Auspicious Symbols of Chinese Ceramics found from Archaeological Excavation in Northern Thailand

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Received: March 17, 2024 Revised: June 20, 2024 Accepted: July 9, 2024

Abstract

Chinese ceramics are important as archeological evidence. Normally, they have been found together with Lanna ceramics and ceramics from other countries. This article aims to study the patterns and symbols of Chinese ceramics found in northern Thailand from archeological excavation in the past century. It is found that the decorative patterns and symbols can be classified into seven groups. Auspicious symbols such as flaming pearls are often shown with the dragon, *Lingzhi* (sacred fungus), or key fret. Chinese characters are normally shown at the bottom of ceramics or Chinese characters found in the king's seal. Nobility is found as a person symbol. Animal symbols include cranes, dragons, *Qilin*, horses galloping in the waves, and cats. Natural symbols include clouds and waves. Floral and botanical symbols include lotus, chrysanthemum, artemisia leaves, and floral scroll designs. Besides, special decorative symbols of Chinese ceramics have influenced Lanna ceramics which then developed into unique designs.

Keywords: Chinese ceramics, Lanna ceramics, Auspicious symbols

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ลวดลายมงคลของเครื่องถ**้วยจีนที่พบจากการขุดค**้น ทางโบราณคดีบริเวณภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย

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วันรับบทความ: March 17, 2024 วันแก้ไขบทความ: June 20, 2024 วันตอบรับบทความ: July 9, 2024

บทคัดย่อ

เครื่องถ้วยจีนมีความสำคัญในฐานะหลักฐานทางโบราณคดีที่สำคัญและมักจะขุดค้นพบร่วมกับ เครื่องถ้วยจากเตาล้านนาและเครื่องถ้วยจากประเทศอื่น ๆ บทความนี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาลวดลาย ที่ปรากฏอยู่บนเครื่องถ้วยจีน ที่พบจากการขุดค้นทางโบราณคดีในภาคเหนือของประเทศไทยในช่วง ทศวรรษที่ผ่านมา จากการศึกษาพบลวดลายที่ตกแต่งบนเครื่องถ้วยจีน แบ่งออกได้ 7 กลุ่ม ดังนี้คือ กลุ่มลวดลายมงคล ได้แก่ ลายไข่มุกไฟ ซึ่งมักปรากฏร่วมกับมังกร ลายเห็ดศักดิ์สิทธิ์ หรือลายประแจจีน เป็นต้น กลุ่มอักษรจีน ปรากฏอักษรจีนบริเวณกันถ้วย หรืออักษรจีนที่เป็นเครื่องหมายตราประทับของ กษัตริย์ กลุ่มรูปบุคคล เช่น รูปขุนนาง กลุ่มรูปสัตว์ เช่น นกกะเรียน นกกระสา มังกร กิเลน ม้ากระโดด ท่ามกลางคลื่น แมว กลุ่มรูปอรรมชาติ เช่น เมฆ เกลียวคลื่น กลุ่มรูปดอกไม้และใบไม้ เช่น ดอกบัว ดอกเบญจมาศ ใบอาร์เตมีเซีย ลายดอกไม้ก้านขด และกลุ่มลวดลายพิเศษอื่น ๆ เช่น ลายยู่อี่ ลายอารบิสก์ ลายวิศวะวัชระ จากลวดลายที่ปรากฏบนเครื่องถ้วยจีนนั้น ได้ส่งอิทธิพลไปยังการตกแต่งลวดลายของ เครื่องถ้วยล้านนาจนกระทั่งพัฒนาเป็นลวดลายเฉพาะของตน

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Introduction²

Archeological evidence, especially Chinese ceramics, which show a relationship with Chinese dynasties is important evidence and is always found with Lanna ceramics and ceramics from other countries. Another importance of Chinese ceramics is that the ages can be used to compare and identify the ages of Lanna ceramics found together and lead to identifying the historical ages from each excavation.

Research by Chandavij (1994) stated that Chinese ceramics are important evidence to verify that northern Thailand has a notable relationship with China, beginning around the Yuan Dynasty. For example, a blue and white jar can be found with a lid in the Yuan Dynasty at Wiang Tha Kan in Hod district, Chiang Mai. Overglaze enamel bowls in the Ming Dynasty, Jiajing Emperor A.D. 1522–1567, are found in the pagoda at Chedi Sung Temple, Dokkham Temple, and Dokngern Temple.

