



The SUPPORT Arts and Crafts
International Centre of Thailand
(Public Organization)



Types of Handicrafts
Krueang Benjarong
(Handmade pattern)



Kruang Benjarong (Thai porcelain with five primary colors) is a form of porcelain made in Thailand that reflects the high class of craftsmanship, inherited from Ayutthaya Era to today. In the past, Kruang Benjarong was mainly used in the royal palace and royal house, as it was highly valuable, with its beautiful paint and design made on the

porcelain's surface. Kruang Benjarong originated from Chinese porcelain, the original source of high quality porcelain. Thai craftsmen had adapted and invented their own graceful form of Thai porcelain, which is now a renowned form of a handcraft that maintains its value and attractiveness to this day.



The unique identity that reflects the craftsman's wisdom and ability

Krueang Benjarong, the name of the graceful – unique pattern that has been inherited for a very long time, since Ayutthaya Era of Thailand. The word ‘Benja’ means ‘Five’ while ‘Rong’ means ‘color.’ Therefore, Benjarong denotes the use of 5 colors, for the patterns painted onto the porcelain. In the past, there were only five primary colors, namely, red, yellow, white, black, and green or blue. Nowadays, more formats and colors have been developed, and thus Krueang Benjarong now comes in more than those five primary colors. In the past, those five primary colors came from burning the ore, which was then mixed with the coating solution at the appropriate proportion and used as the paint, in order to inscribe the pattern onto the earthenware, before firing the workpiece and produce the finished porcelain product. The finished porcelain has shiny and wonderful color, with beautiful – unique pattern of Thailand. Originally, during Ayutthaya Era, such porcelain was imported from China. Therefore, original porcelain made in China has different pattern made by Chinese craftsman. Later, craftsman was sent from Thailand to learn about the manufacturing process and painting method, who later came back and started

producing Krueang Benjarong with Thai pattern. Therefore, more workpieces of Krueang Benjarong made with Thai patterns were found. Popular patterns were designed by Thai craftsmen, including, Lai Teppanom, Lai Norasing, Lai Garn Kod, Lai Kranok, Lai Panom Norrasing, Lai Prachamyarm, Lai Bua Jedsai, Lai Benjamart, Lai Wichayen, Lai Poomkhaobin, etc. The first lots of import porcelain, though order with Thai patterns, were supervised by Thai craftsman. Hence, the products were somewhat different and strange, for example, product made with Lai Teppanom, where the ‘Tep’ or angel was quite chubby. This was because the result of Chinese paint master came from different belief, tradition and culture, in comparison to Thai craftsman. Until Rattanakosin Era that we start to see Krueang Benjarong made with unique Thai pattern.

Other unique characteristic of Krueang Benjarong is the used of golden solution to paint the pattern on the porcelain. Such method was highly popular during the early days of Rattanakosin Era, and it reflects the country's wealth, growth, and peacefulness at that time. Krueang Benjarong made by the royal craftsman will have white or the five primary colors as the background, which was painted over by various patterns, especially golden solution paint, a unique painting method of Thai porcelain.



Krueang Benjarong is a type of ceramic earthenware, and it is painted with background color and patterns. It is made of porcelain, which is a white ceramic material. Porcelain is glass-like semi transparent, does not absorb water, and create vibrant sound with a knock. Krueang Benjarong can also be made from Bone China clay, which produces white and shiny product, with finer substance, better transparency, and stronger. The price of Krueang Benjarong made from Bone China is therefore more expensive than the one made with porcelain. Other form of Krueang Benjarong can also be made from coated earthenware, such as, Siladol, as well. The clay used for making of the base white ceramic ware before painting, which is known as 'Krueang Khao' or 'white ware', comes from three sources in Thailand, namely, Din Ranong, Din Surat, and Din Lampang. The clay from Din Ranong





