SPAFACON2021

Papers from the SEAMEO SPAFA International Conference on

SOUTHEAST ASIAN ARCHAEOLOGY AND FINE ARTS

13 - 17 December 2021

Editor: Noel Hidalgo Tan

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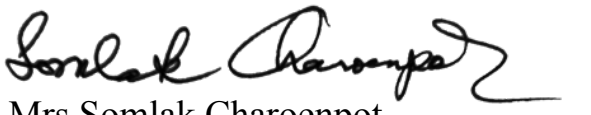
INTRODUCTION

This volume contains the extended abstracts from the papers presented at the SEAMEO SPAFA International Conference on Southeast Asian Archaeology and Fine Arts, which was held online from 13 to 17 December 2021. Also known as the SPAFACON2021, this conference was organised online due to the pandemic. Despite the disruption brought about by Covid-19 to our in-person events, training programmes and field research, it is heartening to see that archaeology and cultural heritage has continued under new modes of communication and collaboration.

This fourth iteration of the SPAFACON is also scheduled a year earlier than our usual triennial cycle to commemorate the 50th anniversary of SEAMEO initiating a centre dedicated towards archaeology and the fine arts. Over the past year, SPAFA has also been highlighting this legacy of international cooperation and capacity-building by sharing our photographic archives on our social media.

I am delighted by the high level of enthusiasm and intellectual curiosity brought by the participants to the conference. During our call for papers we received close to 90 submissions, but owing to the pressures of time and the online format, we were only able to accept 34 papers for the conference. The variety of papers present here, although a small set compared with our usual proceedings, reflects the breadth of the centre's ambit – covering not just archaeology, but also performing arts, visual arts, museum studies, and other aspects of Southeast Asian cultural heritage.

I would like to thank all the participants, without whom this conference would not be possible in its present form, in particular, our Governing Board members who represent every country in Southeast Asia, and to the Ministry of Culture, Thailand and the Ministry of Education, Thailand for their long-standing support of SEAMEO SPAFA and its activities.



Mrs Somlak Charoenpot
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The Still Unexplored Parts of Southeast Asian Archaeology: Colonial Archaeology Singapore

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Abstract

Existing archaeological studies have focused predominantly on 14th century Singapore while colonial archaeology in Singapore remains understudied. With most archaeological sites in Singapore also yielding artifacts from the 19th to early 20th century, there is an enormous potential for the development of the field (Miksic 2013, p.419). Although colonial records can provide information on colonial Singapore, more mundane daily activities and lives of the people are under-documented. This paper seeks to identify the potential and importance of studying Singapore and Southeast Asian's colonial archaeological record.

Keywords

Archaeology; Singapore archaeology; Colonial archaeology; Archaeological ceramics studies

Introduction

Archaeology in Singapore has come a long way since the first systematic dig conducted at Fort Canning in 1984. The excavation, led by Emeritus Professor John N. Miksic, unearthed numerous artifacts from the 19th century layer and the 14th century layer. Inorganic materials such as ceramics preserve well in the archaeological record, which may explain why ceramics continue to dominate the assemblage of finds in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Existing archaeological studies have focused predominantly on 14th-century Singapore while colonial archaeology in Singapore remains understudied. With most of the archaeological sites in Singapore also yielding artifacts from the 19th to early 20th century, there is an enormous potential for the development of the field (Miksic 2013: 419). Although colonial records can provide a rich source of information on colonial Singapore, more mundane daily activities and lives of the people continue to be under-documented. Colonial archaeology thus, can supplement existing colonial records to illuminate under-documented daily activities of the 19th to the early 20th century inhabitants in Singapore.

Colonial archaeology can be defined as "the study of time and place of European rule of non-European lands claimed by Europeans" (Muckle 2006: 51). This paper follows the definition proposed by archaeologist Miriam T. Stark that the historic period in Southeast Asia "is associated with the earliest European penetration in the region," stretching from the late 19th century to the early 20th century (2018: 1). Generally, there are four main occupation layers in Singapore. Layer I dates to the contemporary period. Layer II dates from the 19th to 20th century and is marked by a reddish-brown soil. Layer III dates from the 14th to the 16th century and is marked by a dark brown soil. Layer IV is a sterile yellowish-brown soil (Miksic 2013: 228-234).

