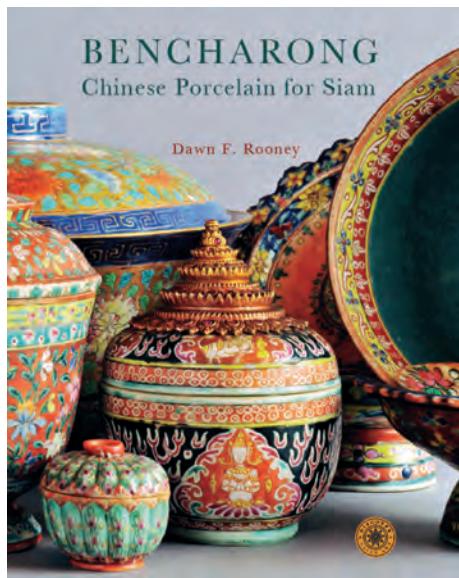


thoroughly mastered the historiography and use it in every chapter together with the latest research to drive the narrative. While the book is driven by analysis, chronology and dynastic history have not been neglected. The book is total history as the authors illuminate their work with literature and lore, religion and prophecy, laws, maps and murals, together with abundant foreign sources, some relatively new. While the role of the monarchy and nobility is fully acknowledged, that of merchants, commoners, free or in servitude, even the mob, is given full coverage. There is a fascinating section on “Family, Gender, and Sexuality” in Chapter 5, with subsections on “Commoners: Female Families and Loose Males” and “Nobles: Male Dominance and Female Submission.”

The book is the work of mature and sophisticated scholars who considerably advance our knowledge and understanding of Thai history, taking us way back before the official founding of Ayutthaya in 1351 and beyond its fall in 1767 to the beginning of Bangkok. The details are meticulous and well chosen. The book is stimulating and fun to read, from beginning to end. The authors write beautifully; even their punctuation should satisfy the author of *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*. This ambitious work is a great achievement. Along with all their other contributions to Thai Studies, especially their wonderful translation, introduction and annotation of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* and *Yuan Phai*, the authors are owed a debt of profound gratitude and thoroughly deserve the Fukuoka Grand Prize awarded to them last year.

Tej Bunnag

*Bencharong: Chinese Porcelain for Siam* by Dawn F. Rooney. Bangkok: River Books, 2017. ISBN: 9786167339689. 995 Baht.



Dawn Rooney has set out to write a definitive book on Bencharong. There is a crying need for such a volume, although many books have already been written on the subject. For those not familiar with this ceramic ware made in China for the Thai market, thanks to recent publications and increased demand, top quality antique Bencharong has become prohibitively expensive and hard to find in the market. Rooney has been following this scenario over her many years residing in Thailand and her own photographs of Chinese and local ceramics piled up for sale along the riverbanks in Ayutthaya as late as 1973 (20) demonstrate how the market has changed. Surviving Chinese ceramics and shards in the old capital are now conspicuously rare.

The first attempt to systematically shed

light on the subject was a book in Thai by HRH Prince Damrong Rajanubhab in 1917, titled *Tamnan Krueng Toh Lae Thuey Pan* (ตำนานเครื่องโต๊ะแล้วปั้น). Prince Damrong visited Ayutthaya in 1902 to inspect the antique artifacts collected by the late Phraya Boran Ratchathanin, the governor, including Chinese porcelain and Bencharong. In his book, the Prince mentioned an abundant quantity of Bencharong utensils with Theppanom motifs in Ayutthaya as well as in other important towns throughout the Siamese Kingdom. Hence the belief of later scholars that Bencharong with Theppanom motifs dated back to the Ayutthaya Period which ended in 1767.

Following Prince Damrong's groundbreaking book, the first comprehensive book on Bencharong written in English was by Natalie Robinson, titled *Sino-Thai Ceramics in the National Museum, Bangkok, Thailand and in Private Collections* (1982). The book is an admirable attempt to systematically categorize and classify Bencharong in terms of size, shape, motif, glaze, color and origin.

