Jizhou as Kiln Town: Writing the History of a Forgotten Past

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Draft only—not for quotation

I vividly remember one of my first meetings with Peter Bol after passing my general exams. It was not that I had no idea what I wanted to work on. I had taken Peter’s ‘local cultural history’ seminar on Wuzhou/Jinhua, a class that included several others present here: TJ Hinrichs, Stephen Chou, Tony DeBlasi, Peter Ditmanson, Hsu Ping-yü, Chu Ping-tzu. It was the first year Peter ran this seminar, and I think he was still reading his way into the materials then. (I can’t think what that seminar must have been like when Peter had been through every one of those texts, because even when Peter hadn’t read a text I had prepared, he still knew more about it than I ever did.) Anyway, we had all been allocated a Jinhua county and told to find relevant sources to illustrate each weekly theme. I became quite fond of ‘my’ county, Pujiang, and liked the idea of a local focus for my dissertation. So, after Peter had rejected one or two of my other choices, I had settled on Jizhou.¹ I just didn’t quite know how to proceed from there. Peter’s advice, at this first meeting after my generals was this: ‘Just read. Gradually it will become clear what was important to the people from Jizhou; they wouldn’t have written it down unless they had a specific intention.’ So that’s what I did, I ‘just read’. I got a bit distracted along the way, I moved to England, had two children, started a job at the University of Warwick, but basically I continued just ‘to read’.

¹ The area produced such eminent figures as the Southern Song statesman and poet Zhou Bida 周必大 (1126-1204), the Song chancellor and Song loyalist Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236-1283), the Yongle advisor Xie Jin 解缙 (1369-1415), or the late Ming philosopher Luo Hongxian 羅洪先 (1504-1564). These were not isolated individuals who made it big, they were part of a steady stream of successful candidates: in 1404, for example, among the 110 Jiangxi men who passed the jinshi examination, a total of 37 of them, including the three highest ranked men, hailed from Ji’an prefecture. More candidates from Ji’an passed the exams than from any other prefecture in Chinese history. As He Bingdi already pointed out in his classic study of Ming and Qing social mobility, Jiangxi Province produced the highest number of jinshi degree holders during the period 1371 to 1439, and Ji’an Prefecture was more prolific in producing jinshi degree holding than any other prefecture. He Bingdi, The Ladder of Success in Imperial China (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962): 226-7. The years 1400 and 1404 were outstandingly successful for Ji’an: the three highest ranked candidates in both years all hailed from Ji’an. No other prefecture ever managed to do this. He, The Ladder of Success: 248. See also Li Tianbai, Jiangxi zhuangyuan pu (Nanchang: Jiangxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 1997) and Liu Wenyuan, Ji’an gudai mingren zhuang (Nanchang: Baiduazhou wenyi chubanshe, 1995).
I often wonder about that advice now. I think Peter was telling me that I should not begin with my argument, and then read to find the evidence that could support that particular hypothesis. The argument should emerge ‘organically’, if that is possible, and emerge from the texts themselves, rather than be imposed upon them. That part I liked. What I had not anticipated was how hard I would find it to forge an argument out of those rather disparate readings I did. The strategy may well have suited someone who reads a complete wenji collection a day (and I know there are quite a few of you here!), but it worked less well for someone like me, for whom ‘reading’ is perhaps not actually the right verb to describe my engagement with texts.

Gradually, however, certain themes did begin to emerge from my ‘reading’. I had started out with an interest in the temples and shrines that dotted the local landscape, and certainly, the Southern Song and Yuan men from Jizhou had things to say about these temples and shrines. They expressed their concern over the practices they observed at temples, they shared their views on the ‘correct’ history of shrines and temples and their deities, and they praised the various members of the local community for their commitment to the wellbeing of these local institutions. In so doing, these authors were positioning themselves as active members of those communities, or so it seemed to me. Southern Song and Yuan men from Jizhou wrote about temples and shrines, because they saw them as crucial local institutions, through which they thought they could shape the moral culture of the area. The texts recording their visits to these Jizhou temples—some located on distant mountains, some positioned on strategic transportation routes, some part of vibrant towns—all became part of the landscape (and often still are): inscribed on large stones and placed in prominent locations, as I found on my travels through the Ji’nan region with Professor Liang Hongsheng during the course of my research. These texts profoundly shaped the way the landscape was experienced, not just at the time they were written but when travel increased during the Ming, and even now, when local tourist board officials are trying to find ways of attracting visitors to an area short on appeal for visitors. A text written for a Jizhou temple written by a prominent literatus of the Song or Yuan marked that temple (or shrine, or mountain top) as a site worth visiting, then as it does now, regardless of the fact that most visitors probably had their own views on how they should behave at that temple.

