

Industrialization of Traditional Crafts in Chiang Mai

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Abstract

Cultural diversity has played a vital role in economic and social development within Chiang Mai. In the past, Lanna people created their crafts as daily equipment, and the craft creation then was evolved for more commercial purpose. During 1981–2011, traditional crafts were extremely popular among tourists and some fields became more industrialized because of higher demand. Various patterns of crafts could be found in Chiang Mai, and methods for creating traditional craft as well as the purpose of its use were significantly affected by the industrialization. However, with the government support from Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization that is responsible for UNESCO Creative Cities Network within the city and related organizations, crafts in Chiang Mai have been preserved and supported to seek maximum benefits for the locals. They are also acknowledged as an important source of revenue for economic development in the city.

Keywords: craft, Chiang Mai, transmission, development, industrial craft, celadon, Sankampang, Siam Celadon

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Chiang Mai, the notable city of arts and culture located in northern part of Thailand, has been a center of the Lanna Kingdom. The city is rich in many natural resources and valuable cultures which consist of way of life, local tradition, religions, and important historical sites. These things have been transferred through generations along with the evolution of the city for almost 725 years. One of the important identities of Chiang Mai is craft communities with their respective cultural heritage. The cultural heritage found in Chiang Mai can be categorized into two types: (1) tangible cultural heritage, such



Walking street in Chiang Mai

Source: <http://www.cmcity.go.th/News/8198-ประวัติ.html>



Walking street in Chiang Mai

Source: http://i11.photobucket.com/albums/a185/Vitton/IMG_0610-1.gif

as crafts, folk arts, architectural styles; and (2) intangible cultural heritage, such as historical contexts, traditional beliefs, cultural events, artisanal skills, and craft production by “Sala,” which means “local artist” in Northern Thai language called Lanna Language or Kham Mueang (Kuntaja 2014, 91). Both kinds of cultural heritages are the proof of prosperity and social development of the city that have been handed down to the new generations. Moreover, Chiang Mai always welcomes a constant flow of tourists from all over the globe since the city is one of the most famous tourist destinations in Thailand with high potential due to several tourism activities and convenient facilities



Map of Thailand

Source: https://th.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thailand_Chiang_Mai_locator_map.svg



Pagoda in Suan Dok Temple

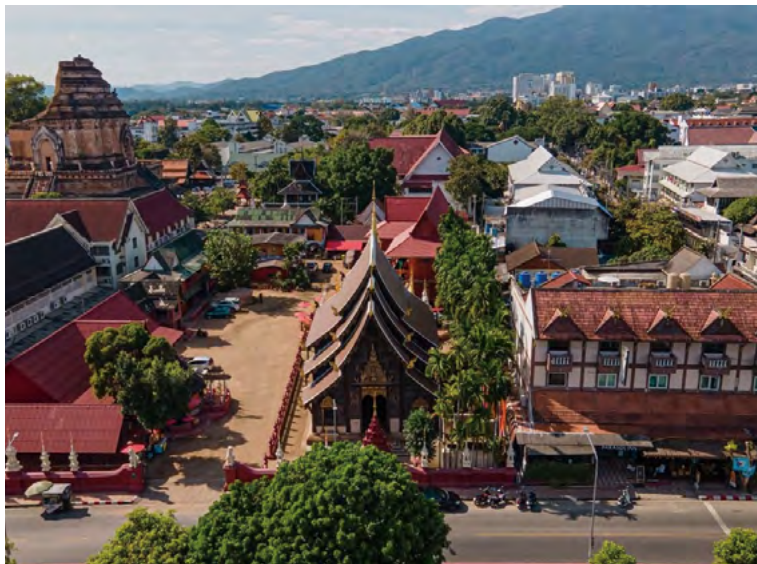
Source: <https://web.facebook.com/>



Local crafts market in Sankampang District, “Cham Cha Market”

Source: <https://www2.edtguide.com/index.php/www/review/466809/>

ตอนย้อนเมืองเชียงใหม่-ริมดอกไม้งาม-chiang-mai-blooms



Old town atmosphere of Chiang Mai

to cater to the need of tourists (Boonyasurat 2021).

