

Walker's study does, nonetheless, highlight one characteristic that is today found throughout rural Thailand – namely, that of political participation. Because of significant “middle-level” incomes (whether from agriculture or other sources), higher education (most rural dwellers, female as well as male, today have at least a 9th grade education), intense exposure to mass media (especially TV), and embeddedness in socio-political networks that entail many personal relations between rural and urban people, Thai villagers today belong to what Walker, following Partha Chatterjee, calls a “political society” as differentiated from a “civil society”. While participants in Thailand's civil society organizations that seek to protect local resource allocations tend to be drawn from members of the urban middle class, participants in Thailand's political society are predominantly rural. These participants “are concerned with channeling power in desired directions, negotiating deals, and striking a reasonable balance between private and public benefit” (p. 231). They reject, either explicitly or, in most cases, tacitly, the view advanced by the traditional ruling elite that only “good” or “virtuous” men should exercise power. While the political system based on elections is, according to Walker, “ragged”, it is, he concludes, “more likely to be able to deal with the warts-and-all realities of political life” (p. 231).

In sum, Walker's book has helped bring rural Thailand back to center stage both for social science scholarship and for understanding contemporary Thai political life. His book deserves a wide audience.

Charles Keyes

*Bencharong and Chinaware in the Court of Siam: The Surat Osathanugra Collection* by Jeffery Sng and Pim Praphai Bisalputra (Bangkok: Chawpipope Osathanugrah, 2011) ISBN: 978-616-207-069-3 (hard)

This is an excellent 286 page hard-cover quarto, full colour volume devoted to the collection of Thai industrialist, politician and serial collector, the late Surat Osathanugrah, and edited by renowned ceramics expert Bhujjong Chandavij. In an opening paragraph, the purpose of the book is stated as giving a wider exposure to the cultural treasures of Thailand, notably antique ceramics, many of which the collection, by its existence, prevented from being smuggled out of the country.

The term *bencharong* (or sometimes spelt in English as *benjarong*) refers to a class of colourful porcelain, or occasionally stoneware, ceramics that occur in a variety of shapes similar to those of Chinese export wares. They were produced primarily for utilitarian purposes and their forms are consequently simple with gentle contours. The most common items are covered and uncovered bowls, jars of different sizes, plates, stem or pedestal plates, spittoons, spoons, teapots and tea sets. Their exterior surfaces are completely covered with design motifs; the interiors are painted and decorated less elaborately. The colour combinations, especially of

red, yellow, black, white and green in the earlier wares gave rise to their descriptive name from the Sanskrit *pancha* and *ranga* — five colours — though other colours, including pink, purple and blue, were added in later pieces.

This volume under review is organised into twelve chapters commencing with a biographical study of Surat Osathanugrah (1930-2008), who compiled the entire collection over a period of some thirty years, but the collection of bencharong during only 3-4 years before his demise. The first of the chapters devoted to the collection deals with the rise of Chinese blue-and-white which pre-dated bencharong. The chapter is of considerable importance given the very strong influence of Chinese wares on bencharong though the relationship could have been made more explicit.

The second chapter introduces bencharong under the title “Bencharong of Iudia” and is printed in white on black pages, as are a number of illustrations in later chapters. There seems little benefit in this, neither does the introduction of the title of *Iudia*, given to Ayudhya, the regional capital of the province of the same name in central Thailand and whose ancient ruins were inscribed as a World Heritage site in 1992. Iudia appears in Vincenzo Coronelli’s map of 1696, but is no longer in common use. A modern map showing all geographical places to which reference is made would have been preferable to the two included — a small one in shades of grey based on a 1936 sketch map, and an historic (1683) Italian map covering mainland Southeast Asia and about two-thirds of Sumatra.

The two subsequent chapters, “Fall and Revival 1767-1809” and “The Gilded Age 1782-1851”, are essentially historical with particular reference to political events in Thailand. These events were relevant to the ceramics trade insofar as their influence on the junk trade with China and the revival of economic prosperity were reflected in the quality of imported bencharong. “The Gilded Age” introduces the gilded version of bencharong wares known as *lai nam thong*, a Thai term literally meaning ‘gold washed patterns’.

The remaining quarter of the text is more directly devoted to the porcelain itself with individual chapters emphasising what is described as a new creative period in Siamese porcelain unconstrained by classical rules.

A chapter is devoted to Himaphan symbolism based on Hindu rites and ceremonies many of which still survive in Thailand, Burma and Cambodia. The Himaphan forest is the legendary woodland said to be the home of an assortment of mythical creatures. In the 18th and 19th centuries, bencharong wares were decorated with images of Himaphan forest celestial beings and mystical beasts.

The following chapter, entitled “Good Fortune, Long Life and Peace”, draws attention to auspicious designs in Chinese porcelain, but makes no reference to bencharong. The next, “The Charm of Teapots”, includes items both of Chinese and Siamese designs and a later is devoted to “Chakri Tea Sets”, which are described as among the most prized Siamese court porcelain. Attention is drawn in this chapter to a declining interest in national taste in the bencharong tradition when it describes

the Chakri dynasty, which has ruled Thailand since 1782, as succumbing to Western “civilised” tastes in the second half of the 19th century.

The text is clearly written and informative, though heavily biased towards historical material, but the highlights of the book are clearly its illustrations by photographer Eddie Siu. These are reproduced excellently with each accompanied by a descriptive paragraph. Evidence for the dating of bencharong wares is scarce and most in the collection are dated as 19th century or by reference to the reigns of particular Thai monarchs.

The book ends rather abruptly with a chronology, a bibliography (in both English and Thai), acknowledgements, a biography of the production team and a rather limited glossary, but no index. Despite this criticism, the book is a major, if not the principal, contributor to this major style of Thai ceramics. The closing sentence to the editorial preface that “this beautiful and interesting book should serve as a welcome addition to the bookshelf” cannot be challenged.

Philip Courtenay

*Siamese Coins: From Funan to the Fifth Reign* by Ronachai Krisadaolarn and Vasilij Mihailovs (Bangkok: River Books, 2012). ISBN 978-974 9863 54 1 (hard)

This is a beautiful, if literally heavy, book. From the superb reproduction gold coin woven into the black cloth cover and the beautiful slip case to the more than two thousand sumptuous colour photographs that enrich the book throughout, it is clear that this has been a labour of love for joint authors Ronachai Krisadaolarn (Ronald Cristal) and Vasilij Mihailovs – both life-time members of the Numismatic Association of Thailand - and brought to fruition by Bangkok-based publisher River Books. Together, they have produced what will surely become the bible for Thai numismatists.

The book covers a lot of ground, outlining how the Thai monetary system developed over two millennia. The authors briefly describe the earliest forms of money found in the first millennium in the general area that now constitutes Thailand - including Funan, the Kra Isthmus, Sri Dvaravati, Haripunjaya, the Maritime Empires and Angkor – and continue through later eras of Siamese history. Coinage and ingots found in the Yonok, Sukhothai, Pattani, Lan Na, Lan Chang and Ayutthaya kingdoms are also quickly assessed before the book really comes into its own tracing in greater depth the history and manufacture of the unique Thai *pot duang* (bullet coins) and flat coinage before and during the Rattanakosin period. The authors rightly make note of the fact that *pot duang* evolved unlike coins used in any other country, and that the level of skill needed to make these coins was such that they could not be recreated today.

Of particular interest, the authors explain how the Siamese monetary system