

Japanese Hizen ware.⁴ The dates of these ceramics illustrate, to some limited extent, the long duration of these exchanges, and the fact that hinterland communities participated in international trading networks. From the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, Hoi An was a nexus for complex cross-cultural exchanges that extended from the hinterlands to international destinations. Although trade along this eastern seaboard was also served by other littoral ports, Hoi An was the most favored. It would be Cochinchina's principal port, and the Nguyen lords actively exploited its advantage.

Champa also responded to commercial opportunities that came in the wake of China's erratic trade policies and took advantage of gaps in the ceramic trade. Five ancient kiln complexes are located northwest of modern-day Quy Nhon in Binh Dinh Province along the Con River, in the vicinity of the Champa polity Vijaya, but so far, only one site has been excavated. Yoji Aoyagi states there is some uncertainty about the starting date of these kilns, but they initially catered to local markets (cat. nos. 85, 86).⁵ By the fifteenth century, Binh Dinh's kilns were exporting in quantity to insular Southeast Asia. Then, in 1471, Vijaya was crushed and annexed by Dai Viet under Le Thanh Tong; while one school of thought believes that ceramic production then ceased, current evidence indicates otherwise.

The port in Thi Nai Bay is well protected by a long peninsula and, like Hoi An, could offer safe haven to passing mariners. In its day, a port in the bay served Vijaya. It was here that historical accounts place the Mongolian forces assembled to invade Vijaya in 1282; and it was here that six of the seven great Zheng He expeditions (1407–33) also called. Ma Huan, official interpreter on three expeditions, wrote that dishes, bowls, and other kinds of blue porcelain were exchanged for local gold, and his detailed description of the local rice-wine drinking culture accords closely with practice that has survived until the present.⁶ We might surmise that the wine-drinking jars Ma Huan saw were local products, since within decades of his visit, considerable numbers of Binh Dinh jars were being exported into insular Southeast Asia. One Binh Dinh jar, previously misclassified as Chinese, is famous in Philippine folklore. Personified and named Magsawi, it could talk and go alone on long journeys, and married a female jar. This union produced a child with qualities similar to those of its parents. Magsawi, a much-treasured heirloom, bestowed considerable prestige on its owners. Similar stories emerge in other communities about other jars with extraordinary qualities. It was not unusual for imported jars to be closely bound up with the spiritual and cultural life of a community, and these were highly valued. Above all, jars were important utilitarian containers and served a multitude of purposes, but for wine-drinking such as Ma Huan described, the jar was essential. Thus, the Southeast Asian wine-drinking culture went hand in hand with the ownership of stoneware jars. On the evidence of the quantities of jars now documented across island Southeast Asia as products of Binh Dinh, it is clear the Cham played a significant role in supplying this niche market.

Several decades after Ma Huan's visit to Thi Nai Bay, a trading ship, possibly of Southeast Asian origin, foundered in the Philippine archipelago. The recoveries included 173 jars, 74 from Binh Dinh kilns, and smaller numbers of blue-and-white ceramics from Hai Duong's kilns.⁷ This tells us that ceramics from these two different production centers were transported by the same carrier to the same island markets. A small quantity of Chinese blue-and-white also recovered is of mixed age; those assigned to the reign of Zhengtong (1436–49) provide an approximate date for the