Chiang Mai has several sites of traditional craft production, and its outstanding crafts can be divided into nine categories: (1) sculpture, (2) textile, (3) wood carving, (4) traditional construction, (5) painting, (6) basketry, (7) paper, (8) metal, and (9) lacquerware. Chiang Mai has been heralded as the city of cultural diversity, where local wisdom and traditional cultures are continually conserved and supported to seek maximum benefits for the locals, which significantly influences its economic matters and social security. Cultural industry has been promoted and empowered as one of the important sources of revenue for the city. An encouragement in regard to cultural capital, together with product development, has generated more job opportunities and led to income distribution through cultural industry and tourism industry as well.



Local crafts community in Sankampang District, “Loang Him Kao”

Source: <https://www.wongnai.com/attractions/378670Fi-กาดตอนยอน-ชุมชนโหล่งฮิมคาว>



Paper umbrella

Source: <https://www.creativecitychiangmai.com>



Umbrella making process

Source: <https://www.creativecitychiangmai.com>



Textile weaving

Source: <https://www.creativecitychiangmai.com>



Traditional bamboo weaving used in daily life

Source: <https://www.creativecitychiangmai.com>



Traditional lacquerware from Tai Kuen people (one of ethnic groups in Chiang Mai)

Source: <https://www.creativecitychiangmai.com>



Pottery in Mae Wang District

Source: <https://www.creativecitychiangmai.com>



Pottery production in Muang Kung Pottery Village

Source: <https://www.creativecitychiangmai.com>



Traditional silverware

Source: <https://www.creativecitychiangmai.com>

Nevertheless, these above-mentioned crafts have been evolved with time, which inevitably had an effect on craft production within the city, for example, raw materials shortage, need for new artisanal skills and adaptation, and lack of successors. The existing products were no longer interesting in contemporary society. Most of the craft producers often imitated those products from successful entrepreneurs, which contributed to a chronic oversupply of craft products with low and unstable prices. The successful entrepreneurs also had a lack of motivation to launch new product design. The craft products found in many communities were hardly different. In addition, many projects related to local crafts conservation initiated by both public and private organizations also unintentionally made some changes to the craft products and had an effect on values and identities of the local crafts. However, the national concept in regard to the utilization of cultural roots has also been extensively implemented. This circumstance still manifests the strength of Chiang Mai in terms of preserving its cultural

capitals that widely benefits local communities all over the city, even though they need to adapt and develop what they own to cater to consumer's needs (Saenyakiatikhun 2021).

Lanna people, collectively referred to people who live in northern part of Thailand, originally created crafts as their daily utensils. Later, people tended to create a large number of crafts for commercial purpose since there were a lot of orders from surrounding communities. Local crafts were also used as a tribute for exchange with other communities. The craft selling sites of Lanna people were not only a place for exchanging goods, but also a place where people, regardless of their gender, age, and social status, could freely share their information, knowledge, and skills, especially among those people who had similar culture (Ruangsri 2021, 4). In the past, people usually traveled to other communities with several purposes, and one of them was for business. Many local markets, or what can also be called goods exchange centers, were allocated all over the city to facilitate these activities. Small local markets in each community were linked with the large one located at the city center through merchant middlemen. In addition, by gathering and distributing



Cultural dissemination activity in Chiang Mai Crafts Fair

Source: <http://www.hiphailand.net/hip/scoop/791>



Art installation in old town area

Source: <http://www.hiphailand.net/hip/scoop/791>



Craft workshop in Chiang Mai Crafts Fair

Source: <https://web.facebook.com/ChiangmaiCCFA/>

goods, these marketplaces have also played an important role in politics, economy, society, and culture. In fact, the existence of local markets and the exchange of goods have been very important component of the concentration of political power (Ruangsri 2021, 5).

