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Museo d'Arte Cinese ed Etnografico di Parma

## Jun Ware

Shards in the Collection of the Chinese  
Museum of Parma

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Lo scopo di questa pubblicazione è di catalogare la collezione di cocci Jun del Museo d'Arte Cinese di Parma. Gli autori hanno partecipato all'opera senza alcun lucro e finanziandola in toto, per fornire al Museo un modesto mezzo di raccolta fondi. L'iniziativa non avrebbe avuto esito senza la partecipazione di:

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# The Controversial History of Jun Ware

sabrina rastelli

Jun ware has been fascinating collectors and connoisseurs, both in the East and the West, for centuries and recently its dating has become the focus of a heated debate among scholars from all over the world. The wide admiration for Jun ceramics is easily justified by its beauty, which lies in the striking visual qualities of the glaze: bluish in colour, with hues varying from green to white, to sky blue and even lavender, and opalescent. On the basis of glaze effects and shapes, Jun ware can be classified in three main categories: the first, including domestic vessels (listed below), is characterised by a monochromatic glaze that either stops just before the foot ring and may or may not cover the base, or that stops three quarters down the body; a few specimens are fully glazed and fired on large spurs. The second also comprises utensils for domestic use, but the glaze is distinguished by pinkish-red to purple splashes that dramatically stand out on the bluish background; as in the previous group, the glaze stops either by the foot or well before it and rarely it fully covers the object. The third category is conspicuous for both shapes and glaze: forms are limited to a narrow range of flower vessels, while the glaze presents various effects: from monochromatic blue hues, to an assortment of purple transmutations on the outside, while the inside remains opalescent blue. Specimens belonging to this group have the base covered with so thin a layer of glaze that in most instances it turns reddish brown, and they are fired on many spurs arranged all around the base. Another outstanding feature of this category is the number incised on the pot's base, ranging from one to ten to signify the size: one is the largest, ten the smallest; for this very reason, this salient group is also known as "numbered Jun" in English, while Chinese scholars prefer to define it as "official Jun".

Jun ceramics belonging to the first two categories share a rather coarse and heavily-potted stoneware body that fires yellowish, buff or grey. As mentioned above, shapes are mainly everyday vessels, such as bowls, dishes and saucers showing a variety of different profiles, bottles, small jars and pillows. A typically Jun shape is the so-called "bubble bowl", distinguished by rounded sides and incurving rim; another is the globular jar, with its ovoid body and, at times, with two small loop handles on the shoulder. Apart from domestic utensils, there are also religious vessels, such as small incense burners, altar bowls and vases. The flower vessels, constituting the third class are characterised by finely grounded clay and dark grey body finely shaped into moulds. Forms include flowerpots with matching pot stands, as in the case of rectangular, hexagonal, five-lobed (haitang or crabapple), polylobed (kuihua or sunflower) and barbed (linghua or water caltrop) shaped ones, or unmatched containers, such as vases of the yangzhong (inverted bell) and zhadou (round receptacle with large trumpet neck) types, and drum nail (guding) pot stands. Other vessels covered with blue or purple Jun glaze are chujizun vases with flanges, guan jars and bowls of the wan and bo types.

## Location

The name "Jun" derives from "Junzhou", today's Yuzhoushi, in Xuchangshi, central Henan. The toponym appeared for the first time in 1184, during the Jin dynasty, when it was given to this area, previously known as Yangzhaixian. As it can be inferred from ancient literature and was the rule in ancient China, today's Yuzhoushi underwent many administrative name changes<sup>1</sup>: at the beginning of the Tang dynasty, Yangzhaixian was first subordinated to Songzhou, then to Luoyang and finally to Xuzhou; in 1078 it was under the jurisdiction of Yingchangfu, in 1182 it was upgraded from county (xian) to prefecture (zhou) and two years later it was named Junzhou. When Zhu Yijun (1563-1620) ascended the throne as the emperor of the Wanli era (1572-1620), the character "jun" in the emperor's name became a taboo word, therefore in 1575 Junzhou was renamed Yuzhou. It was downgraded to Yuxian in 1912 and in 1988 it became a county level town called Yuzhoushi. The 1552 edition of the Junzhouzhi explains that kilns firing Jun ware are located by the foot of the Dalu Mountain, in the western part of the prefecture, while tile kilns are around Guanjiougou<sup>2</sup>.