Preceding Literature

There is a significant lack of research and evaluation on the archaeological research conducted during the historical period in Southeast Asia (Stark 2018: 1-3). Most archaeological research in Southeast Asia has concentrated either on the prehistoric period (especially on the Paleolithic, Bronze, and Iron Ages) or are part of the national historic preservation effort (Stark 2018: 3). Efforts concentrated on preservation and reconstruction of archaeological structures tend to focus on remains excavated from the 9th to 14th century. Stark argues that this can be attributed to how archaeological remains of this period resonated "with nationalist claims and also attract cultural tourism" (Stark 2018: 3).

Recent archaeological ceramic studies have shown that colonisation in the region had a differential impact across Southeast Asia (Stark 2018: 5). This appeared to be surprising to some as the region is generally considered as a homogenous area (Stark 2018: 5). To date, there are two main studies conducted on SEA ceramics during the colonial period. The first being Ueda et al.'s "Paths to Power in the Early Stage of Colonialism: An Archaeological Study of the Sultanate of Banten, Java, Indonesia, the Seventeenth to Early Nineteenth Century" (2016). Previous studies on Banten's sultanate have focused solely on Banten's change in monumental architecture to identify and determine when the decline of the Banten's sultanate occurred (Ueda et al.: 112). Ueda et al.'s petrographic studies showed that the Banten court continued to import large numbers of Chinese porcelain and Southeast Asian produced *kendi* even after becoming a vassal state to the Dutch East India Company (Ueda et al.: 110-111). This shows that the sultan's influence during Banten's vassal state status remains considerable. Ueda et al.'s study has demonstrated the importance of studying the archaeological ceramic records in understanding the colonial period. Through the record, it was noted that the decline of the sultanate of Banten happened gradually and not immediately, which contradicted the historical records and previous assumptions (Ueda et al.: 111).

In another study conducted in 2014, Professor Li Min found that by comparing the ceramic assemblages from both the pre-colonial and colonial period in Philippines, she was able to uncover how political power and economic status of indigenous chiefs and elites were transformed during the Spanish colonialization (p. 67). She noted that prior to being colonized, Philippines was importing significant amounts of Chinese porcelain (Li 2014: 45). The eventual loss of control of their ports to the Spanish resulted in a heavy loss of money and power for the local elites (Li 2014: 45). Li's study exhibited how the study of material culture in the Philippines can help understand the several ways in which the indigenous chiefdoms negotiated and competed with other rising maritime powers of that period.

Similarly in the field of Spanish Colonial Archaeology, Gilda Hernández Sánchez noted the importance of studying artifacts, buildings, and material culture in the reconstruction of the 'indigenous' history as most historical records are documented by the colonisers (2012: 23). Hence, history based on historical records alone cannot provide an accurate representation of the history of the communities who were colonised (Sánchez 2012: 23). It is, therefore, vital for researchers to consider alternative records other than the historical documents such as the archaeological record as they can offer "day-to-day domestic activities, common industries such as ceramic-making or consume patterns" (Sánchez

2012: 24). The trend of studying the colonial objects is reflective of the highlighting the dualistic representation of colonial reality by contrasting the colonial records to the archaeological records as it was regarded as "both central experiences of people living in colonial situations" (Sánchez 2012: 22). Hispanic Archaeology has tended to focus its narrative on the contribution of the Spanish during colonisation while there are only a few studies dedicated towards understanding the locals' experiences and responses towards colonisation.

Amanda D. Roberts Thompson's analysis on the ceramics excavated at Santa Maria de Galve have revealed the various economic alternatives that Spanish colonists engaged in (Thompson 2012: 48). According to the Spanish colonial records, all trading activities between the colonists and foreigners are forbidden (Thompson 2012: 48). However, this was highly unsustainable, which may have encouraged these colonists to look for economic alternatives in order to support themselves (Thompson 2012: 48). This was supplemented by the archaeological records as ceramics were found in abundance at Santa Maria de Galve despite historical records showing that the settlement only received five shipments of ceramics (Thompson 2012: 48).

Hence, by studying the diversity of ceramics excavated at the Officers' Barracks and the Hospital/Warehouse at Santa Maria de Galve, Thompson was able to deduce that the colonists such as the military officers engaged in the illicit trade of ceramics. (Thompson 2012: 62- 63). Locals and lower rank barracks however, did not have access to these ceramics as their diversity index of the ceramics were significantly lower compared to the areas where "higher class individuals" have access to (Thompson 2012: 62-63). Thompson's study has demonstrated an alternative way of approaching colonial archaeological ceramic analysis while also analysing the significance of looking at the archaeological record. Alternative economic activities would have never been revealed if we relied solely on historical records of Santa Maria de Galve.