Blue and white ceramics from the early Ming Dynasty, Xuande Emperor A.D. 1426–1436, have been also discovered at the San Kamphaeng kiln, Chiang Mai. Moreover, Chinese ceramics in the Song– Yuan Dynasty are found in Om Koi district, which are mostly Celadon and are produced at the Longquan kiln with blue and white ceramics in the Ming Dynasty.

Aside from this, several Chinese ceramics are found in northern Thailand such as Chiang Saen district, Chiang Rai. They are displayed in the Chiang Saen National Museum. Most of them are the blue and white wares of the Ming Dynasty. There are two blue and white jars found in Lamphun, and blue and white ceramics and overglaze enamel bowls in the Ming Dynasty were produced at Jingdezhen kiln Jiangxi province (1994, p.171–172), found at Bhumibol Dam, Tak.

Chinese ceramics discovered in cities such as Haripunchai (Lamphun), Chiang Mai, and Sukhothai Kingdom can be dated to the 13th and 14th centuries. Among the Yuan blue and white wares,

² This paper is part of research entitled "The relation between Lanna Kingdom and China from Chinese ceramics discovered from archaeological sites in Northern Thailand" (2022), College of Interdisciplinary Studies, Thammasat University, Lampang Campus.

one was discovered at the monuments at Wiang Tha Kan ancient city in Chiang Mai, located near the ancient city of Wiang Ta Kan; the other is in a collection at Wat Mahadhatu Haripunchai in Lamphun province (they were stolen in 1965) (Chandavij, 1994, p. 374). Moreover, the Yuan blue and white wares are found in Ayutthaya and Sukhothai provinces, too.

In 2008, many types of Chinese ceramics and glazes were found from an archaeological excavation at Hariphunchai National Museum, such as green–glazed wares, overglaze enamel wares, Celadon bowls, and blue–glazed wares dated in the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1278), Jingdezhen kiln, the Yuan Dynasty (1278–1368), Longquan kiln, the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), Jingdezhen kiln, and the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), Dehua kiln (Saenchit, 2009, pp. 458–472).

Later in 2020, several Chinese ceramics of different types representing creative ideas and a variety of functions were also found from an archeological excavation at Khum Chao Burirat (Maha Intra) in Chaing Mai. The most commonly discovered ceramics are blue and white wares, overglaze enamel wares, and ceramic wares with no decoration, which are green–glazed wares, white–glazed wares, and blue–glazed wares.

Different types of Chinese ceramics found from this excavation are blue and white bowls, overglaze enamel bowls, white-glazed bowls, blue and white plates, Celadon plates, white plates, jars, and blue and white cups with the technique of decorations which are painting, incising, glazing, etc. (Meepukdee, 2021, pp. 172–173)

The Chinese ceramics from these excavations can be dated from the Yuan Dynasty, 13th to 14th centuries to the Qing Dynasty, 20th century. There were nine kilns from four provinces as follows: Pai Che kiln and Jingdezhen kiln in Jiangxi province, Longquan kiln in Zhejiang province, Anxi kiln, Bing Heu Kiln, Dehua kiln, Teng An Ge Jiu kiln and Putian kiln in Fujian province (Meepukdee, 2021, p. 250), and Huiyang kiln or Xancun (Xicun) kiln in Guangdong province (Saenchit, 2009, pp. 276–277).

Decoration can be categorized into seven groups that include auspicious symbols as follows: flaming pearls which are often shown with the dragon, *Lingzhi* (sacred fungus), or key fret. Chinese characters shown at the bottom of ceramics or found in the king's seal show four Chinese letters—Chen Hua Tien Jao—meaning that these ceramics were produced A.D. 1464–1487 (Meepukdee, 2021, pp. 251–252).

Hence, Chinese ceramics are important archeological evidence that can be used for analyzing and interpreting together with the document evidence. They have been found with Lanna ceramics and ceramics from other countries. In northern Thailand, we found Chinese ceramics in every excavation. Thus, Chinese ceramics can be the evidence for a study about the relationship between Lanna Kingdom and China.

