

Si Satchanalai Ceramic Figurines from Klang Aow Shipwreck, Thailand: ideas, Functions and Their Roles

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ABSTRACT

Amongst the most remarkable commodities of Thailand on the maritime trade routes during the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries was Thai ceramics “*Sangkhalok*” (the ceramics characterised by green glazed, brown glazed, and underglaze black stoneware produced from Si Satchanalai and Sukhothai kilns). They were made in various shape, such as bowl, jar, plate and figurines. They are marked as one of the significant products found from shipwrecks around Thai waters. The figurines were originated from Pa Yang kilns as one group of kiln at the Si Satchanalai kiln complex; as it was also a dependency under the Sukhothai Kingdom (1238–1438) where the people made ceramics by local materials and applied local wisdoms and handicraft skills to the ceramics. The research materials for this paper focused on the 80 Si Satchanalai figurines recovered from the Klang Aow shipwreck. The shipwreck date (cal. 1305–1420 CE) is based on the Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS) result of a small bamboo sample stuck on the body of Si Satchanalai green glazed small bottle. This paper aims to find out what was the manufacture purpose of these figurines, as they played a major role in Southeast Asian and East Asian maritime trade networks during the fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries? The result indicates these figurines were created at the Pa Yang village of Si Satchanalai kiln in Sukhothai province during the late fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries, to meet the demand for religious activities and toys in folk theatre.

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INTRODUCTION

“*Sangkhalok*” wares are one of the most remarkable commodities of Thailand dated to fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. Typically, this type of stoneware ceramic originates from kilns in Sukhothai province, especially Ko Noi and Pa Yang kilns. Located in Si Satchanalai city as a dependency under the Sukhothai Kingdom (1238–1438 CE). The kilns are well-known as Si Satchanalai or Sawangkhalok kiln complex and Turiang or Sukhothai kiln located in Sukhothai city, capital of the Sukhothai Kingdom. All kilns are located outside of the city wall. Si Satchanalai kiln is located in the north along the bank of the Yom River. While the Turiang kiln is located in the north of the city beside the Turiang and the Phrapai Luang temples. Potters use the local clay as the main materials for ceramic production. These ceramics have various shapes: bowl, jar, plate, dish, human and animal figurines. These are decorated by slipping, incising, engraving, impressing, applying, painting and glazing.

These ceramics were the products which made high profits for Siam or Ayutthaya Kingdom (1350–1767 CE). Ayutthaya as the capital of the kingdom located in central Thailand along the Chao Phraya River, which linked to the Gulf of Thailand - played the role as the middleman who linked the ceramic productions and supplied the ceramics to maritime routes. Since the establishment of the kingdom, Ayutthaya maintained a close relation with China, with diplomacy and tributary trade. However, the international policies of Early Ming Dynasty affected the supply of Chinese ceramics for Southeast Asia and were insufficient (Brown 2009,69-70). The international trade block under the emperors’ decree of Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 CE) made space in the market for Southeast Asian states,

especially Ayutthaya and Dai Viet (now northern Vietnam) who already had their own ceramic manufactures, to supply their products.

A word “*Sankhalok*” is a mispronunciation from a word “Sung-chiao-lo” in Chinese Mandarin or “Sung ka lok” in Chinese Swatow (Shantou), but it is not possible to determine exactly when this word began to be used (Plaicharnjit 2002, 287). In the sixteenth century, a word “Sunkoroku” was mentioned in the Japanese records (Nelson 1965, 127). These words are mispronunciations that referred to the area called Sawankhalok district, Sukhothai province where kilns are located. According to fourteenth-century historical records of Ayutthaya Kingdom, Si Satchanalai referred to Sawankhalok (Kasetsiri 2002,8).

The collection for this paper comprises of 80 human and animal ceramic figurines recovered from the Klang Aow shipwreck, which recently preserved in the storage of the National Maritime Museum in Chanthaburi and the National Museum Storage in Pathum Thani. The paper aims to explain the details of ceramic figurines, production sites and answer the research question: what was the manufacture purpose of these figurines, as they played a major role in Southeast Asian and East Asian maritime trade networks during the fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries?