As a commercial center of the Lanna Kingdom, many craft production sites and marketplaces have been found all over Chiang Mai. These places have now evolved to be business districts and some craft production sites have become industrialized. The following is the example of historical timeline in regard to crafts production and industrialization of traditional crafts.

Art and craft with separated production process

- Before 1991: Traditional crafts were widely produced and transmitted.
- 1981–2001: Separated production process was implemented, and crafts during this period were significantly different from the traditional ones.
- 1997–2001: Investors relocated their production bases to other countries with minimum wage.

In order to make the production more effective, production process is usually separated into different activities and special duties are allocated to different individuals. After this “division of labor,” all components are put together at the assembly line of the production base. This kind of production can contribute to the deskilling of workers, despite the fact that they may have their own knowledge and holistic skills in regard to the production process. At the same time, however, it can also help to strengthen the potential and expertise of the workers on their specific tasks. This kind of production is generally found in massive manufacturing—for example, automotive manufacturing, camera and imaging products, computer manufacturing, electronics products or components, etc.

During 1981–2001, Thailand welcomed a large number of foreign investors who focused on investing in developing countries with minimum wage, particularly in Southeast Asia or Latin America. The industrial investment was significantly settled in many designated areas all over the country, and they are collectively called the “industrial estate.”



Creative product design exhibited in Chiang Mai Design Week

Source: <http://www.daybedsmag.com/chiang-mai-design-week-2017/>

During 1997–2001, the production in Thailand was in exhausting condition due to higher wage and labor shortage. Many investors relocated their production bases to other countries with lower wage. Unskilled workers were left behind.

One of the nationally and internationally popular handicrafts in Chiang Mai, Thailand, is wood carving, especially in Baan Tawai Village, Hang Dong District, the famous wood carving community. Baan Tawai Village has faced a similar situation described above, since Taiwanese investors built their large wood carving factory in Baan Mae Tha Village. The factory was located between Lamphun Province and Lampang Province because this location was originally rich in raw materials for wood carving and many artisans also lived around there. The wood carving factory offered one-stop service and the employment of this factory consisted of two categories as follows:

1. Internal employment: artisans/workers made wood carving to customers' orders and received their income daily or as per order.
2. External employment: the factory gave assignments to artisans, who did not work directly for the factory. The artisans needed to manage all process by themselves and received their income per order.

After receiving carved wood from external artisan, it was then respectively sent to different sectors inside the factory to complete the work, such as polishing, painting, or checking if the work was in good quality and met the need of consumers. The final process was packaging and shipping to customer. As such, the wood carving in Baan Tawai Village has used the “division of labor model” in its production process. Although this process can promote decent works and generate additional income for local communities, this kind of factory will relocate to other area once it runs into some problems like material shortage and higher wage.

Capitalist production in developing country, including technologies and equipment, are basically owned and run by investors. Local communities are unable to have such highly efficient and systematic production, which often lead to the inefficient use of resources and more waste if they run the production by themselves. On the other hand, mass production contributes

to environmental degradation, air pollution, as well as health problems of the workers. Mass production also devalues the traditional crafts regarding to indigenous knowledge and artisanal skills (Wattanaphan et al. 2001, 39-40).

1. The Production of Traditional Craft and Custom Craft

The artistic styles and artisanal skills in Baan Tawai Village were originally brought from Burma. According to cultural exchange in the past, artisans from both cultures shared their knowledge and practices in regard to wood carving, gold leaf craft, and glass-decoration art, which have been transmitted through generations.