It also seemed obvious to me that in this part of the realm, the shift from Southern Song to a Mongol regime mattered remarkably little, or at least was not considered a shift worth discussing in the

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2 Peter describes a very similar trend in *Neo-Confucianism in History*, though he sees this specifically as a Neo-Confucian option, and he is less explicit about the importance of temples as site for moral ‘voluntarism’. See Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History*, 219.
texts. The shift that mattered in this region was the establishment of the Ming. When Jizhou became Ji’an prefecture, it became a place closely tied to the central administration. Under the protection of key individuals such as Yang Shiqi (1365-1444), examination candidates from Ji’an flourished like never before, and men from Ji’an began to hold crucial administrative posts at the imperial court. This had a remarkable impact on their writing about local institutions. Suddenly, authors were writing inscriptions for temples they had not actually been to, and they could rarely resist stating in their texts how high the positions were that had taken them away from their home towns in Ji’an. John Dardess had already described this pride in local success for one Ji’an county, Taihe, but it seemed to me that this pride and sense of local coherence was actually located at the capital, not in Taihe, or Ji’an itself as I think Dardess sees it.\(^3\) What happened at the temples themselves became a great deal less important for the authors of inscriptions, though the cultural value of those texts for the local temples only increased through this association with the central court. By the middle of the Ming, when Ji’an success had started to wane in the face of stiff competition from economically more versatile counties and prefectures, most notably of course those in the Yangzi delta, yet another shift occurred. The focus of local writers had shifted back to Ji’an, but this time not to temples and shrines, but to other community institutions: the lineage, the community covenant, schools and local academies.\(^4\)

It didn’t seem to me that I was rewriting the history of later imperial China with all this, merely that I was fleshing out some of the local detail that informs our wider picture. I also felt reasonably confident that I had been able to write about what was important to the authors I had read. I could see that writers in Jizhou had ‘specific intentions’, and that those intentions changed over time. I did not see, however, a strong engagement with the central concerns of our master. I am not saying nobody in Jizhou ever wrote about the importance of wen 文 or dao 道, of course they did, as some of you here have shown very eloquently in your work, but it is by no means their only concern, nor is it, at least for some of them, their main concern.\(^5\)

This brings me back to Peter’s initial advice. I think he is quite right to take the text as the starting point, and to take seriously what authors have to say. It has allowed Peter to write a sophisticated history of one of the driving forces that shaped the middle period cultural realm: the Neo-Confucianism that has such an impact on the politics, learning, belief, and society of the Song, Yuan, and

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3 John Dardess, *A Ming county.*
4 See Anne Gerritsen, *Ji’an Literati and the Local* (Brill, 2007).
Ming dynasties. It is interesting that it includes the last of those: society. I am not sure Peter would have included that chapter before he started teaching his Jinhua course, but then he took the ‘local turn’ and started taking ‘the social’ seriously, and hence *Neo-Confucianism in History* is a very different book from *This Culture of Ours*. (Now that he’s brought Michael Szonyi to Harvard, though, apparently he thinks he can leave ‘the social’ for Mike to deal with, so he can get back to what really matters.) But I think there is another issue here. What about what is not covered in the texts? If there is something that the men of Jizhou did not write much about, does that mean it did not matter? Surely, if a topic does not appear in someone’s *wenji* collection, that alone does not mean it wasn’t part of the cultured gentleman’s experience.

A few years ago I presented a paper on schools in Luling (one of the Jizhou counties) at a conference on local education in Taiwan. It was organized by Liu Hsiang-kwang 刘祥光 and Thomas Lee, and the latter told me that he had once written a paper on a very similar topic. It had been part of a larger project on Jizhou, which Thomas Lee had subsequently abandoned because of a discovery he had made: he had found out that Jizhou was the site of an extensive ceramics production during the Song and Yuan dynasties, something he had known nothing about for the entire duration of his research. ‘Did you know about those kilns?’ he asked me pointedly? As it happens, one of the guides on my first trip to Jizhou was a museum director by the name of Gao Liren 高立人, and Gao had shown us the remnants of kilns near Luling, so yes, I did know about the kilns. But I had never really paid any attention to what the presence of those kiln remnants meant, and to be honest, I didn’t really believe Gao Liren when he claimed these were the remnants of ‘important’ Song dynasty kilns. Why would they be ‘important’? None of the Song-dynasty authors I was reading was saying anything about those kilns, so therefore they could not have been very important.