Literature Review

1. Lanna-China Relations from Lanna Historical Documents Historical documents, namely, Tamnan Peun-Muang-Chiang Mai, Jinakalamalipakarana, Tamnan Sip Ha Rachawong and the Yonok Chronicles and Ancient Chinese Documents, have been translated from Chinese, such as Yuanshi, Ming Shi-lu, to review content such as details of events. The documents in this group are mostly comparable to places or people that appear in Lanna's documents. The researchers studied together to see the relationship in each area, such as political or geographical, etc.

2. The Study of Chinese Wares found in Northern Thailand from Archaeological Excavations The researchers studied only samples of Chinese wares found in Chiang Mai province. As the main center city, it is considered the best representative of Lanna and Chinese wares obtained from excavations in Chiang Saen district. Chiang Rai province was a secondary center city and Lamphun was an important ancient city before the rise of Lanna Kingdom, such as the report of the excavation of the archaeological site of Wat Pan Sao, Suthep sub-district, Muang district, Chiang Mai (2010), Archaeological Excavation of Ancient Site at Wat Som Suk, Malika sub-district, Mae Ai district, Chiang Mai province (2014), etc.

3. The Study of Lanna Art Influenced by China Leksukhum (2007) on Sino–Thai Relations explains the influence of Chinese ornamental patterns found in various branches of Thai art. Sculpture and architecture, e.g., a sculpture with lotus flower and olive flower in a triangular–square frame (p. 35) shows the influence of Chinese wares from the Yuan Dynasty, etc. As for the painting, it appears

in the religious painting cloth from Wat Dok Ngern Pagoda and Wat Chedi Sung in Hod district, Chiang Mai province, with images of heavenly flowers as the background of the image of Buddha when descended from the heaven. Images of flowers include peonies, chrysanthemums, lotus flowers, etc. (p. 51), as well as sacred animals such as peacocks, egrets, wild geese, etc. (p. 52)

Thongthammachat (2014) studied the development of peony design in Thai art with auspicious symbolic meanings according to Chinese beliefs. Peony design distribution may be transmitted through commercial contacts, diplomacy and tribute, and wars to expand the power of the empire. Peony designs have been widely popular since the beginning of Lanna Kingdom. The beginning of the Mangrai Dynasty was contemporary with the Yuan Dynasty of China, appearing in art in the first stage, namely the Buddhist period of the 14th century. When entering the Buddhist period of the 16th century, Lanna craftsmen adapted the design of Chinese art to become the decoration of the Lanna craftsmen during the reign of King Tilokaraj.

4. A Study of the Influence of Chinese Wares on Lanna Ware Sivasiriyanon (1967) mentioned the design of Sankampaeng wares, such as floral design, lotus, and fish, presumably due to the Yin and Yang. It is meant as the beginning of life, an auspicious sign. Most of the motifs of Sankampaeng wares resemble Chinese motifs from the early Ming Dynasty. Other than that, it is assumed that this decoration was imitated or may have been imported by the Chinese through trade or may have been made here by Chinese craftsmen, but this study presumed that it may have come mostly from trade (p. 77).

Donavanik (1986) studied the ancient city of Wiang Phra That Lampang Luang, Koh Kha District, Lampang Province. The arrival of Chinese wares has been described. The Yuan Dynasty and the Ming Dynasty, during this period, would have been in the form of trade and diplomatic relations and would have been in contact with each other at least in the reign of King Ramkhamhaeng and in the Lanna period as well. It is found in various pagodas in Hod district, Chiang Mai province. The discovery of this evidence should support that Chinese art during the Yuan and Ming Dynasties influenced Lanna's art at that stage (pp. 28–29).

Research Objectives

To study the decoration and symbols of Chinese ceramics found in Northern Thailand from archeological excavation in the past century.

Research Scope

This research referred to evidence from archaeological excavations in Northern Thailand, Chiang Mai Province and Chiang–Saen districts, and Chiang Rai Province being the main area. The document data were only taken from the archaeological excavation report during 2007–2021. If excavations in one of the archaeological sites continue over a period of more than 10 years, they would be included in the study.

Research Methodology

This research was a study of the relationship between Lanna Kingdom and China from Chinese ceramics and documentary evidence from excavation. Descriptive analysis was employed in this study.