Another version concerning the origin of the name maintains that it derives from "Juntai", said to be an important kiln during the Song dynasty located just inside the northern gate of Yuzhoushi, where there used to be a temple with a natural rock terrace (tai)<sup>3</sup>. By comparing different ancient sources<sup>4</sup>, it may appear that the prefecture was designated "Junzhou" because of Juntai. This was the name of the place where the first heir to the throne of the Xia dynasty (20th-16th century BCE), king Qi, gave a magnificent banquet to legitimise the newly established power. Tang dynasty records mention a place 15 li south of Yangzhaixian called Juntaibei because of the slope under it (bei means "slope", "hillside"). They also report that inside the northern gate of the city, a temple to the founder of the Shang dynasty, king Tang, was built on a terrace and called Juntai as well. To distinguish the two places, the first used to be indicated as "Juntaibei", while the second became "old Juntai" (despite the fact that it was later). These sources testify to the existence of a locale called "Juntai", but its connection with Jun kilns was made much later in the Qing dynasty, in the wake of contemporary writers who stated that Jun ware had been made in the Song dynasty at Junzhou<sup>5</sup>. It is therefore more likely that the name derived simply from "Junzhou" which was the name of the prefecture when it produced so-called "numbered Jun".

<sup>1</sup> Qing Jiaqing (1796-1820) edition of the Yuzhou zhi; for the quotation see Henansheng 2008a, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ming Jiajing (1521-1567) edition of the Junzhou zhi; for the quotation see Beijing 2003, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Zhao Qingyun 2001, p. 41; Kerr 2004, p. 31; Henansheng 2008a, pp. 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Henansheng 2008a, pp. 2, 140 e 186.

<sup>5</sup> Nanyao biji; Lan Pu 1815, juan 2.

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## The Controversial History of Jun Ware

No matter what the origin of the name, it is now clear that the main kiln centre was Shenhouchen, comprising numerous sites scattered within 10 km on the surrounding hills, the most important being Liujiamen, Liujagou, Shangbaiyu (or Miaojiamen) and Xiabaiyu (or Zhangzhuang). Jun wares were also manufactured by many other kiln centres within Henan province and beyond its boundaries, and because of the very abundance of kilns sites, it is more practical to list them in a table as it follows:

### Jun Producing Kilns in Henan

County	Kiln centre	Kiln sites	Period of activity
Shanxian	Yezhugou	Yezhugoucun	
Lushanxian	Duandiancun	Liangwaxiang, Duandiancun	
Baofengxian	Qingliangsi	Dayingzhe, Qingliangsicun	in Jin and Yuan layer
Hebijishi	Hebijizhen		
Qixian	Qixian	Xiyuquancun, Qianzuicun, Xizhangcun, Huangdongcun	
Linzhoushi	Linxian	Dongxiahuancun, Lijiachangcun, Xixiejapingcun, Dongxiejapingcun, Dingjiagoucun	
Anyangshi	Anyang	Tianxizhencun, Beiancun, Beiqicun, Dongshancun, Nanshanyingcun, Beishanyingcun, Xishanyingcun, Zhenzhucun, Shibancun, Sancangcun	
Ruzhoushi	Yanhedian	Mangchuanxiang, Yanhediancun	
Xin'anxian	Xin'an	21 sites along the Zhen river and its tributaries	
Jiazuoshi	Jiazu	Dianhoucun, Lifengcun, Encun, Xiwangfengcun, Sihoucun, Dongzhangzhuangcun, Shibeicun, Gaoyao	
Dengfengshi	Dengfeng	Zhengzhuang, Lija???	
Xuchangshi	Wuloucun		
Linruzhen	Linru	Wugongshan, Taomugou, Chengou, Gangyao, Donggou, Chenjiazhuang, Huangyao, Sibanhe	
Tangyinxian	Tangyin		
Xiuwuxian	Xiuwu		