But this is really where I have changed my mind recently, and where I have become aware just how much our preconceived sense of what is important shapes how we read. Even reading with an open mind doesn’t ever get us beyond the text; the materiality of life in Jizhou, for example, will always remain out of view if we focus on texts. If we begin with the material, with the wares produced at the kilns in Jizhou precisely during the time that many of the authors I have read were writing, and then work our way towards the texts, we should be able to write a fuller history of Jizhou.

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6 These are the chapter titles in Peter K. Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2008).
7 See also Gao’s book on the subject: Gao Liren 高立人, *Jizhou Yonghe yao* 吉州永和窑 (Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 2000).
Jizhou as kiln town

The Jizhou town of Yonghe 永和鎮, conveniently located on the banks of the Gan 赣江, was a site of early ceramics manufacture, with up to 24 kilns in operation, the remnants of which still shape the landscape today. Over time, Jingdezhen 景德鎮, located further northeast in Jiangxi, far outshone Yonghe in terms of output and global interest, but at least for a time during the Song and Yuan dynasties, Jizhou wares enjoyed some popularity, even beyond the ‘central country’ (zhong guo 中國).\(^8\) The reputation of Jizhou wares, however, suffered under the harsh judgment accorded to them by Cao Zhao 曹昭, author of ‘Essential Criteria of Antiquities’ (Gegu yaolun 格古要論), the influential fourteenth-century manual on the appreciation of arts and antiques.\(^9\) In this seminal text of 1388, Cao wrote about Jizhou wares:

Their colour is similar to purple ding ware. They have thick bodies of a coarse material and they are not worth very much money.\(^10\)

吉州窯

其色与紫定相類，體厚而質麄係，吉州窯者不甚直錢

Unfortunately for Jizhou wares, many later writers quoted Cao Zhao’s words, or the words of later editions of the same text, more or less verbatim. In 1591, for example, Gao Lian 高濂 wrote in ‘Eight discourses on the art of living’ (Zunsheng bajian 遵生八箋):

Then there are Jizhou wares. Their colour is purple, similar to Ding wares. The material is coarse and [the wares are] not worth much.\(^11\)

有吉州窯。色紫與定相似，質粗不佳。

At least Gao Lian changed Cao Zhao’s words slightly. Zhang Yushu 張玉書 (1642-1711), in Peiwen yunfu 佩文韻府, just quoted the first few lines of Gegu yaolun verbatim, as did Chen Yuanlong 陳元龍 (1652-

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8 On the Jizhou kilns, see Yu Jiadong 余家栋, Jiangxi Jizhou yao 江西吉州窯 (Guangzhou: Lingnan meishu chubanshe, 2002). See also Zhongguo guojia bowuguan and Ji’anshi bowuguan, Jizhou yao 吉州窯 (Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2004). On zhong guo 中央 as central country, see Bol, Neo-Confucianism in History, 12.

9 Cao Zhao, Gegu yaolun. The text has been translated in full: Sir Percival David, Chinese Connoisseurship: The Ko Ku Yao Lun (London, 1970). It is also discussed by Craig Clunas, Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China (Polity Press, 1991).


11 Gao Lian, Zunsheng bajian (Wenyuange Siku quanshu edition), 14.47a. This work, too, has been discussed by Clunas, Superfluous Things, 13-20.
1736) in his ‘Mirror origins of investigating things and extending knowledge’ (*Gezhi jingyuan* 格致鏡原) in 1735.\(^{12}\)

