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### **Discoveries of Chinese ceramic sherds on the coasts of South India**

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In search of Chinese ceramics imported into India during the medieval period I conducted two surveys on the coasts of South India in the late 1980s and discovered a good number of sherds. In this paper I shall report on these discoveries and also survey recent discoveries of Chinese ceramics in South India by some archaeological institutions in India.

During the past twenty years there have been many discoveries of Chinese ceramics in Southeast Asian countries, for example, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand<sup>1</sup>. Some of these finds are ascribable to the early period, namely to the 9th or 10th centuries, but the bulk are of the 13th and 14th centuries and also later periods. Considering the large quantity of pieces discovered and also the high quality and reputation Chinese porcelain had in those days, there must have been a great demand for it. This porcelain was also highly prized in Arab countries and a large quantity of Chinese ceramic-sherds has been unearthed in Fustat in Egypt and Siraf on the Persian Gulf<sup>2</sup>. Finds have been made in Sri Lanka (Mantai) and Pakistan (Banbhore) in South Asia as well<sup>3</sup>.

Contrary to the above trend outside India, very few cases of their discovery in India have been reported. The most famous discovery was made in 1950 at the palace of Firuz shah Tughlaq in Delhi. From the rose-garden of the palace, researchers unearthed broken pieces of more than seventy Chinese celadon and blue-and-white dishes and bowls which are very fine Yuan period products of the Longquan and Jingdezhen kilns. This find was first briefly reported in the Indian Archaeology and later a detailed report appeared in the Transactions of

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<sup>1</sup> Articles on such discoveries are found in many international journals including Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society (London), Archives of Asian Art (New York) and Trade Ceramic Studies (Tokyo), besides the publications of the National Department of Archaeology and Museum in each country.

<sup>2</sup> Tsugio Mikami, "China and Egypt: Fustat," TOGS, 1980-81, pp.67-89 and D. Whitehouse. "Excavation at Siraf: First Interim Report, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth & Sixth," Iran, vols. VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, & XII, 1968, 69, 70, 71, 72 & 74.

<sup>3</sup> J. Carswell and M. Prickett, "Mantai 1980: A Preliminary Investigation," Ancient Cevlon, No.5, 1984 and Department of Archaeology in Pakistan, "Excavations at Banbhore," Pakistan Archaeology. No.1, 1964.

Oriental Ceramic Society<sup>4</sup>. Apart from this case, we only have a few brief reports on sporadic discoveries such as in Champaner in West India and Purana-Qila and Fatepur Sikri in North India<sup>5</sup>. The survey of the Indian coast made by J. Carswell yielded almost nothing<sup>6</sup>.

Recently, however, some fresh discoveries have been made in India, though they have not yet been reported. They include discoveries of white porcelain sherds of Jingdezhen kiln ascribable to the 11th and 12th centuries in Gangaikonda Cholapuram in Tamilnadu by the State Department of Archeology, Tamilnadu, and of blue-and-white and enameled porcelain sherds of the late Ming and Qing period in Vellore fort in Tamilnadu and Golkonda fort in Andhra Pradesh by the Archaeological Survey of India. Finds in Golkonda fort include some complete pieces also.

These recent discoveries in India of large numbers of Chinese ceramic-sherds at last allow us to associate India with other countries in Asia which have yielded plenty of Chinese ceramics, and thus enable us to study East-West maritime trade conducted in the Indian Ocean in greater detail with tangible evidence.

Now, I shall report on the finds made by my surveys. In a small village called Periyapattinam facing the Gulf of Mannar to the west of Mandapam Dr. Y. Subbarayalu, Professor of Archaeology, Tamil University, first discovered Chinese ceramic-sherds by accident in 1985. Afterwards I surveyed the village twice in 1987, first in January together with Dr. Subbarayalu and again in March/April with him and other scholars, including Japanese specialists on Chinese ceramics. On the second occasion Subbarayalu conducted trial excavation as a project of Tamil University by digging seven test-pits in the western part of the village. Prof. K.V. Raman and Dr. P. Shanmugam, both of Madras University, joined in this excavation at certain stages. On both occasions, we picked up roughly five hundred pieces of Chinese ceramic-sherds from the ground surface in the village. Through excavation we also obtained roughly another five hundred pieces. Both display similar tendency in the composition regarding the types of porcelain and their kilns and dates. We can classify the finds into the following categories:

Celadon      60%    Longquan      35%

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<sup>4</sup> E.S. Smart, "Fourteenth Century Chinese Porcelain from a Tughlaq Palace in Delhi," TOGS, 1975-76 / 1976-77, pp.199-230.