KLANG AOW SHIPWRECK

The Klang Aow shipwreck was named after the location as a word “Klang Aow” meant the middle of the Gulf of Thailand located at the latitude 11°37’N and longitude 100°59’E, which is approximate 60 nautical miles from the coastline of Sattahip district, Chonburi province, (Vilaikaew 1992,8-33). In February 1992, this shipwreck and its cargo were recovered by vessel named *AHTS Australia Tide* in the Gulf of Thailand as Thai exclusive economic zone and Thai task force included Royal Thai Navy, Thai Marine Police Division and the Fine Arts Department intercepted the vessel and seized 12,000 artifacts to be the national treasures of Thailand, protected by the National Act of Monuments, Artifacts, Art Objects and National Museums (firstly announced in 1961 and revised in 1992). The origins of these artifacts can be divided in to three different groups (Plaicharnjit 1992,34-37).

- i. Thai ceramics, especially Si Satchanalai, Sukhothai and Maenam Noi or Singburi ceramics (97 per cent of all artifacts)
- ii. Vietnamese ceramics, especially Chu Dau blue-and-white wares (2.5 per cent of all artifacts)
- iii. Chinese ceramics, especially Jingdezhen blue-and-white wares (0.5 per cent of all artifacts).

The scientific date (1305–1420 CE from Beta Analytic Inc. 1999, Beta-134072) from Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS) is from a small bamboo piece stuck on the body of the Si Satchanalai green glazed small bottle with two ring handles. This bamboo seems to be a part of ship structure or cargo hold because of the concretion when the Klang Aow sunk. This feature was also found on a Maenam Noi or Singburi jar.



Figure 1 Thai task force on duty of seizing the recovered artifacts from Klang Aow shipwreck in 1992. (left)
Recovered artifacts from Klang Aow shipwreck during the seizing in 1992. (right)
(The Fine Arts Department of Thailand)

SI SATCHANALAI CERAMIC FIGURES FROM KLANG AOW SHIPWRECK

The human and animal figurines can be classified into four different types as follows.

- i. A man figurine with 28.8 centimetre height in the form of a man sitting on one of his knees up and holding a poultry in the hands on the chest. His appearance shows a short hair with moustache and beard on man face, wearing of the Chinese style dress (possibly an overcoat), and holding of a poultry (possibly a bird or a cock) in the hands on the chest. Inside the figurine is hollowed with a hole on the top of man head and another hole as the poultry head. The glaze was eroded and concretion was occurred.
- ii. Two women figurines with 21 centimetre height in the form of woman sitting on her knees and holding a basin on the shoulder. Her appearance shows a hair tied into the bun shape, women face, wearing of the tube skirt with no upper-body cloth, and holding of basin on the shoulder. The glaze was eroded and concretion was occurred.

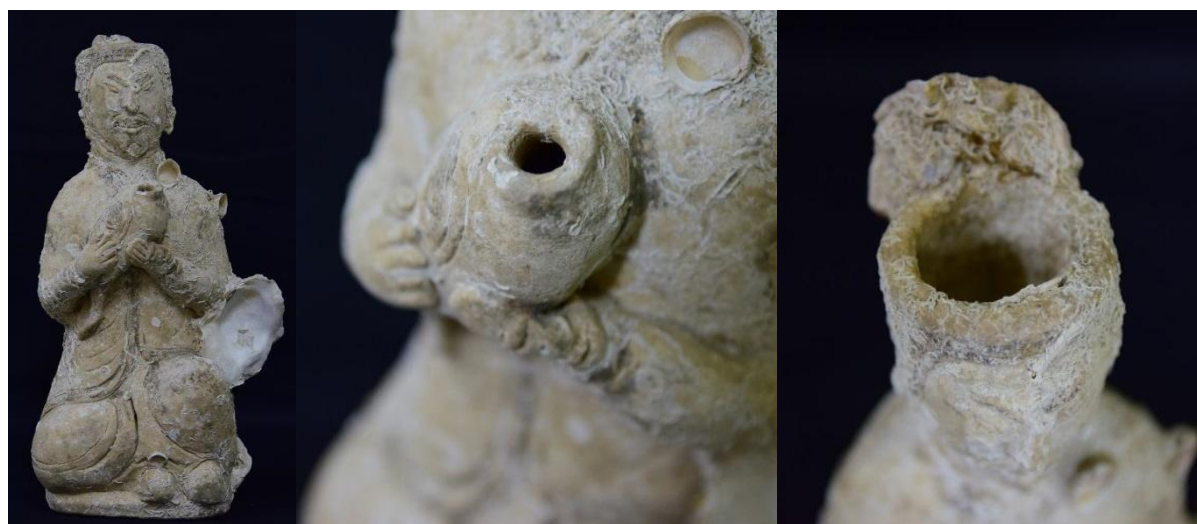




Figure 2 The human figurines from Klang Aow shipwreck, fourteenth to fifteenth centuries:
[top] man and [bottom] woman.