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## The Controversial History of Jun Ware

### Jun Producing Kilns in Hebei

County	Kiln centre	Kiln Sites	Period of Activity
Cixian		Guantaizhen-Pengchengzhen area, 10 sites	Yuan layers, but not in Song and Jin
Quyangxian	Dingyao	Jianzicun area	
Longhua	Longhua		

### Jun Producing Kilns in Shanxi Province

Hunyuanshan	Hunyuanshan	Daciyaobao, Guciyao, Qingciyaocun
Changzhi	Linfen jiexiu Huairan Huozhou Xiangyuan Jianfen	

### Jun Producing Kilns in Inner Mongolia Province

Qingshuihe  
Baotouyao

In a detailed study on the development of the Jun ware system, Quan Kuishan, after surveying the production of known Jun-manufacturing kilns, advanced an hypothesis on the formation of the Jun system: from the original kiln centres at Shenhoushen and Yezhugou, which began to fire Jun ware at the end of the Northern Song dynasty, under the Jin regime, other Henan centres south of the Yellow River, namely Lushan, Qingliangsi, Ruzhou and Xin'an, manufactured this genre. Between the end of the Jin and the beginning of the Yuan dynasty, the technology crossed the Yellow River to expand not only in Henan, but also in Hebei, Shanxi and even Inner Mongolia, thus forming a wide system.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Quan Kuishan 1999, pp. 59–65.

# The Controversial History of Jun Ware

## Technology

The striking visual aspect that sets Jun glaze aside is due to minute glass droplets within the glaze scattering blue light. Basically, Jun glaze is an emulsion of mutually insoluble glasses, technically known as “liquid-liquid phase separation”<sup>7</sup>. This happens upon cooling only within a certain compositional range of silica, alumina, calcia and potassia, as Kingery and Vandiver proved in their ground-breaking research in 1982<sup>8</sup>. The ideal compositional range that generates opalescence is in fact very close to the composition of celadon glazes, but while the colour of the latter is due to iron oxides suspended or dissolved within the glaze, that of Jun is an optical effect triggered by the particles of immiscible glass whose dimension is finer than the wavelength of blue light, but because they refract light through a transparent solid medium, the glaze appears blue (Rayleigh Scattering).

Although the composition must fall within the ideal range, another determining requisite is the thickness of the glaze: if the coating is not thick enough, liquid-liquid phase separation does not occur, nor thus opalescence, as can be seen on Jun specimens where the glaze runs thin, typically along mouth rims and the edges of moulded features. Jun shards show a thick layer of glaze applied not in multiple tiers, like Ru or Guan wares, but in a single coating on the biscuit fired body. If the glaze has to be thick and it is applied in one coat, raw-glazing is a highly unsuccessful method, while the porous biscuit rapidly absorbs the water from the glaze suspension resulting in a rather thick glaze layer<sup>9</sup>. The first firing, without the glaze, is at lower temperature, while the second reaches 1300°C. The firing temperature is essential to get true blue Jun: when it does not achieve 1300°C, the glaze appears pale, and under 1250°C specimens show a rather unappealing yellowish tone.

On some Jun specimens the milky streakiness and the sugary mattness appear particularly conspicuous: these visual traits are the result of the development of wollastonite crystals growing from the lime-rich droplets in the glaze emulsion, a phenomenon encouraged by especially slow cooling<sup>10</sup>.