The quantitative production in Baan Tawai Village has also been problematic, since artisans in the village tended to work mainly on custom crafts to meet the taste and need of their clients. Many famous yet generic characters have been repeatedly produced, such as cowboy, Mickey Mouse, Apache, etc. Raw materials with lower price and of lower quality have been mainly used to create their works. These products obviously did not reflect



Souvenir shop in Baan Tawai Village

Source: https://th.tripadvisor.com/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g293917-d1762650-i195067933-Baan_Tawai_Village-Chiang_Mai.html



Rak Samuk sculpting (Rak Samuk is a material made from the mixture of Samuk, black lacquer, wood and lime neutralized by turmeric)

Source: <https://www.chiangmainews.co.th/page/archives/860865/>



Rak Samuk sculpting

Source: <https://m.mgronline.com/local/app-detail/9600000010261>



Souvenir shop in Baan Tawai Village

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/SaleTeakWoodcarving>

any of their former expertise or cultural identity. As a result, people fail to realize the value of wood carving as much as it should be. Nevertheless, the artisans were still familiar and generally felt more comfortable in creating the traditional ones.

2. General Styles of Wood Carving in Baan Tawai Village

The wood carving in Baan Tawai Village can be subdivided into five main styles as follows:

1. Ancient style: this style has been formerly found in the village. Most of them are Buddha image and goddess statue which are made from teak with elaborate artisanal skills. The artisans try to imitate those antiques and artistic styles from Burma, Cambodia, China, and India.
2. Traditional style: this style has been influenced by the wood carving technique found in Lanna art. Most of the products are animals in Thai classical literature and Buddha image in different postures.
3. Modern traditional style: this style has been created to meet the taste and



Wood carving in Baan Tawai Village

Source: <https://www.chiangmainews.co.th/page/archives/665920/>

need of customers who are mostly Thai and Chinese middle class. The products include Singha (mythological animal), tiger, elephant, musician doll, lotus for Buddhist altar decoration, wooden frame with bunch of vines, etc.

4. Local innovative style: people also admire wood carving art depicting the story in Buddhism and mythology for home decoration. This wood carving art has also been expanded to describe ordinary stories, such as the local way of life and rural atmosphere in northern part of Thailand which composes of natural landscape, people, habitats, animals, activities, etc.
5. Contemporary style: this style has been imitated from Western culture and other cultures found in Asia. It is not related to any belief, religion, or tradition, and the products are usually statues of various kinds of animals.

Despite the different styles of wood carving found in Baan Tawai Village, every style has been producing to cater to an individual customer, which is similar to the situation of wood carving communities found in Sukhothai Province, Thailand and so as in other countries (Wattanaphan et al. 2001, 47–50).



Wood carving in Baan Tawai Village

Source: <https://thai.tourismthailand.org/Attraction/บ้านถาว>

3. Cultural Goods

The context of cultural goods in Baan Tawai Village consists of two categories as follows:

Category 1: Way of Life with Traditional Culture

Each society has its own cultural practices and tradition, as well as social value, belief, religion, art, etc. These things can be changed due to external influences since people always exchange their cultural identities and products with others. Some cultural products are made from different cultural identities. Others are used in new contexts. For example, “Kalare” and “Hum Yon” are now used for decorating walls in house, hotel, or northern Thai food restaurant, although they were traditionally placed above the entrance in front of the house roof to prevent bad things. As such, while the purpose of utilization may change with time, the products still remain as the identity of Lanna traditional culture.



Traditional Lanna House

Source: <https://art-culture.cmu.ac.th/Lanna/articleDetail/859>

Category 2: Way of Life with Contemporary Culture

Traditional way of life has inevitably been impacted by contemporary culture because of globalization and modernization. Local people are more or less getting used to the new culture which always interrupts their daily life in several ways, such as in consumer goods, social trends, foods, social media platforms, etc. These influences can also reflect on the cultural goods made available for customers who are interested in new style of works.



