 19

Figure 19. Temmoku tea bowls from the Jian (top row) and Jizhou (bottom row) kilns. *Recovery locations are in Northeastern Mindanao, except where otherwise specified below. A:* Jian bowl with inscription indicating it was made during the reign of the first Northern Song emperor, Renzong (D: 11.5 cm). **B:** Bowl with hare's fur glaze pattern (D: 11.7 cm - *Panguil Bay area*). **C:** Unique polychrome bowl (D: 12.6 cm). **D:** Jizhou bowl splashed with a blue-white glaze (D: 15.5 cm). **E:** Carved and combed floral motif with three boys on a golden brown glaze (D: 17.3 cm - *recovery location not specified*). **F:** Small leaf Temmoku wine cup (D: 8.1 cm).



(D - F) are a group of Jizhou vessels that are likely to have been made between the 10th and 12th century; the examples illustrated demonstrate the diversity of ceramic bowls produced in this kiln complex.

Among the most distinctive ceramic forms of the 10th -12th centuries are white phoenix-headed vessels. The most common types in the literature are ewers with relatively short necks made for export by kilns in Southern China. Three phoenix-headed vessels found at the Philippine KPC sites, shown in Figure 20 (A - C), have much longer necks and are unique examples of this famous ceramic type. Examination of the literature and a cross-comparison of the ceramics in the collection indicate their likely provenance. The ewer with carved and combed decorations shown in Figure 20A is likely a product of the Jizhou kiln; the striking

similarity of the floral scroll to the golden-brown glazed bowl in Figure 19E was one clue for this assignment. Using a similar analysis, the ewer in Figure 20B is likely an 11th century Jingdezhen kiln product. I haven't yet formed a credible provenance for the vessel with the grayish glaze in Figure 20C but am nonetheless fairly satisfied, considering that the most famous phoenix headed vessel of this type, a ewer with a broken spout in the British Museum (Figure 20D), has not, at present, been confidently assigned a provenance after nearly a century of study and speculation.

The ceramics in the collection produced from the late Southern Song to the Ming dynasty can be divided into three groups: Chinese export ware, particularly the products of the Longquan (Figure 3) and Jingdezhen

Figure 20. Phoenix-headed white glazed bottles and ewer, 10th - 11th century.

A: Jizhou-styled phoenix bottle (H: 33.5 cm). **B:** Jingdezhen-styled phoenix ewer (H: 21.0 cm). **C:** Phoenix bottle with degraded glaze (H: 25.0 cm). **D:** Phoenix bottle from the British Museum collection (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1936-1012-206). *Recovery locations not specified.*



kilns (Plate 2F); Chinese ceramics that are not export ware, which appear to be largely produced for the high-end Chinese domestic market (Plate 2C); and Southeast Asian ceramics from Thailand and Vietnam (Figure 8).

Organizing and Annotating the Collection

In recent years I have redoubled my efforts to document and annotate the collection and to attempt to explore broader issues of the culture and art history relevant to defined groups of ceramics. During the Covid pandemic, with the indispensable help of family and friends, I started to summarize some of the diverse ceramics in the collection in the form of short booklets on Jun and Jizhou Temmoku ware, and Six Dynasties ceramics. As these booklets were being prepared, we wrote a paper, published in 2023, proposing that the Kalaga Putuan Crescent was in fact the site of a lost Austronesian maritime kingdom that existed for well over a millennium, starting in the 3rd century CE. This paper brought together historic records, archaeological evidence, genetic evidence, and some of the ceramics in the collection that originated the seeds of this hypothesis. A subsequent booklet focuses on non-export ware Changsha ceramics in the collection.

At present, our major goal is to complete the documentation of the Six Dynasties ceramics found in the Philippine Archipelago; this is important both for trying to understand the history and culture of the Kalaga Putuan Crescent during the period, as well as shedding additional light on the development of stoneware ceramics at the time that they first became widely distributed in China. We believe that the Philippine collection is a unique sampling of the ceramics made during this period for quotidian purposes, and not primarily for use as tomb furniture as are many of their contemporary pieces recovered in China.