Nowadays, the color used for Krueang Benjarong is chemical color, and known as Over Glaze. The craftsman will mix the desired color, and draft the pattern with red, black or gold color, before paint the workpiece per his imagination. At the present, there are more than 30 tones of color available. Meanwhile, the patterns used for making of Krueang Benjarong are developed as well. From the original patterns, such as, Lai Kranok and Lai Karnkod, to Rattanakosin Era, where new patterns are created, such as, Lai Krut Yud Nark, which is the royal insignia of King Rama II, and Lai Kinnaree, Lai Ratchasi, etc. Nowadays, the craftsman uses original – ancient patterns, that reflect unique identity of Thailand, and modernized – invented patterns, that tell story of the country's culture, tradition, or even story from Thai literature. Anyway, Krueang Benjarong of Thailand is still produced with extreme meticulousness and care, in every process of its production, as it once was in the past. and Din Surat source is black clay that can withstand high heat. The clay from Din Lampang is white clay that contains components of quartz, kaolinite, and feldspar; thus, this clay has higher value of plasticity, which makes it easier for molding.





History of Krueang Benjarong of Thailand

While Thailand negotiated and traded with foreign countries, during the late of Ayutthaya Era, the country was influenced by those countries, and acquired many tools and equipment into the Kingdom. Back then, during the reign of the Ban Plu Luang Dynasty, Siam ordered Krueang Benjarong from China. Originally, Krueang Benjarong made in China was painted ceramic ware, made with porcelain and coated. It was a shiny ceramic ware with beautiful color, prominently produced in the city of Jingdezhen, during the reign of Qing Dynasty. Ordered Krueang Benjarong back then was made with the shape and pattern that was a mixing of Thai and Chinese art and culture; and it was widely popular among the royal. During the reign of Somdet Phra Narai the Great, a time of great peace and wealth, international trading was

flourishing. Krueang Benjarong gained more popularity in this era. The most popular patterns during this era were Lai Tep Panom Norrasing, Lai Prachamyarm, Lai Kankod, Lai Wichayen, Lai Benjamat, etc. The inside of Krueang Benjarong was usually coated with muddy green color. This era was the first time that painting with golden solution has occurred. This method was known as Lai Num Thong (Golden Solution Painting)

During Rattanakosin Era, the royal court preferred to order and import chinaware from China, and sent the royal craftsman with the bark and traveled to China, to supervise Chinese craftsman to produce the products correctly, in accordance with the order. During the reign of King Rama II, many prominent patterns for Krueang Benjarong were created, such as, Lai Krut Yud Nark, which is the royal insignia of Phra Bat Somdet Phra Phutthaloetla Naphalai, King Rama II, and Lai Kinnaree, Lai Ratchasi, etc. New more patterns were created during this era, including, Lai Nok Mai, Lai Karn Tor Dork, and Lai Kularpthong.



During the reign of Phra Bat Somdet Phra Chula Chom Klao Chao Yu Hua, King Rama V, western influence came into Thailand, including the art of painting the pattern onto the ceramic ware, where European patterns were used instead of Thai patterns, such as, Lai Prueksa, Lai Dork Daisy, etc. These patterns were painted on various workpieces, and reflect the application of foreign patterns and creation of the unique identity of this era. The most prominent and renowned ceramic ware made during this era was ‘Krueng Tuay Chakri’ (Chakri Ceramic Ware), which was ordered and imported from France. Chakri Ceramic Ware was made from porcelain, and fired with high temperature, and painted with more variety of colors. Chakri Ceramic Ware came in the form of measuring cup, lotus-shape tea cup, with the cover that has gold – circle rim, with the royal insignia of Chakri Dynasty on it, thus the name Chakri Ceramic Ware. Chakri Ceramic Ware was normally painted with Daisy pattern, and gold solution painting.