As mentioned above, the second category of Jun ware is characterised by purple splashes: these are the result of copper pigment applied over the dry blue glaze by brush, either in broad strokes or washes. During firing at full heat, copper diffuses into the glaze generating those cloudy and diffused purple dashes that after centuries still make Jun ware appear modern. Sometimes the copper brushwork shows a few small green dots: these are the result of the re-oxidation of locally high concentrations of copper on the glaze surface. When applied in a wash, the copper merges with the glaze underneath developing spectacular purple surfaces.

An effect visible on some Jun specimens are the so-called “earthworm tracks”, that is, trailing marks in the glaze caused by cracks developing while the single thick layer of glaze was drying before firing. As soon as the glaze material starts melting, it fills the fissures, but the different composition of the early molten glaze, in comparison with that of the final coating, produces the “earthworm tracks”, that is, trailing marks in the glaze caused by cracks developing while the single thick layer of glaze was drying before firing. As soon as the glaze material starts melting, it fills the fissures, but the different composition of the early molten glaze, in comparison with that of the final coating, produces the “earthworm tracks”<sup>11</sup>. This is therefore a technical fault, but as in other instances in Chinese art, it was instead regarded as a positive feature and a mark of authenticity.

A sub-group of Jun ware is called “green Jun” because of the very colour of the coating. They are not defined celadon because the glaze is thick (as in Jun ware) and opaque and applied on shapes typical among Jun ceramics. Chemical analyses have demonstrated that the composition of green Jun is markedly lower in silica and higher in alumina than blue Jun. It has already been pointed out that the opal-blue colour that sets aside Jun ware is generated by the special rate of the main glaze components and that this compositional range is not far from that of common celadon. However the compositional difference between green and blue Jun is so consistent to suggest that the first is not the result of a miscalculated glaze recipe, but a deliberate effect<sup>12</sup>.

Jun specimens were individually fired in saggars standing on pads or rings in order to prevent the vessel from sticking to the bottom of the saggarr. The firing temperature was raised to 1280-1300°C. The emulsion formed at 1200°C or slightly below during cooling, if the latter was slow enough. This was guaranteed by the dense packing of saggars in the furnace and the fact that kiln was surrounded with earth.

Some scholars like to trace back the origin of Jun glaze to Tang dynasty black ware with whitish brushwork. If it is true that some kilns producing this variety later manufactured Jun glazes as well, the author believes that the time gap between the two genre and most of all the incompatibility of the two glazes – one black, one opal blue, one painted with another glaze, the other with copper pigment – make the two types distinct.

<sup>6</sup> Quan Kuishan 1999, pp. 59–65.

<sup>7</sup> Wood 1999, p. 119.

<sup>8</sup> Kingery and Vandiver 1983.

<sup>9</sup> Wood 1999, p. 123.

<sup>10</sup> Wood 1999, p. 123.

<sup>11</sup> Wood 1999, p. 123.

<sup>12</sup> Wood 1999, p. 123.

# The Controversial History of Jun Ware

## Literary History

The history of Jun ceramics is rather controversial and in fact it is the focus of a heated debate among scholars from all over the world. Jun has been classified as one of the five famous official kilns of the Song dynasty, together with Ding, Ru, Guan and Ge. This is now an obsolete concept, as recent archaeological finds have proved that two of the five varieties were not Song dynasty official wares. It is however interesting to analyse how Jun ceramics came to be included among the five famous official kilns, as it offers some revealing observations.

Jun ware is not acknowledged in any Song or Yuan texts, nor is it listed in the *Ge gu yao lun* (Essential criteria for antiquities)<sup>13</sup>, the first Chinese text that systematically analyses ancient ceramics commenting on their aesthetic qualities and specifying place and time of production, published at the beginning of the Ming dynasty, in 1388. This does not necessarily mean that Jun ware had not been manufactured: neither the Yaozhou kilns are discussed by Cao Zhao, however we know that they reached their pinnacle in the Song and early Jin dynasties. The omission may be due to the fact that by 1388, Yaozhou celadons were no longer appreciated, while Jun, despite its intrinsic beauty, had not yet caught the attention of the social elite.