Hum Yon

Source: <https://art-culture.cmu.ac.th/Lanna/articleDetail/2173>



Traditional craft items are used in contemporary interior design

Source: <https://uncrate.com/raja-heritage-hotel/>



Coffee shop with traditional materials and design

Source: <https://www.zolitic.com/north/ChiangMai/27257>



Lanna architectural style is integrated with contemporary style

Source: <https://www.buildernews.in.th>



Lanna architectural style is integrated with contemporary style

Source: <http://oknation.nationtv.tv/blog/ThailandMICEGURU/2014/06/02/>



Lanna architectural imitation in Chiang Mai International Exhibition and Convention Centre

Source: <https://www.eventbanana.com/Seeker/VenueDetail/1985>

Chiang Mai, the city of cultural diversity, is the largest city in northern part of Thailand. The Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization has always promoted and encouraged the city as a member of UNESCO Creative Cities Network, in the field of Crafts and Folk Arts, for almost eight years. The steadfast mission statement for promoting the city, in line with UNESCO's criteria, indicates the preparedness of Chiang Mai in these following areas:

- Create mutual understanding with all related stakeholders, as well as positive attitude among them to learn new things;
- Promote education, research, self-learning, and transmission of crafts and folk art, which focus on both industrialization and innovation to achieve sustainable development;
- Design local strategic plan to support crafts and folk art;
- Provide public space and develop creative infrastructures available for promotion and transmission of crafts and folk art;



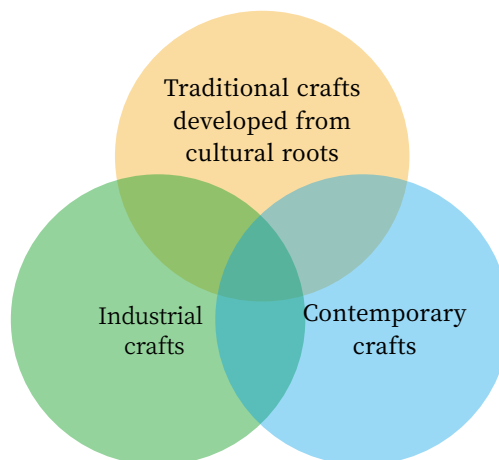
Mrs. Wiphawan Woraputtipong, the vice president of Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization in Chiang Mai Creative Cities Network Forum 2021

Source: Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art

- Communicate city’s identities, as well as support local museums and educational centers in regard to local wisdoms, crafts and folk art, and creativity;
- Co-host various events in related fields on local, national, and international scale;
- Strengthen potential of human resources in terms of education, as well as the preparedness of technical equipment, needed skills, and innovation;
- Strengthen collaborative network among all stakeholders in the city including public sectors, private sectors, and civil society (CMPAO and Chiang Mai University 2014, 17).

As a member of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in the field of Crafts and Folk Arts, Chiang Mai has categorized its own craft creation into three ways as follows:

1. Traditional crafts developed from cultural roots
2. Industrial crafts
3. Contemporary crafts



The nature of crafts and folk art creation in Chiang Mai always consists of these three components. According to historical evolution and cultural development, local communities have been linked to the city center. This social dynamic has led to the creation of traditional crafts and folk arts, industrial crafts, and contemporary crafts, which are acknowledged as identities of Chiang Mai.

From cultural roots to contemporary social contexts, crafts can be continually improved with creativity and sustainability in various aspects. Sustainable development in craft communities will have an effect on creative crafts and folk art development. This will encourage well-being of the locals, quality education and decent job opportunities in the communities. Moreover, it will also lead to sustainable community-based tourism and leverages local economic status.

Local crafts have been formerly created as daily equipment or household utensils, such as tools, clothes, accessories, religious oblations, and tributes, which are generally made from raw materials found in each community and the surrounding areas. In the past, one community needed to interact with others for many reasons. The communication between communities led to commercial activities, cultural exchange, and economic security. Local crafts



Rak Samuk sculpting workshop in Baan Tawai Village

Source: Division of Education, Religion, and Culture, Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization

have not only been exchanged and disseminated, but they also have been integrated and redesigned for multiple purposes. However, the identities of the origin and artisanal skills are obviously maintained in them. Nowadays, local crafts are widely supported by several organizations in terms of design, production, as well as inbound and outbound marketing promotion. Each local craft is then known as representative of the community, to be recognized at a global scale.