Natalie Robinson's pioneering typological exercise is revisited in Chapter 6 of Dawn Rooney's book entitled "Bencharong Discovered." Robinson's discussion of shape, size, colour, function and motif are refreshingly re-presented and amplified in a more concise, systematic manner with sharper, more elegant photographs. Those who have struggled with Robinson's dense, lengthy descriptions and monotone black and white photos will welcome Rooney's simpler, lucid descriptions and conceptual layout accompanied by dazzling color photos. Chapter 6 takes the reader on an exhilarating walk through a grand Bencharong banquet elegantly laid out in a fine presentation.

While Robinson's discourses on size, shape, motif, and color have been definitive, many other important aspects of the subject have remained speculative. Since Prince Damrong's book it has become proverbial wisdom that Bencharong was produced in China on a made-to-order basis for the Siamese court. Fine Bencharong was assumed to have been produced in Jingdezhen. But Bencharong shards had never been found in any excavation sites in China, so that the production methods, kiln locations, and glazing techniques that went into the production of Bencharong have remained largely speculative. We are now greatly indebted to Dawn Rooney for addressing these unanswered questions in her clear and informative Chapter 3, "Technology and Production", about the manufacture of Bencharong. This chapter is competently executed and represents one of the strongest chapters in the book. Ceramists and collectors will enjoy Rooney's technical presentation of potting, coloring, glazing, firing and enameling techniques. Writing forty years after Robinson, Rooney enjoys several advantages. China has opened up after the catastrophic Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), so she could actually visit Jingdezhen and other porcelain production centers. Moreover, Chinese scholars have in recent years excavated numerous new kiln sites. A clearer picture of Bencharong has thus begun to emerge.

To her credit Rooney was proactive in seizing the opportunity to address new discoveries on the Chinese academic front and other parts of the world including Norway, having co-edited a book titled *Royal Porcelain from Siam, Unpacking the Ring Collection* (2013) about the large collection of Bencharong held at the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo. It was on a field trip to China in 2011 that she managed to find conclusive evidence that Bencharong was produced in Jingdezhen. Like the

legendary Sherlock Holmes, she followed the clues which eventually led to the doorstep of the Yanhe excavation site in the outskirts of Jingdezhen. There she was treated to the rewarding experience of actually seeing Bencharong shards that had been excavated from the Chang River (63).

Hence this excellent new book is able to provide conclusive proof of what Thais have always taken for granted—that Bencharong was produced in the great Chinese porcelain capital of Jingdezhen. This is a groundbreaking discovery which lays to rest a century of bickering between believers and sceptics as to whether Bencharong was produced, glazed, and enameled in Jingdezhen. Moreover, with the discovery of the Theppanom shards in the same strata as Chinese Daoguang-period (1820-1850) porcelain (64), many presumed Ayutthaya-period Bencharong wares may have to be redated to the King Rama III period (1824–1851) of the Bangkok Kingdom.

Having put the main burning issue to rest we can comfortably accept the plausible proposition that not all stages of Bencharong production were executed at Jingdezhen. Some enameling and gilding of Bencharong was likely undertaken at Canton (Guangzhou) as well as possibly in Bangkok at the end of the 19th century. One of the kilns used for this purpose was located at the Front Palace of Prince Bavorn Vichaicharn, which was established in 1880. Glazed white porcelain spittoons were ordered from China and then enameled and fired there. However, this workshop closed down after Prince Bavorn Vichaicharn passed away in 1885 and the dating of one of his glazed spittoons as possibly early 20th century may thus be an oversight (65).

Acknowledging that *Bencharong: Chinese Porcelain for Siam* embodies a major contribution to the academic literature on Bencharong, we can now turn to the other finer points of this new volume. The book begins with a marvelously lucid, concise and well conceptualized history of Bangkok entitled “Historical Connections.” Although the historical part of the book is short it more than makes up for brevity with conciseness of formulation and excellent supporting maps and antique prints. The rare maps tell as much of the story as the narrative. The combination of historical analysis and stunning maps make the first chapter outstanding.