Chinese man carrying a poultry functioned as a water dropper. Woman carrying a basin functioned as a candle holder. (National Maritime Museum in Chanthaburi)

- iii. 41 small poultry figurines (possibly a cock or a quail) with 6.8 centimetre height, standing on the rounded base. The head was sculpting as a beak, the eyes and wings were formed by sculpting and applying, some were incising the detail of wing, and a tail was also sculpting and applying.
- iv. 34 small elephant figurines with 7.4 cm. standing. The figurines showed realistic details of a head, eye, ear, and trunk by sculpting and applying.





Figure 3 The animal figurines from Klang Aow shipwreck, fourteenth to fifteenth centuries. (top)
 (National Maritime Museum in Chanthaburi)
 The figurine in the form of an elephant from Klang Aow shipwreck, fourteenth to fifteenth centuries. (left)
 The figurine in the form of a horse from Klang Aow shipwreck, fourteenth to fifteenth centuries. (right)
 (National Museum Storage in Pathum Thani)

There are other animal figurines from the Klang Aow Shipwreck preserved in the National Museum Storage in Pathum Thani: an elephant and a horse.

- i. An elephant figurine with 27 centimetre height with a mahout sitting on the neck, a howdah on the back, and four warriors holding a sword and a shield protect at the elephant feet. The glaze was eroded. concretion.
- ii. A horse figurine with 27 centimetre height with a horseman sitting on the neck and a bowl affixing on the back, and four men holding a lotus flower standing at the horse feet. The glaze was eroded. concretion.

Production site of figurines

The production site of these figurines can be identified by the comparative study between the production, glazing and decoration techniques such as clay body textures, glazing characteristics, and decoration or design styles. The sources for comparative study are the figurines preserved and on display of the National Maritime Museum in Chanthaburi, National Museum, Bangkok (Chongkol 1999,91), Ramkamhaeng National Museum in Sukhothai, Sawanworanayok National Museum in Sukhothai (Srisumang 1992,39–40), and the figurines discovered at kiln sites of Si Satchanalai. Previous excavation at the kiln site by Don Hein (2001, 156–262) resulted the figurines and even the architectural ornaments were produced at Pa Yang kiln, Si Satchanalai kiln complex within specific kilns separated from other kilns for other utensils production. Additionally, the chronology of trade ceramics recovered from the shipwrecks around Southeast Asian waters by Roxanna Brown (2009) and Atthasit Sukkham (2016) suggest the figurines were supplied to maritime trade routes during the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries.

Production process began by a preparation of local clay acquired from the riverbank nearby the kilns where materials were mixed with the sands or stone pebbles. They were formed into various shapes before they were decorated by slipping, incising, engraving, impressing, applying, and painting.

The green or brown glaze was reactive of clay slip mixed with plant ash and silicate during firing in the cross-draught kiln with temperatures around 1,200–1,300 degree Celsius (Hein 2001). The evidence of these processes is supported by a large number of cross-draught kilns discovered in Ko Noi and Pa Yang village of Si Satchanalai kiln on the riverbank of the Yom River (Nithiarchakul, Rattanawong 2022,73-82).

FUNCTIONS AND ROLES OF FIGURES

Functions of figurines from literature review

Generally, the manufacturing purposes of figurines produced at Si Satchanalai kiln can be reviewed as follows:

- i. Beliefs and religions: especially the ceramic figurines in the form of a Sukhothai style Buddha image in various postures, *Ganesha* (a deity in Hinduism influenced from Khmer Empire), a man riding a swan and *Norasingh* (the man with the lion head in Hinduism influenced from Khmer Empire) were produced related to this cultural aspect. These figurines also represented the Buddhism and Hinduism in Sukhothai Kingdom associated the both religious temples around the capital (Vudhaditya 1984,78-89).