Research Results

Kiln Sites of Chinese Ceramics found in Lanna

The Chinese ceramics evidence found in northern Thailand archeological sites during the past decade were from the Southern Song Dynasty, until the Republic of China. The types of kilns found in each dynasty were the Southern Song Dynasty, Jingdezhen kiln, Jiangxi province, Longquan kiln, Zhejiang Province, Dehua kiln, Fujian province, and Tong An kiln, Fujian province. The Yuan Dynasty, Longquan kiln, Zhejiang province, Bai She kiln, Jiangxi province, and Putian kiln, Fujian province. The Ming Dynasty, Longquan kiln, Jingdezhen kiln, Anxi kiln, Bing Her kiln, and Hui Yang/Xancun kiln. The Qing Dynasty, Jingdezhen kiln, De Hua kiln, Anxi kiln, Teng An Ge Jiu kiln, Da Pou kiln, Tong Zhi kiln, Sue Auan kiln, and Nanfeng kiln. The Republic of China, Da Pou kiln, and Qing Xi kiln, Guangdong province.

Type of Chinese Ceramics

The types of Chinese ceramics found from the excavation in northern Thailand were mostly white-glazed Kendi, overglaze enamel bowls, white-glazed bowls, Celadon bowls, blue and white plates, green Celadon plates, white-glazed plates, jars, small jars, and blue and white cups with decorative techniques such as green, white, blue and painted glaze.

In the Southern Song Dynasty, there were white-glazed, Jingdezhen kiln, in Jiangxi Province, green-glazed bowls with an unknown kiln source, the porcelain bowls from the Longquan Kiln, and Zhejiang Province and Dehua kiln, Fujian province.

The Yuan dynasty, found in small numbers, from Longquan kiln found both green–glazed plates and green–glazed bowls. From Bai She kiln, there were found only white–glazed plates and from Putian kiln both green–glazed plates and green–glazed bowls.

The Ming Dynasty found the largest number of ceramics and had many styles. There were four kilns found: Jingdezhen kiln found both porcelain bowls and painted bowls on glaze, blue enamel bowls, porcelain dishes, and porcelain cups; Anxi kilns found both porcelain bowls and plates painted on glaze. Ping Her kiln found porcelain bowls. And lastly, Longquan kiln found only a green–glazed plate as found during the Yuan Dynasty.

The Qing Dynasty found several wares in all four kilns as follows: from Jingdezhen kiln, both porcelain bowls and overglaze enamel bowls were found. From Anxi kilns, porcelain bowls, painted glazed bowls, and white-glazed bowls were found. De Hua Kiln found only porcelain bowls. Teng An Ge Jiu kiln, which is the source of the furnace that can only be found nowadays, had only two pieces of porcelain bowls that used blackish blue or gray which are different from other kilns.

In the Republic of China wares were found in small numbers, from Da Pou kiln, Guangdong province, decorated with blue and white bowls, jar, and overglaze enamel bowls.

Auspicious Symbols and the Meaning of Chinese Ceramics

The patterns found in the decoration of these Chinese ceramics often use auspicious symbols that can be found everywhere. These symbols might be used to identify age, such as Pao Sheng, which means definite value, and Ku Chen, which means ancient jewelry. The Chinese symbols that were generally used as wishes were these four words: Fu, which means happiness; Lu, which means honor; Shou, which means longevity; and Kuei, which means wealth.

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Among these words, Kuei Chang Chun was used most which means Wealth, Honor, and Enduring Spring. There was also the word Shuang Shi which meant cheerfulness which was doubled or used as a special symbol of happiness resulting from marriage by using two Shi characters to write together (Chandavij, 1994, p. 91). The patterns found in the decoration of auspicious symbols in Chinese wares could be divided into seven groups as follows:

1. Auspicious Symbols such as flaming pearls (Figure 1). Because of the ancient belief that it was strange, or saying that it might come from the moon, or come from clams with two lids, therefore, pearls were like fire protection amulets. Pearl was an auspicious symbol which was one of the eight traditional auspicious symbols of China, derived from Taoism. The eight traditional auspicious symbols were flaming pearls or dragon pearls, gold coins, diamond shapes, mirrors (bronze mirrors), stone bells, books, pairs of rhino horns, and Artemisia leaves. The meaning of pearl was a symbol of intelligence and wisdom and emphasizes the beauty and purity of a woman. The Sacred Fungus symbol, called *Lingzhi* in Chinese, was the symbol of longevity and immortality. The Buddhist double Vajra tied with ribbons was the symbol of the principle of absolute stability.