While the book represents an impressive academic achievement, collectors tend to skip the narrative and focus on the pictures and captions. The range of styles exhibited make this a valuable reference book for academics, collectors, and dealers alike. Naturally, the book has found a ready niche market in antique bazaars and collectors’ libraries. The questions at the back of their minds are: “Is this an authentic Ayutthaya, Rama II or Rama III piece?” or “Are the motifs, style, colour, cover, body and fitted parts correctly aligned?

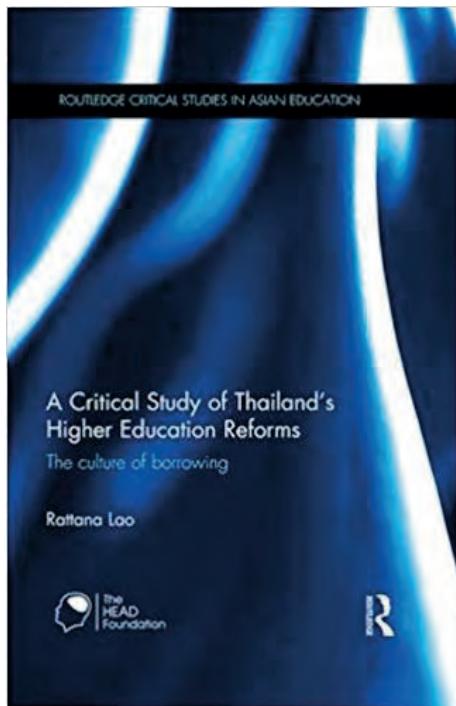
Unfortunately, for this readership there are several problematic pictures in the book. A case in point is the opening page of Chapter 5, “Forms and Functions” (98). The plate shows a mix of covered jars and (to the horror of many collectors) a covered spittoon. The difference between the two consists in the fact that Thai spittoons have no cover. The color and motifs are also a mismatch. Another mistake is the mythological creature depicted in the photo 4-31, “*Kinnari* (kinnara, male form)” (87). Connoisseurs point out that this is not a Himaphan Kinnari; rather it is a female Norasingh. The tail gives the picture away. A Kinnari has a feathered tail like a bird; but a Norasingh sports a lion’s tail.

Admittedly Bencharong with Kinnari motif is very rare. In over fifteen years of monitoring the Bencharong scene, we have seen only two pieces. One was a piece of a Kinnari shard in the personal collection of Phraya Boran Rachathanin. The small shard was mentioned in Prince Damrong's book as a rare find, even in those days, at Vihara Somdet in the compound of the Royal Palace of Ayutthaya. The shard was put on display in 2016/17 at Phraya Boran's Exhibition organized by his daughter at the Chan Kasem National Museum in Ayutthaya. Another beautiful Kinnari motif Bencharong *toh* jar is in the Lek Viriyaphant collection.

Our disappointment is only that with a slightly better photo editing effort this book would be not only an outstanding academic treatise but also an excellent, faultlessly executed book on the subject. Dawn Rooney deserves three cheers for writing the most definitive and up-to-date book on the subject of Bencharong. Buy it!

Jeffery Sng and Pimpraphai Bisalputra

*A Critical Study of Thailand's Higher Education Reforms* by Rattana Lao. Oxford: Routledge, 2015. ISBN: 9781138575868 (paperback), £36.99; ISBN: 9781138022683 (hardback), £110; ISBN: 9781315776927 (eBook), £33.29.



*A Critical Study of Thailand's Higher Education Reforms* analyses the complex relationship between globalisation and education policymaking, with a critical evaluation of the influence exercised by Western models of higher education in the past 100 years, their implications for the present status of tertiary education in the kingdom and the numerous obstacles associated with their implementation.

Comprising ten chapters, the first four provide the theoretical foundation, setting out the case for Thailand within the globalisation of higher education policy, the adoption of Western education models through selective borrowings, and the changing role of the Thai state in the administration of higher education, with the Asian economic crisis as a window of opportunity towards the transition of public institutions to autonomous universities. Chapter

Five discusses the development of the interrelated phenomenon of the internationalisation of higher education and its attendant challenges, i.e. quantity vs. quality. Chapters Six-Nine deal with the politics of international ranking and Thailand's research landscape, the emergence of, and rationale for, quality policies, the global-local nexus of quality