From the reign of King Rama V, Krueng Benjarong maintained its format and patterns as it was in the past, but the knowledge its production spread widely. Many more factories of Krueng Benjarong occurred in various provinces of Thailand, including, Samut Songkhram, Phetchaburi, Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya, Chai Nat, Phichit, Chonburi, Lampang, Chiang Mai, Nakhon Pathom and Bangkok. However, Thai people’s lifestyle had drastically changed. Equipment and utensils made as Krueng Benjarong were replaced by modern ceramic ware. Meanwhile, advance technology and invention had put up many amazing products that catch the people’s preference. Krueng Benjarong thus becomes just a souvenir and gift, that one present to the other people. However, with its gracefulness and value of the ancient Thai wisdom, Krueng Benjarong is used as decoration during many of the country’s important events. Application and use of Krueng Benjarong in our modern lifestyle requires the people of the next generation, who have the passion and persistence to use his imagination to create beautiful pattern and design, in order to restore the popularity in Krueng Benjarong. So that Krueng Benjarong can be widely accepted and sought for again, as it once was in the past, as the unique representative of the different eras.



Tales that are related to the people's lifestyle

Krueang Benjarong is a form of handicrafts that excellently reflects the past lifestyle and tales of Thailand. Krueang Benjarong was mainly used in the royal court, members of the royal house, and the noble. This was because it was a product of excellent craftsmanship, from complex manufacturing process, in order to produce each individual workpiece. Therefore, Krueang Benjarong was extremely expensive and highly valuable in the past. If a person want to express his status and seek respect from other, having Krueang Benjarong in his possession was a great indicator of such person's social status in the past. For example, Krueang Benjarong can be used as part of the woman's dressing kit, as the container for powder, perfume, and other cosmetics. It can be used as dish, bowl, tea pot, etc. It can be used in the religious ritual and ceremony, such as, for the offering kit, holy water bowl. It can be used for decorating the household and important place, such as, tall vase or large bowl. Krueang Benjarong can be used as part of the building's architecture, such as, as Nah Ban (a building's component) and tile used in many important temples, during Rattanakosin Era.

There are many more creative forms of Krueang Benjarong products, all of which are highly attractive and valuable, designed with graceful patterns, made with meticulous process and excellent craftsmanship. From different eras, the stories of the country's past culture, tradition, custom, belief, arts and handicrafts, are being told through various pieces of Krueang Benjarong. This handicraft serves as the mirror that reflects the value of the past to the present day.





The method for making Krueng Benjarong

Materials and equipment

Equipment for making Krueng Benjarong

1. Brush
2. Spinning pad
3. Electrical oven for firing Krueng Benjarong;

originally the craftsman used charcoal and wood oven, before developed to gas and electrical oven.

Raw materials

1. Porcelain ware
2. Gold solution paint
3. Over Glaze and base paint



Modern method of making Krueang Benjarong starts from looking for ceramic wares, where the most popular is white ceramic ware, which is available with various raw materials, including Porcelain, Bone China, Stone Ware, etc. Nowadays, there are the method of glossy coat and matte coat. Glossy coat gives golden shine to the surface, while matte coat improves the sharpness of the golden paint pattern, and thus give the better feeling of temporary product than glossy coat.

The craftsman will place the ceramic ware on the spinning pad, in order to evaluate the potential area for painting the pattern, such as, determining which area should be used for the main pattern, which area should be used for sub-pattern, or which area should be left blank. The result is subject to individual craftsman's design. The next step is to place the grid, in order to facilitate the pattern drawing, and to create a clear pattern that isn't overlapping or disproportionate, or too small or too large.

Painting the pattern with golden solution, which is 12% golden solution paint from Germany, a product of highest quality. Most patterns used are specifically designed for Krueang Benjarong and applied with similar method. The variance in the finished product comes from the craftsman's creativity and imagination. Each individual craftsman is normally proficient with specific pattern, and most experience craftsman can paint with every pattern. In any case, a craftsman must first practice with various patterns, and his early work may take sometimes to finish, until he can memorize the pattern and paint it proficiently.