<sup>5</sup> For Champaner, Indian Archaeology 1969-70. p.7, for Purana-Qila. *ibid.* p.5 and for Fatehpur Sikri, Indian Archaeology 1979-80, p.72. 1981-82, p.66, 1983-84, p.83 and 1984-85, p.84.

<sup>6</sup> J. Carswell. "China and Islam: A Survey of the Coast of India and Ceylon," TOCS. 1877-78, pp.25-45.

		Fujian	25%
White porcelain	15%	Dehua	10%
Blue-and-white	10%	Jingdezhen	10%
Brown glaze	10%	Guangdong	10%
Others	5%		5%

In all the seven pits we were able to recognize three cultural strata, and two continuous sherds of typical. Yuan blue-and-white was obtained from the lowest stratum in a pit. Most of the celadon is, therefore, ascribable to the 14th century, though otherwise they could be dated to the 13th century also. Blue-and-white pieces are certainly of the 14th century and later. However, it's difficult to date blown glaze porcelain sherds to any particular century. From the above we are able to say that most of the pieces discovered in Periyapattinam belong to the 14th century, though some pieces are ascribable to the 13th century and some others to the 15th century and later.

The present location of the village is about one and a half kilometres West from the sea shore and in between there is a big tank called Kappalaru urani. The name Kappalaru meaning a water course for ships and the topographical features suggests that this tank was once connected with the sea by a channel through which ships must have been led to the western side of this tank. The area of excavation of seven pits is not far from this tank and the old town seems to have been located in or close to it. Although most of the Chinese ceramic-sherds remaining on the ground were also concentrated in the area of the excavation, we were able to find them almost everywhere within the village.

Islamic potsherds were also obtained through both excavation and surface exploration, but their number was much less and perhaps amounts to not more than five per cent of the Chinese sherds. They seem to belong to the period from the 12th to 15th centuries. The number of sherds of local earthen pottery discovered in Periyapattinam seems to have amounted to ten times of that of the Chinese sherds. Besides these potsherds, Periyapattinam has been locally known for yielding many old coins of the Cholas, Pandyas and the Madurai Sultans, and we obtained some from the villagers. One Chinese coin was also excavated, but unfortunately the date is not ascertainable owing to damage.

Notwithstanding the significance of the name, "big port" or "big commercial town," Periyapattinam has attracted little attention from scholars as a big port of the medieval period<sup>7</sup>, probably because it is now only a small coastal village. However, the discovery of medieval Chinese ceramic-sherds urges us to regard it as a big medieval port town. I have suggested in one of my recent papers<sup>8</sup> that it should be identified with Dabadan mentioned in the Daoyi Zhilue, an important 14th century Chinese work on the countries in the southern sea stretching from Southeast Asia to West Asia<sup>9</sup>. Dabadan appears in that book in the part which describes the coastal towns in India. The first reason for my identifying it with Periyapattinam comes from the correspondence of their names. Da in Chinese meaning "big" corresponds to periya in Tamil in the meaning and the pronunciation of badan in Chinese corresponds to pattinam or pattanam in Tamil. The second reason concerns the similarity of the natural features described for Dabadan in the Chinese work with the landscape of the Periyapattinam area of the eastern coast of the Indian peninsula, though I will not repeat here the discussion on this point. I also proposed in the same paper the identification of Periyapattinam with Fattan mentioned by Ibn Battuta in his travels. The remnants of a large quantity of Chinese ceramic-sherds of the 14th century in Periyapattinam is quite accordant with its appearing in those 14<sup>th</sup> century works. It does not appear, however, in the 13th century works or the 15th century works, the implication of which has also been discussed in my previous paper.

