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## Rare Ming dynasty ceramics found in shipwrecks

### Malaysia seabed explored by Swedish experts

September 24, 1996  
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ENDAU, Malaysia (CNN) -- Divers off the coast of Malaysia have discovered in the wrecks of four ships a precious cargo of ceramics believed to be from China's Ming dynasty period (A.D. 1368-1644).

Little is known about the ships buried under the South China Sea, but three of them were thought to have been from Thailand and the fourth from China.

Located in waters up to 213 feet deep, the wreckage appeared to have rested undisturbed for hundreds of years.

The booty was found after the Malaysian authorities gave Swedish engineer and maritime historian Sten Sjostrand permission to try to find the ships' remains.

Volunteer divers first tackled the sunken ship called the Royal Nanhai and have retrieved some 30,000 pieces of ceramics thought to be Celadon, a form of green glazed pottery that pre-dated blue and white porcelain.

First produced in China in the 7th century, Celadon was prized for its jade color and supposed supernatural powers.

According to Sjostrand, the Royal Nanhai's cargo of Celadon came from the Sawankhalok and Sukhothai kilns in Northern Thailand. Many Chinese potters fled to Thailand in the 14th century following a ban on the export of Chinese Celadons by the first Ming Emperor Hung Hu in 1368.

"It represents the same kiln techniques because it is done by the same people," Sjostrand said. "It just comes from a different area, and it's just not known."

A converted market serves as a warehouse for the recovered artifacts, which include large serving bowls, ring-handled bottles and various jars and storage containers.

Initial probes of the other three wrecks, the Nanyang, Xuante and Longquan, indicate they had similar cargo, in addition to Chinese Celadon and blue and white porcelain.

*Reuters contributed to this report.*



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