The first referral to Jun kilns is not in connoisseurial manuscripts, but in historic records: the 1461 edition of the *Da Ming yitong zhi* (Unified records of the Ming dynasty)<sup>14</sup> reports that the kiln centre was in Junzhou, thus revealing that at that time the correct name was “Junzhou”, rather than “Jun”, and that the chief factories were located in today’s Yuzhoushi, rather than Linru, where many 20th century scholars thought they were.

The first literary text on material culture to mention Jun ware is Song Xu’s *Song shi jia gui bu* (Precepts of the Song family), written during the Hongzhi reign period (1487-1505). After introducing Chai, Ru, Guan, Dong, Ge, Dingzhou, Yu, Peng, Longquan, Jizhou, Shufu, Xiang and Huo kilns, it states that Junzhou ware is deep purple or powder blue combined with purple, and it is very thick. Two important points are to be noted here: the first is the confirmation that in the mid Ming dynasty Jun ceramics were referred to as “Junzhou” ware. The second is that Jun is the last described genre<sup>15</sup>.

In the first half of the 16th century, Lu Shen (1477-1544), an accomplished litteratus and collector, in his *Yan shan ji* (Collectanea from Majestic Mountain), explicitly refers to “one Junzhou gang jar” in which he displays an ornamental rock that his family has had for a long time, to “a pair of sunflower-shaped vases” and to “a sunflower-shaped pot stand”, besides which he needs nothing else to decorate his study. The important point here is that Lu Shen refers to matching flower vessels, thus indicating that in the mid Ming dynasty this was the admired type of Jun, as well as that some Jun pots were employed to display ornamental rocks<sup>16</sup>.

As mentioned above, the *Jiajing* (1522-1566) edition of the *Junzhou zhi*, published in 1553, does not comment on the aesthetic qualities of Jun ware, but, like the already quoted *Da Ming yitong zhi*, reports on the geographical position of the kilns and it is even more accurate by asserting that they are located by the foot of Daliushan mountain in the western part of Junzhou.

In 1591 Gao Lian published his acclaimed *Zun sheng ba jian* (Eight discourses on the art of living), a book dealing as much with medicine as with aesthetics, extensively quoted by contemporary and later writers<sup>17</sup>. Of the eight chapters in which it is divided, the sixth is dedicated to the “pure enjoyment of cultured idleness”, that is, to everything related to collecting. Republished a few years later as an independent text with the title *Yan xian qing shang jian* (Notes on the pure appreciation of intellectual pleasures)<sup>18</sup>, it comprises four sections: the first discusses Guan, Ge, Chai and Ru wares, the second concentrates on Ding, the third analyses wares from all kilns and the last one concerns specimens from the old and new Rao kilns. Junzhou is described in the third section after Longquan, Zhang, ancient Ci(zhou), Dashi, Jizhou and Jian, just as in the *Song shi jia gui bu*.

Roughly contemporary with Gao Lian’s writings is *Qing bi zang* (Pure and arcane collecting),<sup>19</sup> published in 1595, which groups together Chai, Ru, Guan, Ge and Ding as the most important kilns, followed by Jun and Longquan. Of the Junzhou wares, the author, Zhang Yingwen, states that the best are red like cosmetic rouge, followed by green like spring onion and purple like blank ink; those with pure colour and the numbers one and two inscribed on the base are beautiful, while those with mixed colours are not worth fetching. Zhang then continues with the description of Longquan ware, considered inferior to Jun, but when he comes to discuss early Ming blue and white ceramics, he comments that these are superior to Longquan and Junzhou (this time listed in the opposite order). What the *Qing bi zang* reveals is that, although Chai, Ru, Guan Ge and Ding wares are regarded as a league on their own, and Jun is regarded as inferior to early Ming blue and white, it has nevertheless climbed a few steps, as it is listed immediately after the most praised wares and above Longquan. It is worth noticing that the designation adopted by Zhang Yingwen is still “Junzhou”.