After the examination of Chinese ceramic-sherds in Periyapattinam in March/April 1987, we visited several places along the southern part of the Coromandel Coast and the coast of Gulf of Mannar including Kayal, Deripattinam and Nagapattinam. Kayal is a famous port town that flourished during medieval period in Tirunelveli District on the South of Tutukudi (Tuticorin). It stretches along the coast to the North and South and Kayalpattanam where Craswell found almost no Chinese ceramic-sherds in Malaya-Kayl (Old Kayal) located in the

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<sup>7</sup> There are a few exceptions. H. Cordier in his note to Yule' Cathey and the Way Thither, IV (London, 1916, p.35, note 1) referred to Periapattan as a medieval port and S.K. Aiyangar in his South India and Her Muhammadan Invaders (Madras. 1921, p.64) mentioned Periya Pattanam as a possible candidate for the identification of Fattan visited by Ibn Battuta.

<sup>8</sup> N. Karashima, "Trade Relations between South India and China during the 13th and 14th Centuries," Journal of East-West Maritime Relations. Vol.1. Tokyo,1989 (originally the paper read at the plenary session of the Sixth International Conference-Seminar of Tamil Studies on the 17th November 1987 at the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur).

<sup>9</sup> There are two Chinese editions by recent scholars. Toyohachi Fujita, Daoyi Zhilue Jiaozhu (Critical edition of Wang Dayuan's Daoyi Zhilue), Xuetang Congke. Tokyo, 1915 and Su Jiqing, Daoyi Zhilue Jiaoshi (Critical edition with notes of Wang Dayuan's Daoyi Zhilue) Beijing, 1981. Before the publication of these critical editions most parts of the Daoyi Zhilue were translated into English by W.W. Rockhill in his article in the T'oung Pao ("Notes on the Relations and Trade of China with the Eastern Archipelago and the Coast of the Indian Ocean During the Fourteenth Century," T'oung Pao. 1914, pp. 473-476, 1915, pp.1-159, 236-271. 374-392, 435-467 & 604-626).

northern most part. Palaya-Kayal was mentioned by R. Galdwell in 1877 as the place where he found many Chinese ceramic-sherds.<sup>10</sup> The place of our discovery seems to be the same as the place where Caldwell found Chinese ceramic-sherds in 1877. On a place of barren ground in Palaya-Kayal, about a kilometer inland from the sea shore, we picked up more than two hundred sherds within a few hours. Most of them were celadon from the Longquan and Fujian kilns and the rest were white Dehua porcelain and the brown glaze Guangdong ware. Significantly there was no single piece of blue-and-white, which indicates that these pieces of celadon and others remaining in Palaya-Kayal should be ascribed to the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

This is quite accordant with the fact that Kayal (Cail) was described by Marco Polo in the 13<sup>th</sup> century as a large port of the Pandyan kingdom flourishing in the horse trade with the Persian Gulf and Arabia<sup>11</sup>. Though it is referred to in the Yuan-shi as the place where the five Pandyan kings led by Sundara assembled to deliberate on attacking Quilon<sup>12</sup>, it does not appear in the Daoyi Zhilue of the 14th century.

Devipattinam is located on the northern side of the small peninsula projecting towards Sri Lanka, on the southern side of which Periyapattinam lies. In the southern part of this town we visited a place called Arapunattkadu and picked up roughly fifty Chinese ceramic-sherds of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and after. Our visit was very short, but a more systematic survey may yield more pieces, as this place is mentioned in many medieval sources.