It seems unlikely any of these authors had ever seen Jizhou wares themselves. Why else the comparison to Ding wares? Ding wares come from kilns in northern China (Hebei), and are usually dated to the Song dynasty, with fine ivory-white bodies decorated with engravings and later mouldings under a colourless glaze.\(^{13}\) Far less common are Ding wares with purple and black glazes, and presumably it is the purple Ding ceramics Cao Zhao compares the Jizhou wares to. Jizhou wares, however, come in a much broader range of qualities, glazes, and designs than Ding wares, which suggests even Cao Zhao himself was also not familiar with the full range of Jizhou wares.\(^{14}\) Gao Liren distinguishes six main types of Jizhou wares: very early bluish-green wares (*qing you ci* 青釉瓷) and egg-white wares (*luanbai ci*卵白瓷), the more common (brown) black wares (*hei you ci*黑釉瓷) produced during the Song and Yuan dynasties, painted wares (*caihui ci*彩绘瓷), green glazed wares (*lü you ci*綠釉瓷), and finally sculpted ceramics (*diaoying ci*雕瓷). Each of these are further subdivided; the black wares, for example, include not only deep black glazes, but also mottled glazes with evocative names such as ‘hare’s fur’ (*兔毫纹*), ‘tortoise shell’ (*玳瑁斑*) and ‘partridge mottle’ (*鹧鸪斑*), and black wares with paper-cut appliqué, leaf, and flower patterns. The painted wares include a wide range of motifs on white glazed surfaces, and the sculpted wares include statuettes and animal shapes.\(^{15}\) The black wares in particular gained in popularity during the Song dynasty, in part because of the ever-growing popularity of the consumption of fine teas. The creamy white and light green teas were thought to taste best when served in simple dark-glazed bowls, and most prized were bowls with mottled glazes produced at the Jian kilns in Fujian and at the Jizhou kilns.\(^{16}\)

The frequent repetition of the statement about the thickness and coarseness of the Jizhou bodies also suggests uncritical repetition of Cao Zhao’s statement, although here recent research bears

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out this early observation. I have personally never lifted a Jizhou bowl, but the foremost UK scholar of Chinese glazes and ceramic materials, Nigel Wood, has described Jizhou bodies as follows: ‘The fired density of the Jizhou clays probably accounts for the unusual weight of many Jizhou bowls. These bodies seem to have been prepared from impure quartz‐mica porcelain‐stones and, even after preparation, often contain some fairly large grains of quartz.’\(^\text{17}\) In other words, Cao Zhao’s oft‐repeated characterisation of the bodies of Jizhou wares as ‘thick’ (hou 厚) and ‘coarse’ (cu 粗) may have been based on some personal experience.

Some, though not all, of the earlier descriptions of Jizhou ware added a further anecdote. Fang Yizhi 方以智(1611‐1671), for example, wrote the following in his 1664 ‘Small Encyclopedia of the Principle of Things’ (Wu li xiao shi 物理小識):

The Yonghe kilns in Jizhou were established during the Song dynasty. Until this day, there are vessels made by Shu Weng and Shu Jiao. The locals say that during the time of Wenshan, the kilns changed and subsequently declined.

This, too, was taken directly from Cao Zhao’s Gegu yaolun, but from the 1459 edition, which added substantially to the 1388 edition.\(^\text{18}\) The Percival David translation of this edition reads:

In the Sung Dynasty, there were [here] five kilns, among which Shu Kung produced the most commendable pieces in white and in brown. The big vases are worth several taels of silver; the smaller were decorated with delightful designs. It also produced very good crackled wares.

It is said that when Chief Minister Wen passed by the kilns, the wares in them turned to jade. Later, the kilns ceased to operate. The site of the kilns is still to be seen, although dwelling houses have been built on it. It is also said that jade cups and bowls were discovered there during the Yung‐lo reign period (1401‐1426). This might be true..... It has been so from the Yüan Dynasty down to the present day.\(^\text{19}\)

宋時有五窯書公燒者最佳有白色有紫色花瓶大者值數兩小者有花又有碎器最佳
相傳云宋文丞相過此窯變成玉遂不燒焉今其窯尚有遺跡在人家永樂中或掘有玉杯盞之類理或然也。。。自元至今猶然\(^\text{20}\)

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\(^\text{17}\) Wood, Chinese Glazes: 152.
\(^\text{19}\) David, Chinese Connoisseurship, 141-2. A footnote after ‘This might be true’ adds that ‘several characters appear smudged and illegible’.
\(^\text{20}\) Wang Zuo, Xinzeng gegu yaolun (1459) pp.33b-34a.
Archaeological studies have revealed more than five kiln sites within an area of about ten square kilometres on both sides of the Gan; most significant, apart from the Yonghe kilns, are the Peng family kilns (Peng jia yao 彭家窰), the Linjiang kilns 臨江窯, and the Wu family kilns (Wu jia yao 吳家窯). It is not clear which of these the potter Shu Weng was associated with, and from an early Qing version of the story, we gain little more detail:

During the Song dynasty, Jiangxi ceramics came from Yonghe in Luling. Shu Weng was skilled at making ornamental objects. Weng’s daughter was also very skilled. Her name was Shu Jiao. Some of the incense burners and vases in various colours were as valuable as Ge wares. I once obtained a bluish-white round dish and bowl with a glossy sheen. I filled it with water, and for a whole month it did not change. Seeing that, I knew this was an antique object.

宋時江西窯器出廬陵之永和市有舒翁工為玩具翁之女尤善號曰舒嬌其壚甕諸色幾與哥窯等價余嘗得一盤一盎質蒼白而光黝然以注水經月不變望之知為古物

Did the author, Shi Runzhang 施閤章 (1619-1683), wish to imply he had a genuine Jizhou bowl to hand? Is he suggesting there was a connection between this bowl and the famous Jizhou potters, father and daughter Shu? Probably not, and perhaps at this point all we can conclude is that despite the ubiquity of critical statements about Jizhou wares, for men like Shi Runzhang, Jizhou wares seem to have had some value.

The second part of the Gegu yaolun quote refers to the association between Yonghe’s potteries and Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236-1283), who hailed from Yonghe. In particular, this established a connection between the end of Wen’s life and the end of the productive period of the Yonghe potteries. Several stories circulate that create an explicit causal connection between the two. Shi Runzhang describes these events as follows (in the translation by Bushell):

Tradition says that the pieces worked by the potters were transformed in the furnace into jade, whereupon the workmen, fearing lest this should come to the knowledge of the officers, closed

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21 Zhongguo guojia boquguan 中国国家博物馆 and Ji’anshi bowuguan 吉安市博物馆, eds., Jizhou yao 吉州窯 (Beijing: Zhongguo she hui ke xue chu ban she, 2004), 7-8.
22 The character for Shu in Shu Weng should read 舒 rather than 書 as it appears in Xinzeng Gegu yaolun.
23 This story was also included in Zhu Yan 朱琰, Tao shuo 陶説 (Description of Pottery and Porcelain) 1774 (reprinted in 1914). Cf. the translation by Stephen Bushell, Description of Chinese Pottery and Porcelain being a translation of the T’ao-shuo, with introduction, notes and bibliography (Oxford 1910, reprint, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 48.
24 Shi Runzhang 施閤章 (1619-1683), Juzhai zaji 矩齋雜記 (Congshu jicheng xubian edition), 19.10a. On Shi, see his biography in Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period, p. 651. He gained his jinshi degree in 1649 and passed the boxue hongci examinations in 1679.
the doors and fled to Jao-chou. Even in the present day many of the potters at Ching-te Chen were formerly natives of Yung-ho, as we see stated in the Travelling Notes of Wu P’ing (sic), Prefect of Chi-an Fu.  

Another version of this story claims that Wen drew on the population of his native prefecture to fill his loyalist army to resist the Mongols. The potters of the Yonghe kilns left their profession en masse and joined the troops, hence the decline of the Yonghe ceramics industry. Such stories do little more than point to what remains an unresolved puzzle: when exactly and why did the kilns in Jizhou decline, and what, if any, is the connection between Jizhou’s decline and Jingdezhen’s flourishing. It certainly seems unlikely that Wen Tianxiang had anything to do with it.

To some extent, Jizhou’s pots, now distributed across major ceramics collections all over the world, speak for themselves: during the Song and Yuan dynasty, kilns throughout Jizhou but probably most notably in the town of Yonghe, just across the river from the Luling, produced a wide array of rather beautiful ceramics. Their existence in these collections proves they were valued and treasured, traded, collected and passed on. But what I am really interested in is whether anyone had anything to say about Jizhou as place of ceramic production. Did anyone create a connection between the place and the wares? The evidence is sporadic. The thirteenth-century Luling writer Ouyang Shoudao 欧阳守道,

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25 Shi, Juzhai zaji, 19.10a-b. Translation from Bushell, Description of Chinese Pottery, 48-9. We know Wu Bing hailed from Yixing 宜兴, another famous site of ceramic production, and served in Ji’an during the late Ming, but I have not yet located this text.