In the past, the craftsman used paint brush made of the fur from squirrel's tail. Nowadays, the craftsman use syringe instead, in order to save the golden solution paint, and produce finer pattern. Syringe allows the golden solution paint to run out constantly, and eliminates the need to put the brush into the palette frequently.



The painting of Over Glaze; Over Glaze is in a form of powder color, available in many colors, imported from Germany, Japan, Italy, and China. The craftsman must first crush the paint into fine powder before use. The ancient craftsman also mixed resin extracted from Elephant Apple, in order to improve the paint's cohesion. In the past, there were only five primary colors available, namely, black, red, green, yellow, and pink. Nowadays, since the patterns have been developed to the stories from Buddha's biography and Thai culture and tradition, more colors are required, and now the craftsman have over 16 colors to work with. The most expensive Over Glaze colors are pink and purple.

Painting is an important process. This is because no matter how elegant a craftsman may draft the base pattern, if the painter is incompetent, the result color will be ugly, and the workpiece will lose its aesthetic value. Therefore, the craftsman will experiment and try with different colors for several times, until the best choice of color for such workpiece is determined.

The choice of colors used will be determined with the use of golden solution paint; where the craftsman may use one, two, three, four, five, or even ten colors on a workpiece. A workpiece that requires many colors is usually made with the pattern that tells story of a tradition and culture, or a picture of the flower, or Thai portrait. The tactics of painting are, for example, Ekarong (mono tone paint), harmonious paint, and contrast paint. Each individual craftsman will have his own preferred colors.

After the painting is complete, the craftsman will check and finish any small details on the work piece, and apply golden solution paint onto the workpiece' cover, in order to improve the workpiece' attractiveness. This process requires extreme caution from the craftsman, as he is painting over the area with finished paint. After the last layer of golden solution paint is applied, the workpiece will be left to dried, and then prepared for firing in the oven.



Firing; to bake Krueang Benjarong, the craftsman now uses electric oven. The workpieces will be put into the oven, with appropriate spacing. The firing process starts from warming up the oven, with the temperature of 200 – 300 degree Celsius, for approximately 30 minutes. Then the heat will be turned up, to 800 – 830 degree Celsius, for approximately 6 – 8 hours. Afterward, the craftsman will wait and let the workpiece to cool down, for around 10 hours. Also, firing large workpiece is prone to damage than smaller piece, and if the temperature isn't high enough, the ceramic ware will not develop shinny surface.



Moreover, the craftsman nowadays develops the method of painting with bas-relief pattern, using oil paint. After the pattern is painted, the workpiece must be baked one more time. For smaller workpiece, the workpiece will be made by casting the mold, as another extra process. The mold will be made from mixing three types of soil with water, at the appropriate proportion, then leave the mixture to set and the sediment to form. Then the mixture will be poured onto plaster mold, and wait till it is set. The water will be removed and the mold will be left to dried, then it will be dressed and decorated, and fired for the first time, or the Biscuit Fire, in the gas oven, at the temperature of 780 degree Celsius, for approximately 8 – 10 hours. Krueang Benjarong made from this firing is called 'raw soil', and after it is painted with Over Glaze and fire again, it will become the porcelain or chinaware.



The most important components of making Krueang Benjarong is the white ceramic ware, and pattern painting, using colorful paint and beautiful design. Most importantly, the craftsman himself must be passionate with his work, and ready to dedicate his best to create the best possible Krueang Benjarong, in order to satisfy and impress the buyer. This is because Krueang Benjarong is quite expensive, and the buyer thus expects only the best for their money. In summary, Krueang Benjarong is made with complex process, excellent raw materials, and skillful craftsmanship, where the craftsman put in his best to create each individual workpiece with graceful pattern and design. Also, this handicraft requires Thai craftsman to use his imagination, to expand and improve Krueang Benjarong, the result of the local wisdom in the art and handicraft, in order to protect and preserve this national unique identity.





Data Source And documents used for reference.

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Handmade earthenware Celadon

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