<sup>13</sup> Cao Zhao 1387, juan 3; for an English translation of this text see David 1971.

<sup>14</sup> Shenzhenshi 2006, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Shenzhenshi 2006, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Shenzhenshi 2006, p. 3; Qin e Zhao 2007, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Gao Lian 1591; for a detailed study on this text see Clunas 1991.

<sup>18</sup> Gao Lian.

<sup>19</sup> Zhang Yingwen 1595, juan 1; for a comment on this text see Clunas 1991, p. 33.

## The Controversial History of Jun Ware

Among early 17th century texts on material culture, *Bo wu yao lan* (Essential survey of all things of interest), compiled by Gu Yingtai between 1621-1627, is noteworthy. One of its chapters is entirely devoted to ceramics, listed in the following order: Ru, Guan and Ge, then a paragraph each to Ding, Longquan, Jian, Jun, Dashi, Boli and Raozhou. Here Jun ware seems to lose a few positions, but it is still very appreciated.

There is another Ming dynasty document mentioning Jun ware, on purpose left for last because of the uncertainty surrounding its dating. The work in question is the *Xuande dingyi pu* (Manual of Xuande [1426-1435] ritual vessels), attributed to Lü Zhen (1365-1426) and Wu Zhong<sup>20</sup>. Qin Dashu argues that although it is said that the manuscript was compiled by imperial order, it is not recorded in any historical document of the time. Moreover it often quotes from the *Da Ming hui dian* planned in 1372 with the title *Di Ming hui dian*, changed to *Da Ming hui dian* by imperial edict in 1496, published in 1508 and revised during the Longqing (1567-1573) reign period. Finally Qin points out that the death of one of the main authors, Lü Zhen, coincides with the first year of the Xuande reign<sup>21</sup>. It is therefore more likely that the text belongs at the end of the Ming dynasty, also because the passage quoting Jun ware recites that in the court collections there are Chai, Ru, Guan, Ge, Jun and Ding wares. The *Xuande dingyi pu* thus surprisingly lists Jun before Ding, while from the sources discussed above, it appears that only at the very end of the 16th century the status of Jun ware among the literati was improved. If a text of the calibre of the *Xuande dingyi pu* had included Jun ware among the best Song ceramics, surely this would have affected later Ming writings. It influenced Qing dynasty literature instead.

In his *Yanshan zhai zaji* (Jottings from the Inkstone Mountain studio)<sup>22</sup>, Sun Chengze (1592-1676) groups together Chai, Ru, Guan, Ge, Jun and Ding and is the first to associate Jun ware (he is praising Jun vases) with the Song dynasty – so far, although Chai, Ru, Guan, Ge and Ding wares had been singled out, their date had never been specified. However the trend is now set and, according to *Nan yao bi ji* (Notes on southern kilns)<sup>23</sup>, Jun ware was fired at Junzhou during the Northern Song period when many flower vessels were made. The author then lists the characteristic colours: fire red, rosy purple, donkey liver, horse lungs, moon white and red like the clouds at sunset. This palette, variously extended and modified, will always be debated in later writings. The unknown author also notes that the numbers inscribed on the base serve for matching vessels. In another passage he does not include Jun among the ten great wares of the Song and Ming dynasty (Chai, Ru, Guan, Ge, Ding, Longquan, Xuande, Chenghua, Jiajing and Wanli), nevertheless he considers Jun as an official ware. So does Zhu Yan in the roughly contemporary *Tao shuo* (Discourses on pottery), published in 1774: in the chapter dedicated to ancient ceramics, he discusses Ding, Ru, Guan, Xiuneisi, Ge and Longquan as Song, and then continues with the examination of Jizhou, Xiang, Dong, Jun, Cizhou, Jian, Shanxi and Gaoly (Koryo) wares. Regarding Jun ceramics, Zhu compares quotes from previous texts describing and ranking the various colours typical of the genre.