26 Thus far, I have found mostly informal references to this version of events. See, for example, ‘Gudai ciqi shaozhi guochengzhong de yaobian xianxiang’ 古代瓷器烧制过程中的窑变现象, http://www.cangdian.com/HTML/07/01/070114102508.html (accessed on 11 June 09). Apparently, the scholar of Jizhou ware Tang Changpu 唐昌朴 also holds this view. Tang Changpu, ‘Jizhou yao de xingfei wenti’ 吉州窯的興廢問題 in Xinan shifanyuan xuebao 1980.3, quoted in Yu Jiadong 余家栋, Jiangxi Jizhou yao江西吉州窑 (Guangzhou: Lingnan meishu chubanshe, 2002), 19. Yu himself does not agree, and bases this view on the archaeological evidence that reveals that the Jizhou kilns continued to be active throughout the Yuan dynasty. Yu, Jiangxi Jizhou yao, p. 23.

27 The most convincing explanation, in my view, is one that takes account of changing patterns in taste and consumption. Bob Mowry, for example, writes: ‘Most kilns that had produced dark-glazed stone wares in Song and Jin times either ceased production after the Yuan or turned to the manufacture of light-coloured wares in imitation of the newly popular porcelain made at Jingdezhen.’ Robert D. Mowry, ‘Chinese Brown and Black Glazed Ceramics: An Overview’ in Mowry et.al., eds., Hare’s Fur and Tortoise Shell, p. 38. Others talk of a major, but unspecified, natural disaster. See for example, Yu, Jiangxi Jizhou yao, p. 19.
who provided me with long texts about temples, shrines, schools and lineages for my Ji’an project, has only one reference to ceramics. It is a delightful piece that contrasts two individuals:

One of these works as a farmer and grows grain. His grain stores are always full, but where he lives there are no plastered walls and when he goes out his carriage has no canopy. He shapes clay to make vessels and uses plain cotton to make clothes. His social life is made up of the people he works with on the land. If you ask him what he makes, he says it adds up to a great deal. The other is someone from a grand family. Where he lives he not only has plastered walls but paintings and carvings, and when he goes out he not only has a vehicle with a canopy, but it is pulled by famous fine horses. He has rare curios for vessels and embroidered silks for clothing, and every day he has music and dance to entertain him. If a visitor asks him what he makes, he, too, says it adds up to a great deal.

The point of the piece is to establish a contrast between those who strive for what is real (wu shi 務實) and those who do not.28 If you ask both of them again about their income in some years to come, the farmer is making the same amount, and he enjoys the company of the same fellow workers, but the income of the rich man has dropped substantially and his friends have dropped away. It is the same with one’s devotion to learning: if you cheat on the truth (qi shi 欺實), you can endlessly gain new profits (xin yi wu qiong 新益無窮), but in the end you are left with nothing; the one who devotes himself to what really matters may have less, but will always have more than the cheat. In that stark contrast, the ceramics only serve to illustrate the point: the hard-working peasant’s plain ceramics are contrasted with the antique curios and fine embroidered silks of the rich man. He may be under the illusion his fine ceramics are ‘something’ but in the end they are ‘nothing’. A serious scholar and teacher, Ouyang Shoudao concentrated on personal, moral development, and his extant writings create the impression that there was no place for writing about ceramics amongst them. We know he was familiar with the town of Yonghe, but it only appears explicitly in his texts as the location of the ancestral shrine of a

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28 ‘Those who strive for what is real do this for what is on the inside, not for the outside. Those who do not strive for what is real, have nothing yet think they do, and believe their emptiness to be fulfilment.’
branch of the Ouyang family, not as a kiln site. Nonetheless, Ouyang Shoudao’s reference to ‘rare curios’ (zhēn wán 珍玩) can serve as a comment on what must have been a social practice of collecting and treasuring ceramics.