Melding Timelines and Subsets into a Cohesive Framework

In the process of organizing and annotating these ceramics acquired over a period of five plus decades, I have come to realize that I have assembled two quite different subsets within the collection. The first group is easily understood from the published ceramic literature: this is a set of the ceramics that were commercially distributed through the Maritime Silk Road which started in the 9th century and continued to expand until the Song Dynasty. The initial export ware in China was dominated by the Changsha kilns. Longquan celadons later provided the major stream of export ware until the 14th to 16th century, with Jingdezhen blue and white ceramics, together with the products of Thai and Vietnamese kilns, becoming major components of that trade network. The addition of the export ware ceramics in this subset to the collection can be defined chronologically and geographically. These were largely acquired in the first 10 years, from 1969 on; the Manila commercial market during these years consisted almost exclusively of these export wares. The recovery sites for these ceramics were on Western Luzon and Mindoro islands, facing the South China Sea, and in the Western Visayas. In the early phases of the Maritime Silk Road, Austronesian balangays were very likely the primary ships that brought the ceramics to these Philippine areas from the port cities of Southern China where the export cargo was assembled. Starting in the Southern Song dynasty, the trade fleet composition was likely diversified with an increasing use of Chinese junks.

In marked contrast, the second subset of the ceramics collection does not overlap with the first in almost any respect. These pieces were largely acquired from Manila shops after 1980, and most notably, come from geographically distinct sites that are to the south and east of the areas of the Philippines that yielded only export wares. These sites, all in the Southeastern Philippines, include the Eastern Visayan islands of Samar and Leyte

as well as the Caraga - Butuan region in Northeastern Mindanao, west along the coast to *Panguil Bay* in Lanao del Norte province. The striking geographic separation of these two groups is supported by ancient Chinese textual references. The geographic sites of ceramics recoveries in the first subset are referred to in the Chinese literature as a kingdom called Ma-yi together with lesser kingdoms that were closely associated with Ma-yi. On the other hand, the second subset were recovered from a region that Northern Song dynasty court records referred to as the kingdom of P'u-tuan or Pudian, and which Pigafetta later described in the 16th century as Mazaua, Butuan and Caraga – this is the geographic region, more oriented to the Pacific Ocean, that we have called the Kalaga Putuan Crescent.

The ceramics in the second subset of the collection are notable in that comparables to most of these pieces have never been found outside China, except for a small overlap with ceramics from sites in Western Indonesia. Pieces from this second subset were clearly not distributed through the Maritime Silk Road as were the ceramics in the first subset.

The textual evidence from the chronicles of the Northern Song dynasty documents a tribute mission from the Putuan region (the Southeastern Philippines Archipelago) that in 1007 CE came to the Northern Song capital of Kaifeng on the banks of the Yellow River, bringing with them cloves, a gold tablet, camphor, and local natural products. In exchange the records indicate that the visitors were given silk robes, copper coins, and most notably, ritual vessels (Yang 2021). The visitors stayed for several months. These records thus provide a detailed historical account of exactly how one batch of Chinese ceramics reached this sector of the Philippine Archipelago: they were obtained directly from the imperial court by tribute mission delegates from the Philippines, who were in Northern China for an extended period of time. While recorded as a tribute mission,

both sides of the transaction brought elite goods to the exchange, likely in large quantities.

The Southeastern Philippines was endowed with copious gold deposits and immediate proximity to the highly sought after endemic spices of the Molucca Islands, and their balangay ships were the largest and most widely used ocean-going watercraft at the time, capable of carrying hundreds of passengers and over 500 tons of cargo (Hall 2021). Clearly, ceramics that were obtained directly from the imperial court or obtained from domestic markets in the imperial capital in the North, in exchange for gold and exotic trade goods, would be quite different from export ware ceramics assembled by merchants in Southern China ports for large-scale commercial distribution.

Conclusion

In my work as an academic science researcher and in my collecting hobbies, I have always been interested in the potential of the unusual -- the objects themselves and related, non-standard pathways of inquiry that the unusual may elicit. It's been my experience that non-standard inquiry and good luck have often been as important a contributor to breakthrough insights as meticulous study and persistence. This observation seems to hold true to both the collection and my attempts to interpret its significance and implications. In reflecting on the collection of ceramics I have acquired, I feel the two major conclusions that I have been able to draw from this unusual assemblage are: 1) the sophistication of the KPC kingdom and its trading accomplishments, and 2) the bifurcation of the Philippine Archipelago in terms of its precolonial spheres of contact.

The two subsets of ceramics I have collected over five decades each represent a distinct era of the Manila antique market. The subsets are disconnected in their period of manufacture and the geographic distribution

of their reported recovery sites. Each group was likely brought back from China to their respective recovery areas in the Philippine Archipelago via a fundamentally different route. For both subsets of the collection, the ceramic objects are greatly complemented by other emerging historical evidence. The expanding and increasingly accessible literature on Chinese ceramics, archaeology and trade history, linguistics, genetics, Austronesian maritime civilization, and Chinese court records have been indispensable to formulating new insights that begin to fill the largely empty void that is the precolonial history of the Philippine Archipelago.