Pottery workshop at Pottery Learning Center, Mae Wang District
Source: Division of Education, Religion, and Culture, Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization



Traditional paper cutting workshop
Source: Division of Education, Religion, and Culture, Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization

Chiang Mai and its crafts and folk art production has been compared to the deep rooted tree of creativity with strong trunk and wide branches, which continues to bloom and grow (CMPAO and Chiang Mai University 2014, 19). Chiang Mai is plentiful with cultural capital, particularly in the field of crafts and folk arts. Due to the aforementioned categories of creating crafts in Chiang Mai, the development of traditional crafts towards creative industry to launch more product designs and to leverage the city as Creative City can go along with creative tourism, under the governmental support (Creative Economy Agency 2020).

The inventory made by Microsoft.com in 2019 found that 86 percent of consumers used their online platforms searching for local business and almost half of these Google searches from all over the world were related to local information and database. This statistic might indicate that the global trends seem to be more interested in local contexts. People in contemporary



Creative crafts in Chiang Mai

Source: Loang Him Kao Facebook Fanpage

society mostly focus on diversity and specific identity of each community, so that special story or storytelling related to a local product is implemented as one of value-added marketing strategy to generate more interests. The survey on consumer behavior in the city center of Chiang Mai towards local craft products in daily life found that 54.5 percent of the respondents appreciated their local craft products more, after the stories were well transmitted to them. The result of this survey also found that 72 percent of Chiang Mai citizens were more confident to use local craft products than industrial products. One of the main reasons was that the professional skills of local artisans are more reliable. Their contributions, particularly from artisan or entrepreneur who has a long experience in this field, have also been elaborately made. Some of the products have been creatively redesigned by integrating local identity and contemporary concept and the products are then perfectly composed of aesthetic and some new functions to cater to



Bua Bhat Art of Green Home Products

Source: <https://www.buabhat.com/main/>

people's lifestyle, which make the products more valuable and interesting. More than 40 percent of the respondents were interested in using multi-functional crafts. However, some respondents focused on aesthetic as their top priority and utility as their second consideration. Others did not consider the utility at all. The suggestions for local crafts development to be used in daily life and make them more interesting are subdivided into two main issues: (1) local crafts need to be redesigned—even though the crafts themselves are interesting, they should still be adapted or redesigned to meet the taste and need of respective group of consumers, by considering more of their gender, shape, color, yet keeping the original identity; and (2) local crafts need to be in better quality—some local crafts may not be suitable for using in daily life. Consumers prefer durable and multi-functional products. Eco-friendly and degradable materials have also been taken into account (Creative Economy Agency 2020).



Paper umbrella

Source: Umbrella Making Center, <https://www.facebook.com/UmbrellaMakingCentreChiangMai/>

Nowadays, various kinds of remarkable and favorable crafts can be widely found in Chiang Mai, namely silverware, lacquerware, wood carving, Pha Teen Jok (traditional women's sarong with unique patterns, vibrant colours and weaving style), Sankampang's textile, pottery, umbrella, and Sa Paper (handmade paper from the bark of the Mulberry tree), etc. Some of them are still created with traditional techniques and forms, while others are based on traditional skills, yet integrated with contemporary styles and new production technologies to align with the global trends.