Nagapattinam, another important medieval port town, lies in the port of Thanjavur District of the Coromandel Coast. It is well known that Nagapattinam maintained a close relation with the Kadaram kingdom in the Malay Peninsula during the Chela period, which is well attested to by the mention of a Kadaram king in the larger Leiden plates of Rajraja I<sup>13</sup> as the builder of a Buddhist vihara in Nagapattinam. Another inscription (AR 1956/57-166) discovered at Nagapattinam in the 1960s extends this relation Nagapattinam had with Kadaram further to China by recording a gift of two chinakkanagam (Chinese gold) by an agent of a Kadaram king to a Hindu temple in Nagapattinam in the 3rd regnal year of Rajendra I.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Indian Antiquary, IV, 1877, p.82.

<sup>11</sup> Maule & Pelliot, Marco Polo: The Description of the World. Vol. I, London, 1938, pp.412-414.

<sup>12</sup> Yuan Shi, Chapter 210. Section on Mabazi (Ma'bar) and other countries.

<sup>13</sup> Epigraphia Indica, XXII. pp. 242 & 243.

<sup>14</sup> I was given access to this unpublished inscription by the Director of Epigraphy, Archaeological Survey of India, Mysore. In reading the impression of this inscription, I was helped by Dr. Y. Subbarayalu and Dr. P. Shanmugam. I am grateful to all of them.

It is also a well-known fact that a broken brick tower called China Pagoda stood in Nagapattinam until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when it was completely destroyed by the Christian missionary of the place<sup>15</sup>. This China Pagoda leads us to identify Nagapattinam with Tuta in the Daoyi Zhilue. The description of a place called Tuta meaning an "earthen tower" in the Daoyi Zhilue refers to the existence of a brick tower which had a Chinese inscription. The inscription quoted in the Daoyi Zhilue gives the date of construction of the tower as the eighth moon of the third year of Xianchun (AD. 1267), and it is stated in the Daoyi Zhilue that the Chinese people came to Tuta and engraved the inscription in that year.

We visited the place where the China Pagoda used to stand, namely the compound of the present local court, and discovered on the surface a number of Chinese ceramic-sherds of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and after. Though we picked up many pieces on the sea shore in front of the local court, they seem to have been dumped there as rubbish carried from a construction site in the town. They date from later centuries, and also include some sherds of Thai and Vietnamese ceramics. In 1990 Prof. Subbarayalu visited Nagapattinam again and found in the same compound and other places in the town, including the sea shore, many Chinese ceramic-sherds of the 16th century and later.

In 1988 and 1989 I conducted two surveys on the Malabar Coast, first in August 1988 together with Prof. Subbarayalu, Dr. P. Shanmugam of Madras University and Dr. R. Varier of Calicut University and second in December 1988/January 1989 with the same scholars and also with some Japanese specialists. We visited many places from Kannanur, to the North of Calicut, to Viliyam, to the South of Trivandrum. I shall report here on our discoveries at three of them, i.e. Pandalayini Kallam, Kodungallur and Kollam (Quilon).

Pandalayini and Kollam are two adjacent towns at present, but as there are more than two Kollams in Malabar people seem to have called this Kollam as Pandalayini Kollam to distinguish it from the other Kollams, especially from Quilon (Kollam) and called Quilon as Kurakkanni kollam or Ten kollam to distinguish it from the Kallam adjacent to Pandalayini. In a Tamil inscription (SII,xxvi,101) of the 13<sup>th</sup> century the word Panthalayani Kollam appeared as the native place of a merchant (Chetti) who donated a mandapam to a Vishnu temple in Visakhapattinam, although medieval Chinese and Arab sources referred to this area as either Kellam or Pandalayini, as we shall see later.

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<sup>15</sup> H. Cordier, Ser Marco Polo, London, 1920, pp.113 & 114.

In the southern part of the present Kallam there is a masjid locally called Jayat-palli and Dr. Varier conducted a trial excavation in its vicinity by digging four small test-pits. One of them yielded a sherd of typical Yuan blue-and-white porcelain and a celadon sherd ascribable to the 13th or 14th century. Both of them were discovered at a depth of 40 centimetres from the surface. A number of celadon pieces of the 13th and 14th centuries were also obtained through surface exploration near this masjid. To the South of the masjid there is a place called China-palli, where there was supposed to be a Chinese temple. In this area and particularly in a small place called Moidin-akattu adjacent to China-palli, we collected a large number of Chinese ceramic-sherds of later centuries, mostly ascribable to the 17th and 18th centuries.