Coincidence has been an important contributor to the conclusions that I have developed. Early archaeological interest and successful formal explorations in the Philippines stimulated the search for ancient buried ceramics and other objects. Then, the accidental discovery and widespread publicity of the Surigao Treasure in the historically gold rich areas of the Southeastern Philippines accelerated the recovery of ceramics that began a second phase of the Manila antique markets. To the great advantage of my collecting activities, the vast majority of collectors exited the ceramics market just as the new wave of KPC-area ceramics, of higher quality and quantity but of less-well understood provenance, began to appear in the Manila antique shops. This was partly due to a shift in the interests of the higher end collectors to the hand-worked gold being found, but also the deeply troubled domestic political and economic climate in the Philippines, and the collapse of the greater Asian economic boom that had fueled foreign interest in the Manila antique stores. Serendipitously, my scientific research program, rooted in marine biodiversity, required field collection and coordination trips to the Philippines three or four times a year, which enabled a frequent sampling of the Manila markets and the assembly of the broad collection of Philippine-recovered ceramics across the two eras.

The scope and diversity of the collection has provided unique opportunities to compare each new addition to related ceramics already in the collection, as well as in the ceramics literature. Over many decades of collecting, there has been an accretion of meaningful conclusions about the importance of these objects as insights that should expand the understanding of precolonial Philippine societies and their accomplishments. And given the uniquely preserved sets of ceramics from far-ranging dynastic periods, the collection also provides new information relevant to the lineage of Chinese ceramics and the circumstances of their production extending approximately two millennia into the past.

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Figure 21. Chinese dynastic periods, major Chinese ceramic ware periods, and the approximate Kalaga-P'utuan Crescent period as established by recovery of Chinese ceramics in the SE Philippines.

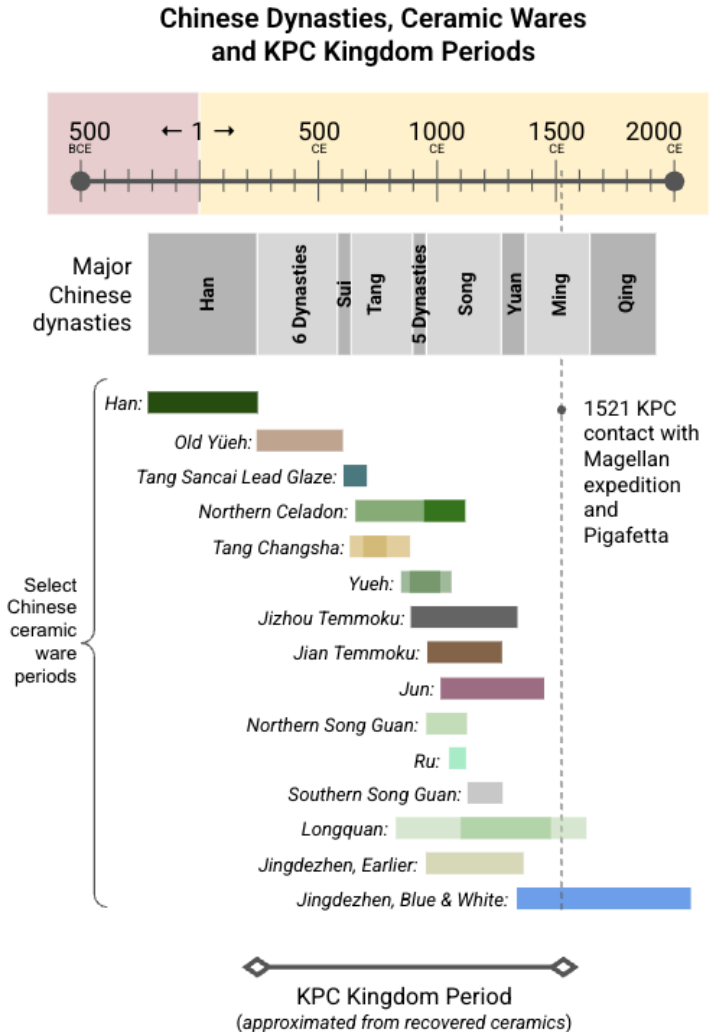


Figure 22.

Northern Song foliated bowl recovered in the Philippines. Blue primary glaze with an intricate 'golden thread, iron wire' crackle pattern (D: 17.0 cm).



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Cover: Jingdezhen dish with long-necked qilin (D: 12.0 cm, also shown in Plate 1E).