There are many craft communities all around Chiang Mai and the most famous craft communities are located in Sankampang area (Sankampang District), where several kinds of crafts have been produced here, including umbrella, Sa paper, celadon, etc. The project "One Tambon, One Product (OTOP)," which actually means "one sub-district, one product," has been initiated all over the country by the government to promote traditional crafts and leverage economic status in each respective area. Most traditional crafts have been promoted nationally and internationally through this project. In Chiang Mai, traditional crafts were also heralded as an outstanding symbol of the city. A large number of tourists travelled to Chiang Mai as their pinpoint destination and chose local crafts as their souvenirs. Once the demand for local crafts by tourists was increased, the craft communities in Chiang Mai have forged synergies in their respective fields with government support, to create a large quantity of products made available for tourists. Overall, the project "One Tambon, One Product" has led to the establishment of local associations for promoting crafts, which also encourage the potential of the locals in group management and income distribution. In terms of crafts production, Chiang Mai has its own strength and capability to support all related activities such as conservation, transmission, and development. Crafts production has been an important source of income for the local communities and also for the city.

One of the popular and well-known crafts among tourists across the world is “celadon,”¹ the green-glaze wares with unique surface and elaborate making procedure. Celadon arrived in Thailand during the King Ramkhamhaeng period (1277–1317). Potters were brought from China and the beginning of a profitable industry was then established. During the Song dynasty in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, political instability in China caused massive immigration and a large number of them took advantage of King Ramkhamhaeng’s immigratory offer. As a result, the first kilns were built around the area of Si Satchanalai, Sawankhalok and Sukhothai, which are now important historical sites of the country. The pottery works in this

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1. Celadon was found in mainland China during the Song dynasty (960–1280). The real origin might stretch farther back than this period. The origin of the name “celadon” is interestingly shrouded in romanticism as many theories have been propounded on when and how. One must remember that this is a non-oriental name of a Chinese product ending up on European soil. It is generally accepted that the very first samples touched Europe during the first half of the sixteenth century and one of the earliest recorded specimens—the “Warham Bowl” was the valued property of New College in Oxford in 1530.

It is also believed that the name was transferred from the shepherd celadon, a character of a French play by Honore d’Urfe of the seventeenth century. Another theory is that the name belonged to Sultan Saladin of Egypt, who sent 50 pieces of celadon to Nur ad-Din, the Sultan of Damascus in 1711. The story from the Middle Ages said that the name had been derived from food-tasters of the royal courts. The court jesters were known as “celadons” with traditional green attire. The duty of the court jesters was to sample food suspected to have been tampered with before the king would touch it. The special chemical property of celadon was that, if the food was placed on celadon ware, the presence of poison would be revealed.

Celadon consists of several categories. In the West, it generally refers to a particular type of highly fired pottery with a typical green glaze, while there is a wider range of forms and glazes found in the East, namely China, Korea, and Japan. It is known as *qingci* 青瓷 among Chinese people, while it is normally referred to *seiji* in Japan. Nevertheless, all celadon wares are highly fired porcelainous stoneware, which are potteries with high temperatures attained during firing and have acquired a strength and degree of resonance somewhere between stoneware and porcelainware. The unique glaze dipping of celadon, which can be called “feldspathic,” contributes to glassy, beautiful, and special aesthetic appeal. The main glaze-forming ingredient is the mineral feldspar, derived from common clay. The original celadon glazes are quite clear and translucent, and the wide color range depends on the presence of iron, that spanning from blues and blue greens to light greens, olives, and greys. This is the result of complex chemical and physical inter-reactions in the kiln.

period had a different quality due to several factors: the use of local raw materials in the firing processes caused a distinctive colorization, and the potters developed artistic styles and forms due to their own tastes. Moreover, celadon was also found in Sankampang, Chiang Mai and Wiang Kalong and Phan, Chiang Rai. But those works created in Sukhothai area were by far the most famous.