The discussion on the glaze colours is central to Lan Pu's discourse as well, although his text, the *Jingdezhen tao lu* (Account on Jingdezhen ceramics), compiled at the end of the 18th century, but published in 1815, has a slightly different approach from the connoisseurial one. As the title suggests, the *Jingdezhen tao lu* addresses Jingdezhen manufactures. This includes the re-production of Jun ware, made, according to Lan Pu, since the beginning of the Northern Song dynasty at Juntai, then called Junzhou and now (in 1815) known as Yuzhou. Following what is by now a consolidated convention, Lan Pu comments on and classifies Jun glaze colours to conclude by remarking that Jingdezhen reproductions, with their white body and red glaze, are even superior to the originals.

At the beginning of the 20th century books such as the *Yao qi shuo* (Discourses on kiln products) by Cheng Zhe, published in 1913, or Liu Zifen's *Zhu yuan tao shuo* (Ceramic discourses in the bamboo garden), appeared in 1925, down to the 1934 edition of the *Zhongguo taoci shi* (History of Chinese ceramics), reiterated as an unshakable truth the concept that Jun was an official ware made during the Northern Song period. In this period, another concept, destined to bias later studies on Chinese ceramics, emerged: Ding, Ru, Guan, Ge and Jun wares came to be considered as an inseparable group defined as the "five famous official kilns of the Song dynasty". It is most likely that the ever higher recognition of Jun ware and its inclusion among the top five kilns of the eulogised Song dynasty were encouraged by connoisseurs and collectors who obviously had an interest in establishing an ancient and prestigious genesis for this genre.

The list of ancient literary sources down to the 20th century is vast<sup>24</sup>, however the analysis of this selection shows how the appreciation of Jun ware progressively grew in time and the genre was not only listed among important wares of the past, but it slowly became praised as a Song dynasty kilns and finally it was recognised as one of the five official wares of the Northern Song period. Ming and Qing literary sources have generated a lot of confusion, perpetuated in the 20th century, over Jun ware: the short descriptions seem to refer to what we conventionally define as "flower vessels" or "numbered Jun" or "official Jun". As we shall see in the paragraph dedicated to the archaeological history of the Jun kilns, this specific category was not produced during the Northern Song dynasty. The type of Jun ware manufactured at that time and during the following Jin and Yuan dynasties was the opal blue with or without copper-red brushwork – that is what has been termed as the first and second category at the beginning of this paper. Some of these specimens were of excellent quality and could have served the imperial court, but there is no evidence that this ever happened. On the contrary, at present the only available evidence is that it did not attract the elite's attention until the end of the Ming dynasty.

The anticipation on behalf of Qing authors of the production time of "official Jun" to the Northern Song period caused the overlapping of the different types of Jun ceramics. Conversely, the two main groups ought to be considered separately, almost as if they were two distinguished genre, as Margaret Medley suggested in the 1970s. As a matter of fact the time of production and the fruition of domestic and flower vessels was very diverse.

<sup>20</sup> The *Xuande ding yi pu* is a catalogue of antiquities collected by the court in the Xuande reign period [1426-1435] allegedly compiled by Wu Zhong and Lü Zhen 吕振 (1365-1426) and others for internal use at court and thus not published until the Jiajing era; it then circulated in 8, 20 or 3 juan.

<sup>21</sup> Qin Dashu 2002, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> *Shenzhenshi* 2006, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Nan yao bi ji*; probably written during the Qianlong era, that is 1736-1795, by an unknown author. It discusses the Jingdezhen kilns of the Ming and Qing dynasties, one section is dedicated to Song and Ming ceramics imitated during the Yongzheng (1722-1735) and Qianlong reign periods.