Auspicious symbols were discovered in archaeological excavations in northern Thailand, decorated with flaming pearls and often appearing with the dragon, sacred mushroom, Chinese key fret, and a double Vajra tied with ribbons (*The excavation in Muang Chiang Mai District, Chiang Mai province*, 2019, pp. 7–35).



Figure 1 Flaming pearl

Note: Land use evolution of Khum Chao Burirat (Maha Intra), Chiangmai Province from archaeological evidence by Khomsi Meepukdee, 2021, Thammasat University, Lampang Campus, p. 252.

2. Chinese Characters were decorated on Chinese ceramics. It was the seal of the king or the Chinese characters that mostly appeared on the reign mark or the hallmarks on the base could be dated to the Ming and Qing periods. The reign mark was usually written in cobalt indigo and had a double inner ring glaze on the bottom of the vessel (Chandavij, 1994, p. 89). For example, this piece was excavated at Khum Chao Burirat (Maha Intra), Chiang Mai province. It was a porcelain bowl with four Chinese characters that could be read as "Cheng Hua Hian Jao" (Figure 2) meaning that this bowl was produced during A.D. 1464–1487 (Chandavij, 1994, p. 103; Liu, X., communication, May 21, 2020).



Figure 2 Chinese characters

Note: Land use evolution of Khum Chao Burirat (Maha Intra), Chiangmai Province from archaeological evidence by Khomsi Meepukdee, 2021, Thammasat University, Lampang Campus, p. 252.

3. **Portrait** Nobleman portraits could be dated in the Ming Period and were produced at Jingdezhen kiln. A portrait of a nobleman was decorated at the bottom.

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4. Animal Decoration Most of them are animals that symbolize auspiciousness, such as dragons. Chinese people believed that dragons are excellent in intelligence and had strength and virtue. The dragon was a symbol of guardianship. He was the keeper of the god's desire and guardian of the god's treasures. The dragon was decorated with fire pearls. It often represented the force of nature, and some say it is a symbol of the sun, moon, and lightning (Chandavij, 1994, pp.100–103).

In particular, this cat or fox (Figure 3) was from the excavations in Chiangmai, Thailand, and there had not been found any similar decorations like this. Therefore, it was considered an interesting discovery, but it was not found anywhere else, and most importantly, we were still not sure what kind of animal, cat or fox.

Moreover, this decoration with a fox or a cat was also found in other artwork, such as the cat in the painting by the artist Li Di, during the Southern Song Dynasty, around A.D. 11. Also, during the Ming Dynasty, cats were decorated in wall paintings and ceramics by the artists Tai Jin, and Hong Wu reign (Sangpetch, J., communication, May 21, 2020).



Figure 3 Fox or Cat

Note: Land use evolution of Khum Chao Burirat (Maha Intra), Chiangmai Province from archaeological evidence by Khomsi Meepukdee, 2021, Thammasat University, Lampang Campus, p. 253.

Crane, phoenix, and stork (Figures 4–5), symbol of longevity, were decorated on a plate that could be dated to the late Ming Dynasty (Chandavij, 1994, p. 103). The left side was a blue and white bowl produced at Jingdezhen kiln, the Wanli reign, which could be dated to the 17th century. The right side was a blue and white bowl produced at the Jingdezhen kiln that could be dated from the reign of Jiajing to the Wanli reign, 16th century. In addition, there were decorated horses running among the waves which can be dated to the Ming period. Horse meant speed and perseverance. Duck meant marital fidelity. Fish, swan, duck, lion, ox and rabbit, too.



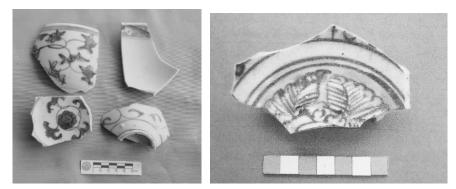
Figures 4-5 Crane and Phoenixes among clouds

Note: Land use evolution of Khum Chao Burirat (Maha Intra), Chiangmai Province from archaeological evidence by Khomsi Meepukdee, 2021, Thammasat University, Lampang Campus, p. 254.

5. **Decorated with Nature, Clouds and Waves** These symbols were obtained from observation of nature often found together with animal motifs such as birds, etc.

6. Floral Designs and Tree Designs such as plum trees or leaves (Figure 7) are the most popular decorations. Several were decorated with chrysanthemums, lotus flowers, a lotus pond, the Kan Khot (Tree design), which is always decorated with floral design (Figure 6), or the Kan Khot (Tree design) mixed with The Shuangxi (double happiness and floral scroll design on the exterior) Also, the flower in a rectangular frame imitating a glass window (A floral in frame).