Judging from these finds, Pandalayini Kollam seems to have been very important port town during the medieval period. Actually, it is referred to in some of the important medieval sources such as the travels of Ibn Battuta and the Daoyi Zhilue. Ibn Battuta described Fandarayna (Pandalayini) as a large and beautiful city with gardens and bazars<sup>16</sup>. He also mentioned that ships from China spent the winter in this town. The Daoyi Zhilue recorded a place called Xiaogunan which is identified with (Pandalayini) Kallam by Toyohachi Fujita, a Japanese scholar who first edited a critical text of this book in 1915<sup>17</sup>. I follow this identification. The section on Xiaogunan stated that the place was suitable for raising cereals and wheat, but the people depended on rice carried yearly by boat from Orissa, and that Chinese ships spent a winter in this place, if they missed the horse ships (coming from Arabia) or the wind proved unfavorable for their return. The commercial goods the Chinese people exchanged in this place included blue-and-white porcelain. It is not surprising, therefore, that we obtained a good number of Chinese ceramic-sherds at this place. In a map illustrating the Chinese maritime expeditions led by Zheng Ho in the beginning of the 16th century in the Wubei Chih published in 1621<sup>18</sup> we find Bandaolina to the North of Koli (Calicut). This must be identified as Pandalayini.

In Kodungallur there is a ruined Portuguese fort at a corner of the junction of Periyar River and Cannoli Canal, where we picked up many pieces of Chinese ceramic-sherds of the 16th centuries and after. However, pieces of earlier centuries were obtained through

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<sup>16</sup> Mahdi Husain, *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta*, (Gaekwad's Oriental Series, CXXII), Baroda, 1953, p.188.

<sup>17</sup> See note 9 above.

<sup>18</sup> Xiang Da, *Zheng Ho Hanghai Tu*. Zhonghua Shuju, Beijing. 1961. p.58.

excavations conducted earlier by the Cochin State Department of Archaeology<sup>19</sup> and the Archaeological Survey of India<sup>20</sup> in the area called Cheraman-parambu in Kodungallur town. The findings of the excavation conducted by the Cochin State Department of Archaeology in 1945/6 are now displayed in the Kerala State Museum of Archaeology in Trichur and we were able to examine them<sup>21</sup>. They include celadon sherds of the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, blue-and-white pieces of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and a sherd of Khmer style Thai pottery. In Cheraman-parambu we picked up a celadon sherd of the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> centuries from the surface. There is no evidence to connect this place with ancient Mujiri, but medieval Mahodayapuram must have been located in or near this locality, which produced 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century celadon-sherds. However, neither Mahodayapuram nor Kodungallur appeared in Chinese sources. Cochin appeared only from the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the Yingyai Shenglan and other Chinese sources.

Kollam (Quilon or Kurakkeni-Kollam) is referred to in several Chinese works including the Zhufan Zhi of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The Daovi Zhilue stated that Kolifo (Kollam) is the important place in the big ocean close to Sengjiala (Sri Lanka) and is the principal port of the Western Ocean (India). It is also described as a country producing pepper.

We visited Kollam twice and on both occasions we found a large number of Chinese ceramic-sherds in the place called Tangacheri (Gold Street) at the northern end of the Kollam bay. Most of them were picked up from the ground behind the light house and are blue-and-white sherds of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, though some celadon sherds of the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century are also included. However, when we visited Tangacheri for the second time in 1988 we were lucky enough to be able to pull out some good specimen sherds of the 14<sup>th</sup> century celadon and others from the exposed section of the turf-covered ground in front of the light house. The section of the ground seems to have been cut and exposed by strong surfs during the last rainy season. The sherds include a base portion of a Longquan celadon bowl which has incised vertical lines of lotus petal in its inside and a biscuit of chrysanthemum design applied in the centre. This type of bowl seems to have been produced in the kilns of Longquan for the purpose of export to the West Asian countries, where they were mainly

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<sup>19</sup> The excavations of the Cochin State Department of Archaeology is reported in the Annual Report of the Archaeological Department Cochin State for the Year 1944-45 § 1945-46, 1946-47. Ernakulam, 1947, 1947 and 1948.