Some utensils were built in the same form of figurines or attached by sculpted figurines, especially an incense burner, kendi in the form of a deity riding on a swan, water dropper in the form of a man holding a jar or other animal, and a candle holder in the form of a cup or a basin attaching on the back of various kinds of animal. The incense burners, kendis, water droppers and candle holders can be considered to be the utensils used in religious activities, such as pouring a sacred water or burning a candle in front of Buddha image (Sukkham 2016).

Additionally, most common characteristic of figurines discovered from excavation is the figurines in the forms of a man or a woman with headless which was referred to the intention of the figurine head as a ritual practise for protecting from the sickness or bad spirits (Vudhaditya 1984). Some scholars also believed that this form of headless figurine was accidentally broken in the archaeological deposit because the part of figurine neck was softer than other parts (Sukkham 2016).

- ii. Household items: some other cultural aspects may occur in the figurines, such as the figurines in the form of a man carrying a container on his head (Suzata and Srisuchat et al 2022, 290), a humpbacked elder carrying a jar by one hand beside the body as seen in the museum collection of Ramkhamhang National Museum in Sukhothai (Suzata and Srisuchat et al 2022,306).
- iii. Playing equipment: the figurines can be used as toys or games for children. A piece of ceramic chess glazed by the white and brown color (Ram Khamhang National Museum exhibition) has been unearthed during an excavation at Si-Satchanalai old palace.

Function of figurines from Klang Aow shipwreck

The figurines from Klang Aow shipwreck can be considered as bespoke or on-demand manufacture. A lot of Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai ceramics were found in many shipwrecks sank around Southeast

Asia. For example, the Turiang shipwreck sank near the coast of Malaysia there are approximately 3,735 of 6,475 ceramics identified to be Siamese ceramics included Sukhothai, Si Satchanalai, and Suphan Buri or also-called Bang Poon ceramics associated with Chinese and Vietnamese ceramics dated cal. 1305–1435 CE (Sjostrand 2001,101). Similarly, Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai ceramics have also been found in the shipwrecks sank in the Philippines waters, notable on the Pandanan, the Lena Shoal and Santa Cruz dated in the mid-fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries (Orillaneda 2016,85-88), and the San Isidro and the Kanduli dated in the sixteenth century (Orillaneda 2021).

The excavation at Calatagan peninsula, Batangas province, Luzon Island in the Philippines revealed the Si Satchanalai jarlets in Calatagan burial site dated in the fifteenth century (Fox 1959,355). Moreover, the figurines in the form of an elephant were found in Sulawesi, Sumatra, and Kalimantan, Indonesia dated to the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries (Kerdpanyawat 1987,32). While fragments of glazed figurines in the form of an elephant were recovered from the Brunei shipwreck, dated late fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries (Maidin 2017,173).

A man figurine found in the Klang Aow is likely a Chinese man carrying a poultry. This style was possibly influenced from Chinese's zodiac god figurines discovered in the Ming tomb, where the figurine in the form of Chinese man carrying a cock was found (The Barakat Gallery 2013,118) (Fig 3).

Based on the characteristics of this figurine that has the hollow body, holes at the top of man and poultry heads, it can be indicated that the function of this figurine was the water dropper for pouring a sacred water.

In Vietnam, there are the blue-and-white figurines with 28 centimetre height have been found. It illustrated the man sitting on knees and holding the vessel dated to the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries (Stevenson and Guy 1997,369). Other small blue-and-white figurines originated from kiln site in Vietnam was to be a rabbit or a frog with 3-4 centimetre height and 4-5 centimetre length. In the middle of figurine body has punched holes around 0.7-1 centimetre diameter. These Vietnamese figurines can be identified as a water dropper. The dating and function were related to the figurines found in the Klang Aow.

The figurines in the form of a women carrying a cup on her shoulder, an elephant with a howdah on its back (Chongkol 1999,91) and a horse with a cup on its back (Watcharangkul 2002,129) (Figs 2, 3) show the traces of use that are probably functioned as a candle holder for using in the religious activity in the households or temples. All of them were attached a small cup that used to hold the candle.