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Figures 6-7 Floral design and Leaves

Note: The excavation at Wat San krawan 3, Wiang Thakan by Department of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai, by Department of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai, 2011, p. 49; *The excavation at Wat Som Suk in Mae Aye District, Chiang Mai province* by Department of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai, 2021, p. 128.

7. **Special Designs** such as Arabic patterns (Figure 8). It was a unique design found only in the excavations at Khum Chao Burirat (Maha–In), Chiang Mai province. And it was also found decorated with a diaper band on the rim.



Figure 8 Arabesque

Note: Land use evolution of Khum Chao Burirat (Maha Intra), Chiang Mai province, from archaeological evidence by Khomsi Meepukdee, 2021, Thammasat University, Lampang Campus, p. 256.

The Influence of Chinese Wares on Lanna Wares and Lanna Fine Arts

Patterns that appear on Chinese wares have influenced Lanna wares such as wares made from San Kamphaeng and Wiang Ka Long kilns (Chandavij, 1994, p. 341). Besides, the patterns on Chinese wares have also influenced Bor Suak and Wiang Bua wares. Thansawangdumrong (2005) conducted a study and found evidence that Bor Suak wares have techniques and patterns that are likely influenced by China. Interestingly, Bor Suak, San Kamphaeng and Wiang Bua wares have common decoration– stamping the image of a pair of fish on the inside bottom of the wares.



Figure 9–11 Pale green–glazed with fish graving, Nan kiln (left) and stamping with a pair of fish, Wiang Ka Long kiln (right)

Source *The excavation of an ancient rampart at Ban Phraya Wat, Nan province*. by Department of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai, 2012a, p. 75; The excavation of Wat Chang Nam, Chiang Mai province, by Department of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai, 2012b, p. 227.

In addition, patterns on Chinese wares have influenced Lanna arts and architecture. Amaranonta (1981) found that, aside from peony, the following patterns have influenced Lanna wares: flora varieties, lotus bouquet and chrysanthemum bouquet. These patterns are characterized by a continuous pattern of vines running along the length. It is decorated along the edges or sides of various containers and joins together to form a circle. Furthermore, it is created to decorate the top of the arch, which is a strip that runs along the curve of the arch.

Therefore, it shows that the influence of Chinese wares covers Lanna wares and fine arts found in building, stupa and important archaeological sites. This conforms to the Chinese ware evidence found from excavation in Northern Thailand and historical documents revealing a clear relationship between the Lanna Kingdom and Chinese dynasties.

Benefits

1. Perceive the decoration and distribution of Chinese wares found in archaeological sites in northern Thailand.

2. Perceive the relationship between Lanna Kingdom and China from Chinese wares excavated from archaeological sites in northern Thailand.

3. Develop this research as preliminary information for the study of Chinese wares found in Thailand, and for researchers who want to study comparatively other sectors such as the central and southern regions, etc.

Summary and Discussion of Results

According to the study of auspicious symbols that appear on Chinese ceramics, it has illustrated the beliefs of the Chinese people. Of the meanings that appear on the patterns of these ceramics, most of them are symbols having a good meaning and auspiciousness. Moreover, the decorations were decorated with flowers, animals, and humans and it can be interpreted as the beliefs of Chinese people. The meanings were good ones and auspiciousness.

In addition, the symbols on Chinese ceramics, whether it was the seal of the king or Chinese characters which were mostly the reign mark or year mark that would appear especially on Chinese ceramics in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, allow discovery of the year of the reign and emperor's name. They were also important pieces of evidence that could be interpreted with other archaeological evidence. Therefore, it was considered that Chinese ceramics were important archaeological evidence for historical and archeological studies.

Suggestions

In the future, for scholars interested in studying the patterns of Chinese wares found in Thailand in the past decades, it should be possible to see more details of both the patterns and sources of Chinese kilns found in Thailand.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the College of Interdisciplinary Studies for giving me financial support throughout my research project. This paper is part of research titled "The relation between Lanna Kingdom and China from Chinese ceramics discovered from archaeological sites in northern Thailand" (2022), College of Interdisciplinary Studies, Thammasat University, Lampang Campus. And this is not considered for ethical approval of research in humans.

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