<sup>20</sup> The excavation of the Archaeological Survey of India is reported briefly in the Indian Archaeology 1968-69, p. 10 and more detailed in K. V. Raman. "Archaeological Investigations in Kerala." Aaraichi, Vol. 2, pt.1, Palayamkottai, 1971.

<sup>21</sup> We are grateful to Smt. Saroja Rajagopal, Curator of the Museum, who kindly permitted us to examine the ceramic-sherds.



discovered. Besides this, broken pieces of a Dehua type white porcelain bowl and two fuyode type blue-and-white dishes of the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were also taken out from the section about 40 centimetres below the surface.

The present shore line of this place must have receded some distance from that of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, but we do not know how much. In between the light house and the present shore line there remains the base portion of a laterite construction. This might be a part of the Portuguese fort which we find indicated on a 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch map<sup>22</sup> in its Tangacheri area. In Yonapuram in the central part of the beach line of Kollam we collected only a small quantity of Chinese ceramic-sherds.

In 1987, together with Japanese specialists on Chinese ceramics I had an occasion to examine Chinese ceramic-sherds unearthed in Gangaikonda Cholapuram by the State Department of Archaeology, Tamilnadu<sup>23</sup>. They are of yingqing porcelain of Jingdezhen ascribable to the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Since Gangaikonda Cholapuram was the Chela capital constructed in the 11<sup>th</sup> century by Rajendra I who sent envoys to China, it is quite natural that we should have found Chinese porcelain of the earlier centuries.

The Chinese ceramic-sherds collected by the Archaeological Survey of India, Madras, were examined by us twice in Madras in 1987 and 1989<sup>24</sup>. They are from Darashram and Vellore. Those from Darashram temple compound included yingqing porcelain of the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, while those from Vellore fort are mostly blue-and-white and enameled porcelain of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

When we visited Hyderabad in 1989, we were able to examine Chinese porcelain, mostly broken pieces, obtained in the Golkonda fort by the Archaeological Survey of India, Hyderabad<sup>25</sup>. They are blue-and-white and enameled porcelain, mostly ascribable to the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. One bowl has the date of the 5<sup>th</sup> year of Tianqi (AD. 1625) on the bottom.

As I stated at the beginning of this paper it is now clear from the recent discoveries mentioned above that a large quantity of Chinese ceramics were imported into India during

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<sup>22</sup> The map is preserved in the India Office Library and Records (T IV 229, Chart of the Malabar Coast and Backwaters from Coilang to Cranganor, by Jan Tim, and revised by H. G. Faarant. Date 1697).

<sup>23</sup> We are grateful to Dr. R. Nagaswamy, Director of Archaeology, who kindly permitted us to examine the ceramic-sherds.

<sup>24</sup> We are grateful to Dr. C. Punacha and Sri B. S. Raman, Super-intending Archaeologists, Archaeological Survey of India, Madras, who kindly permitted us to examine the ceramic-sherds.

<sup>25</sup> We are grateful to Sri A. P. Sagar, Superintending Archaeologist, Archaeological Survey of India, Hyderabad, who kindly permitted us to examine the ceramics obtained at the Golkonda fort.

the medieval period. As the date of Chinese ceramics is ascertainable in most cases, we are able to know many important facts from those that remain. For example, the vicissitudes of ports and the scale of the trade conducted therein. The discovery of Chinese ceramics in the compound of temples and palaces testifies that royal households and temples were the main buyers of those expensive Chinese ceramics. Thus the Chinese ceramics discovered in South India will help us greatly in the study of East-West maritime trade carried out in the Indian Ocean during the medieval period and also of economic conditions in South India, a region which was closely related with the development of this international trade.