The figurines used as a candle holder or an incense burner previously appeared in Chinese ceramic figurines since Western Jin Dynasty (fifth to sixth centuries). This represented by sacred animals with some forms of vessel on their back (Valenstein 1989,52). There are some figurines from Si Satchanalai kiln were produced in the Chinese stylistics, such as a Chinese wearing officer hat, dressing the Chinese monk outfit (Sukkham 2016). These characteristics also appeared on the figurines found in the Klang Aow especially the appearances, postures, and outfits that can be considered to be Chinese style. According to this reason, figurine production at Si Satchanalai kiln has also been influenced by the Chinese craftsmanship.

The duplication can also be seen on animal figurines in the form of a swan and an elephant from the Klang Aow (Figs 3). Those were indicated the mass production of these forms of figurine. Additionally, the animal figurines were formed as various kinds of animal in mass production scale, such as quail,

ox, cow and monkey, for example, which discovered from archaeological sites and were transferred to display at the national museums around Thailand. Undoubtedly, they were recognised as a indigenous or domesticated animals, (Suzata and Srisuchat et al. 2022,301-304). Although these forms of figurine are commonly found especially in the terrestrial sites around central Thailand, they are found in small amount from the shipwrecks around Southeast Asia. According to the quantity in shipwreck context, these forms of figurine are probably gifts, souvenirs, or collectibles for their consumers at the ports of call or destination.

Commercial role of figurines from Klang Aow shipwreck

Since the fourteenth century the Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai ceramic trade was incorporated with Ayutthaya Kingdom. According to Ayutthaya historical records mentioned that the trade and diplomacy with other country were managed by Ayutthaya royal court. The trades in South China Sea and even Southeast Asian waters had directly manipulated by Chinese merchants and diplomats who were probably conducted a close connection with the Ayutthaya royal court under the Chinese-Ayutthaya tributary trade system (Kasetsiri 2002,42-43).

According to the ban on the international trade in Early Ming Dynasty, many Chinese merchant junks active in the South China Sea stuck and smuggled in Southeast Asia. Some Chinese immigrants who stayed in Ayutthaya had received a job opportunity for high-ranked officers worked in Ayutthaya royal court. In the Ryukyu Kingdom, a trade archive named “*Rekidai Hoan*” (precious documents of successive generations) recorded that one of the royal letters mentioned the correspondence between Ayutthaya and Ryukyu was written in Chinese language by an overseas Chinese who stayed in Ayutthaya (Ichii and Yoshikawa 1999,42).

Before the Ming ban, most of the Southeast Asian states consumed the ceramics from China for a long period of history. During the late fourteenth to the mid-fifteenth centuries, the Chinese ceramics were deemed for domestic market only. This was an important opportunity for the Sukhothai, Si Satchanalai, Vietnamese, and Burmese ceramics. It raised their supply to maritime trade routes in Southeast Asian market. The ceramics from Sukhothai, Si Satchanalai and others were acquired by those Chinese merchants because they knew well about market demands. Other reason is the Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai ceramic form and decoration had influence from Chinese and Vietnamese ceramic productions. The Ming Dynasty removed the ban for international trade and the Chinese ceramics were returned to Southeast Asian market from mid-fifteenth century onwards. Then, new forms and decorations of Si Satchanalai ceramics were created during the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries, such as the two-colour glazed wares, architectural ornaments, and especially the figurines.

CONCLUSION

The shipwreck contexts ceramic characteristics and quantity of the figurines from Klang Aow shipwreck demonstrated a context of figurines originated from Si Satchanalai kiln during the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries

The AMS date result from the fourteenth to fifteenth century of the shipwreck suggested the dating of figurines between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This also represented the cultural pattern on ceramic trade during this time. There was the mixed cargo between Chinese, Vietnamese, Maenam Noi or Singburi, Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai. Ceramics were spread around the South China Sea and the

Islands of Southeast Asia. This is supported by several types of evidence, especially the ceramics recovered from both shipwrecks and terrestrial sites.

According to the identification result of the sources of influence and functions for figurines found from the Klang Aow, it can be suggested that the figurines were used as the utensils and household appliances for some ritual practises. They were also considered that the Chinese and Vietnamese figurines were the sources of influence for Si Satchanalai figurine production and remarked that the figurine production was a new creation became a mass production to compete with the return of Ming ceramics to Southeast Asian market.

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