Similarly, in Singapore, little is known about the archaeological record from the 19th to 20th century. Archaeological studies have mostly focused on 14th to 16th century Singapore. In *Singapore and the Silk Road of the Sea, 1300-1800*, Miksic noted that there is simply not enough trained manpower to carry out archaeological research (2013: 431). As a result, most of the archaeological materials from the 19th to 20th century, except for a selected few from Pulau Saigon (PSG) site and Colombo Court (CCT), have not been sorted and entered into a database. The number of Singapore archaeological sites that yielded 19th to 20th century artefacts are as follows: Fort Canning (FTC), Colombo Court

(CCT), Empress Place (EMP), Parliament House Complex (PHC), Singapore Cricket Club (SCC), St. Andrew's Cathedral (STA), Pulau Saigon (PSG), Duxton Hill (DXT), and Istana Kampong Gelam (IKG) (Miksic 2013: 405-431).

Despite the number of archaeological materials excavated from the 19th to 20th century, there are only three studies carried out to date, all conducted by Jennifer Barry. In her first report, Barry proposed a typology that relied on general observations on the clay and paste colour, which gave her a clue on the provenance (i.e. European. Chinese, Japanese), before separating them further based on their decorative design (Barry 2000: 14). However, Barry's research has mainly focused on European artefacts, specifically the European porcelain that were excavated at PSG. Because of the extensive disturbance of the site, it was impossible to reconstruct the stratigraphy of the site. Using site maps and notes, she listed five possible ideas regarding how the artefacts were deposited at PSG (Barry 2000: 20-21).

She contended that prior to 1889, the primary area for refuse disposal was most likely located at the foot of Pearl's Hill (Barry 2000: 18). Despite the introduction of incineration in 1889, large finds of glass and stoneware in the river indicate the potential of continued use of PSG as a disposal area (Barry 2000: 19). The presence of popular Chinese exports of blue and white porcelain further suggest that PSG was potentially used as a dumping area for the warehouses located around the area (Barry 2000: 19). These ideas, however, have never been deductively tested according to the hypothesis-deductive method. The hypo-deductive method would increase our confidence in the hypotheses and further inferences we develop on PSG.

Barry's second study focused primarily on the site named Istana Kampong Gelam (IKG) where she focused on European ceramics and coins. In the first edition, she recorded the overall number, weight, and distribution of European ceramics excavated (Barry 2007: 54). Barry also attempted to date the different spits based on the maker's mark found on either on the vessel base or on the underside of the rims, which allowed her to establish the *terminus post quem and terminus ante quem* of the spits within Square I to IV (Barry 2007: 59). Barry's first edition is particularly useful in guiding the identification of the European wares excavated throughout 19th to early 20th century sites across Singapore. However, her sorting of European ceramics is still very much in the preliminary stage as it was based simply on the decorative techniques and motifs, and/or the maker's mark that she was able to identify. Additionally, Barry observed patterns of vertical distribution, finding that there is a general increase in artifacts frequencies with depth (until spit 7) followed by a gradual

decrease (Barry 2007: 56). However, no further analyses or hypotheses were made and tested in Barry's first paper. It was only towards the end of the paper when Barry made several broad general statements concerning the site.

Barry's second edition provided a more comprehensive study on the European ceramics excavated at IKG. 24 colonial era coins were also included in this paper to provide a better *terminus post quem* and a *terminus ante quem* date of the spits within Square I to IV (Barry 2009: 112). Notably, the second edition's appendix, titled statistical analysis, was far more comprehensive than the previous edition. It was divided into 1) total finds, 2) densities of artefacts per spit, 3) densities of artefacts within IKG, and 4) spit dating and conjoining artifacts (maker's mark on European ceramics and colonial era coins) in order to determine the *terminus post quem* and a *terminus ante quem* of the spits (Barry 2009: 126-135).

Through Barry's statistical analysis section in the second edition, she observed certain patterns and correlations within the archaeological record. For example, she noted subsquare IVB2 and spit 4 has the highest concentration of Asian stoneware across all 51 subsquares at IKG (Barry 2009: .130). One of the biggest limitations of her statistical analysis is that, given that different classes of materials weigh differently, basing an entire analysis solely on weight can be problematic. Naturally, organic materials like bone, seed, and shells are lighter than ceramics. Similarly, within the ceramics category, earthenware is typically lighter than porcelain while stoneware is generally heavier than porcelain. Hence, Asian stoneware may be overrepresented in the data since it is typically heavier than the rest of the artefacts in the assemblage. Nevertheless, this particular act of data mining by Barry has provided extremely useful information regarding the archaeological data in IKG, which can provide direction for future research. This includes noting the density of the distribution of artifacts across IKG. This includes having most of the ceramic locating in Square IV and most of the other materials such as metal, glass and organic material locating in Square II. It is important to note that Barry's papers were never meant to serve as archaeological reports and Barry, herself, acknowledges this.