Celadon in Chiang Mai started to gain its reputation after the Second World War. Nowadays, although the production process has been more industrialized, the traditional hand-moulding and painting are still preserved. Siam Celadon was found in 1976 by Mr. Nit Wangviwat, the former president of Chiang Mai Chamber of Commerce, who has been passionate about traditional crafts all around Chiang Mai and very knowledgeable of celadon. The business was originally started by an American foundation, the International Executive Service Corp. (IESC), who established chinaware



Teacup

Source: <https://www.bangkokbiznews.com/tech/858363>

factory and provided more job opportunities for the locals in Sankampang area. A small souvenir shop was also opened to facilitate tourists. Five years later, Mr. Nit and his wife joined with this financial investment and owned the business afterward. They started their own business by establishing small celadon factory which focused mainly on quality, traditional style, and wood ash glaze, to produce souvenirs that meet the needs of both national and international tourists. Mr. Nit once described the processes and related techniques of making celadon as follow:

The “paddy field black clay” is used because of its special qualities. It is cleaned in water and then filter-pressed to drain the water out. After going through pumps and grinder the mixture is ready for shaping, being now a soft lumpy slab. To form this clay into a desired shape and purpose, three choices are implemented: (1) moulding into a plaster cast to make a



Siam Celadon Factory

special figure, (2) jiggering to make a plate or flat object, and (3) spinning or throwing to make a vase or pot. The first 800°C firing is called “Biscuit” that takes eight hours, and the result is a creamy-brown terra cotta. The next process is glaze dipping or painting and then back to the kiln for another eight hours firing at 1,200°C. When it leaves the kiln, the clay is transformed into a beautiful work of art—the Celadon.

The typical item is the round plate or vase with floral in a pleasing twisting pattern design. The skill of the artist is prominently displayed with cuts of varying depths and sizes to bring out a three-dimensional effect. This is a former character of celadon since it used to be an exclusive household ware of the Chinese emperors, while general people were not allowed to use. These days, anyone can own a piece of celadon, and they can buy items like full dining sets and literally hundreds of other creations. But one must be aware that there are also a lot of poor imitation products.



Siam Celadon Factory



Siam Celadon Factory

It is not possible to get all the pieces in the same shade, since wood ash is an important component in the glaze melting process. The ash is from different kinds of trees. Even though the trees are from the same species, they may be of different ages and locality. This can cause a distinctive colorization and exceptional character of celadon. Moreover, despite the availability of the modern technology, there is no foolproof certainty. The factory needs to make sure that all the processes are kept spotlessly clean and dust particles is not mixed up in the processes. That is why a masterpiece of work is expensive and there are only a small number of high-quality factories in Chiang Mai.

Nowadays, the factory has its own capacity production up to 400,000 pieces per year. The factory has recently collaborated with Plural Designs Co., Ltd. launching a new product design for the special exhibition held during the annual event of “Chiang Mai Design Week 2019.” Two interesting celadon items were exhibited: (1) Bamboo Wall, the bamboo imitation wall with



Bamboo Wall exhibited in Chiangmai Design Week 2019

Source: <https://www.bangkokbiznews.com/tech/858363>

beautifully various shades of green glaze, and (2) Tea Set, inspired from sticky rice container, using a double-wall bamboo weaving container to maintain temperature of sticky rice. The new product design turned into double wall celadon teacup that helps prevent high temperature while holding the cup, yet maintaining the temperature of hot drink. The products from Siam Celadon are characterized by functional purposes: 1) Tableware, 2) Tea set, and 3) Home decoration item.

Although passing on the knowledge of celadon is priority vision of the brand, it also focuses on innovation, creativity, and contemporary contexts. New product design is important to cater to customer's need, yet it still keeps the identity of celadon by using natural wood ash glaze. This is why celadon has continued to be famous among tourists (Bangkok Business 2019).

Within the factory, tourists or interested observers can go around the area to see the manufacturing processes step by step. Information board describing all processes can also be found there. The factory employs around 120 workers, and their duties are clearly divided into casting, sculpting, jiggering, incising, firing, painting, glaze dipping, and re-touching. All products from Siam Celadon have been elaborately made. In addition to providing a lot of items in the shop, the factory also designs and produces exceptional celadon ware for special occasions by professional skill artisans and systematic making process.

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