Some did write about Yonghe as kiln town. The early-Ming Huizhou poet Tang Wenfeng 唐文鳳, for example, wrote the following lines about Yonghe:30

Yonghe of old was a famous town,
For Yiguo [i.e. Wen Tianxiang], this was the family home.
Kilns [once] transformed vessels of unfired clay,
Now, the streets just have walls with broken shards.
The mountains and valleys were robbed of their stunning beauty,
For nature to yield its precious stores.
The lonely studio is still there,
In the vast expanse of long spring grasses.31

永和鎮
永和古名市/益國是家鄉/窯變胚胎器/街存瓦礫墻/山川奪秀色/天地啓珍藏/寂寞書室在/茫茫春草長

No explicit connection is created in the poem itself between Wen Tianxiang’s death and the end of production in Yonghe, although the introductory notes to the poem state that ‘after the gentleman died, they were no longer able to make pots’.32 Most striking is the image of an industry having taken its toll on the natural environment, foreshadowing similar comments that would be made about Jingdezhen’s mode of ceramic production, and indeed the cost to the natural environment of the potteries in Staffordshire, when Josiah Wedgwood started to produce the cream-ware that formed part of the British response to Chinese porcelains in the eighteenth century.33

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30 Tang Wenfeng 唐文鳳, zi Ziyi 子儀, hao Menghe 夢鶴. Tang hailed from Huizhou, and during the Yongle reign period, served as magistrate in Xingguo 興國 county in Ganzhou prefecture, just across the Ji’nan prefectural border in Jiangxi province. He died at the age of 86, and wrote Wugangji 梧岡集.
31 Tang Wenfeng, Wugangji (Wenyuange Sikuquanshu edition), 3.5a-b.
32 公生後器不能成. Tang, Wugangji, 3.5a.
33 The famous French missionary and Jingdezhen observer, Père d’Entrecolles (1664-1741), wrote: ‘The whirling flames and smoke which rise in different places, make the approach to Ching-te-chen remarkable for its extent, depth, and shape. During a night entrance, one thinks the whole city is on fire, or that it is one large furnace with many vent holes. Perhaps these encircling mountains form a
It seems to me that even sporadic references can be revealing, but it must also be a question of how we read and what we look for. We know, for example, that the early Qing author of the story told above, Shi Runzhang, visited Yonghe at least twice. In 1662, not long after Shi had arrived in Jiangxi to serve as circuit intendant in Huxi (Huxi dao 湖西道), he embarked on a boat trip on the Gan, which took them from Taihe to Yonghe, where they disembarked, and from there walked to their destination: the temple complex in the Qingyuan Mountains 青原山. Shi was full of praise for the beauty of the mountains, but on this occasion wasted no words on Yonghe itself. He travelled to the Qingyuan Mountains again in 1665, and he liked the area enough to contribute a preface to the mountain gazetteer he helped to edit, but only chose to write about the remote temples he visited on this trip. But perhaps now that we know that Shi Runzhang had some interest in ceramics and antiquities, and also spent some, albeit brief, time in Jizhou, it seems to me that we can ‘read’ his works in a different way, and ask different questions. Perhaps, ultimately, we can aim to construct a picture that includes the physical environment and the material culture in which the texts we read took shape.

In conclusion, let me say a few words about why I think any of this matters. Once again, I return to Peter’s own trajectory. Peter started with texts, which allowed him to say something about ideas, symbolic meanings, imagination and representation. If adding a social dimension to his work was his own idea, devoting about a decade of his career to Hartwell’s maps and turning them into an invaluable tool freely available for the use of the academic community was, I think, more of a moral duty for him, as was facing the challenge of Hartwell’s rather erratic prosopographical database. That, too, is about to become a tool that will change the field and the way we do Song history. We may still mostly start with


texts and ideas and symbolic meanings, but the prosopographical database allows us to embed those ideas firmly in knowledge about society, and the Chinese Historical GIS allows us to transfer that knowledge to maps. Suddenly we begin to see the physical environment from within which the ideas emerged. Could the next step be the material culture that was equally part of that physical environment? With material culture I don’t just mean the high culture of the visual arts or the economic history of the movement of objects, but the ways in which goods in different socio-cultural milieus are given meaning. It still relies heavily on text, but adds objects and draws on disciplines like art history and archaeology. I think when Jeff will talk to us about roads and sewer systems later today, and about archaeological evidence tomorrow, he will illustrate the connection between object and text in a great deal more depth than I have done. But it seems to me that by creating connections between texts and objects, we begin to read differently. And perhaps we begin to see not only what was important to the people of Jizhou, but what were perhaps ‘unimportant’, but equally influential forces that shaped what we read.