Based on the existing literature both in Southeast Asia and Singapore, much of Singapore's colonial archaeology is left unexplored. It is distressing to note that there are practically no comprehensive studies on Singapore colonial archaeology despite the number of archaeological sites and artefacts available. One of the biggest advantages of conducting an archaeological ceramic analysis lies in the fact that these ceramics can provide us information about the inhabitants at the site such as the potential social stratification within

the site and the utilitarian functions of the ceramics. Archaeologists studying 19th to 20th century Singapore have a distinct advantage over 14th to 16th century scholars due to the addition of the historical records. For example, from the historical records, we are aware that FTC (Keramat site) was previously occupied by Malay lighthouse keepers while the other parts of the FTC site (near the Fire Director's Residence, Sculpture Garden and Telecoms Terrace) was occupied by colonial officials and their families (Miksic 2013: 416-418). This is also reflected in the archaeological records where we see a higher frequency of local and Southeast Asian artefacts excavated at the Keramat site (Miksic 2013: 418). On the other hand, more European porcelain and children's toys were excavated at other parts of the FTC site (Miksic 2013: 418).

Possible future direction in research

Due to the lack of research in colonial Singapore archaeology, there is an absence of comparable and standardised terminology, typology, and methodology. A standardised typology is crucial to archaeology as they enable archaeologists to compare similar sites to one another. Typologies and classifications systems are essentially grouping techniques created to aid the ordering and analysis of the archaeological data. With standardisation of these terminologies, archaeologists are able to use the same criterion to describe 19th to 20th century artifacts excavated not only in Singapore but also potentially across 19th to early 20th century sites in SEA.

As seen above, archaeological ceramics conducted in SEA and in Spanish colonial archaeology have demonstrated how archaeological studies can not only contextualise aspects in historical documents but also provide significant information regarding past inhabitants and economies that are often absent from the historical records. The only 19th to early 20th century classification that exists today for Singapore archaeological sites was created by Barry. Majority of her classification focused solely on European produced ceramics. Her initial classification of the materials excavated at IKG were also limited to Asian stoneware, Asian porcelain, Asian earthenware, European ceramic, Metal, Glass, Organic, and Miscellaneous. Further sorting is necessary for a more complex and nuanced analysis of the site. For example, her category of Asian porcelain includes both Chinese and Japanese porcelain. The frequency of occurrence between the two types of porcelain can be vastly different. Preliminary studies on other 19th to early 20th century sites in Singapore have shown that the occurrence of Japanese porcelain was significantly lower than Chinese porcelain. Grouping the two under the same category will cause the Japanese porcelain to be overrepresented in the data, which can skew the archaeological data.

It is important to focus on creating a more in-depth spatial analysis of the entire 19th to early 20th century assemblage either based on systematically collected samples or the entire assemblage. Barry's research on 19th to 20th century Singapore has provided certain questions that could be used as a starting point of inquiry for the archaeological materials excavated from PSG and IKG. The call for the standardisation of terminologies and the application of the hypothetico-deductive method for 19th to 20th century Singapore archaeological materials allow research to move forward beyond Barry's proposal. Standardisation of terminologies allows for reproducibility of data beyond colonial archaeological sites in Singapore. The hypothetico-deductive method allows researchers to test hypotheses created about the site. A strong methodology and framework provide more rigor and confidence in the hypotheses generated.

The paper therefore proposes the importance of a standardisation of approach to archaeological ceramics in 19th to early 20th century Singapore and in SEA. Till date, there has not been any establishment of ceramic typology for 19th to 20th century Singapore and SEA despite the fact that ceramic sherds make up the bulk of the assemblages found in the region. Additionally, existing ceramics catalogs have also been dedicated largely towards collectables that often do not reflect local inhabitants' ceramic consumption. As demonstrated in this paper, there is a relative lack of colonial archaeological studies in Singapore and SEA and a general lack in study of consumption centers. Mass production pottery factories increasingly took over the production of ceramics, studying consumption centers would thus, allow for a better understanding of the production, distribution, and consumption of ceramics. Due to the lack of research in archaeological analysis of ceramics, a great deal of discussion in this paper has centered upon the potential of colonial archaeological studies of ceramics and the importance of creating a systematic approach towards the 19th to early 20th century ceramics in both Singapore and Southeast Asia, which include the standardisation of terminologies and the importance of using a hypothetico-deductive method.

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