<sup>24</sup> For a detailed summary of sources on Jun ware see Lo Huichi 1997, pp. 110-116



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## The Controversial History of Jun Ware

### Western Literature

Since the end of the 19th century, when western scholars and collectors first encountered Jun ceramics, they were immediately charmed by its seductive beauty and began to collect it passionately. Given the novelty of the subject and the paucity of available information, to begin with western scholars relied heavily on Chinese sources and thus could not avoid to be influenced by them. As a consequence, the overlapping of the different categories and their attribution to the Northern Song period were preserved in early western writings. So in 1937 Hobson, quoted by Lee in 1945, wrote that numbered Jun vessels were made in the 12th century and entered the Song court when the latter expressively chose Jun kilns to supply it with flower vessels<sup>25</sup>.

However, as early as 1953, Basil Gray observed the similarity of some "official Jun" shapes with Ming dynasty sancai specimens and suggested that Jun flower vessels may have dated to the beginning of the 15th century<sup>26</sup>. But he changed his mind later on, influenced by the traditional view, and dated Jun flower vessels to the 12th century<sup>27</sup>.

On the contrary, Margaret Medley never went back on her footsteps and always maintained that the main kiln centres for Jun ware were located in Linru and Yuxian, which began production in the Song dynasty. Purple splashes were introduced at the beginning of the 12th century, while flower vessels appeared in the 14th century and continued into the Ming dynasty. This conviction was based on the observation of the technical challenges posed by their shapes, which could have been realised only by adopting a complex system of moulds<sup>28</sup>.

Mary Tregear discussed both domestic and flower Jun vessels in her book devoted to Song ceramics, pointing out that Jun ware was manufactured from the 11th century to the Yuan dynasty included. Regarding flower vessels, she did not take any clear position and dated the specimens published in her book to the Jin-Yuan period<sup>29</sup>.

Roughly a decade later, Shelagh Vainker listed Jun as one of the five great wares of the Song dynasty, made by Linru and Yuxian kiln centres, but she specified that the dating of Jun flower vessels had not been established, with eminent Chinese specialists trusting they were Song, while western scholars believing they were the last phase of Jun production in the Yuan or early Ming dynasties<sup>30</sup>.

Rose Kerr also recognised that the dating of Jun flower vessels was problematic with Chinese and western authorities divided on the subject, but very diplomatically she did not openly take sides<sup>31</sup>.

The Handbook of Chinese Ceramics written by He Li of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, published in 1996, favoured the traditional view and clearly stated that official factories were established at the Jun kilns in Yuxian. She traced back to the Tang dynasty the production of Jun ware which then ended in the 15th century.<sup>32</sup>

The analysis of western literature here proposed is far from being exhaustive, but it is an extensive enough sample to understand that generally speaking, western scholars harboured some doubts on the Song origins of Jun flower vessels, however they usually followed the traditional view associating this typology to the court. The lack of archaeological evidence was one of the main reasons for their uncertainty and it is indeed thanks to recent archaeological finds that some western and Chinese scholars have reconsidered the position of Jun ware in the history of Chinese ceramics. It is therefore essential to explore, albeit briefly, the archaeological history of the Jun kilns.

<sup>25</sup> Hobson 1937, p. 27; Lee 1945, pp. 53, 59

<sup>26</sup> Gray 1953, p. 31.

<sup>27</sup> Gray 1984, p. 82.

<sup>28</sup> Medley 1974, pp. 90-96; Medley 1989, pp. 118-122.

<sup>29</sup> Tregear 1982, 118-126.

<sup>30</sup> Vainker 1991, pp. 101-105.

<sup>31</sup> Kerr 1993, pp. 151.

<sup>32</sup> Li He, 1996, pp. 133, 135-136, 142.



# The Controversial History of Jun Ware

## Archaeological History

The archaeological history of the Jun kilns, which, as it often happens, tells a different story from that narrated by ancient literature, starts in 1950 with the surface investigations carried out by Chen Wanli, the father of Chinese ceramic archaeology. His (and other eminent archaeologists') research was part of a much wider plan aiming at localizing the manufacturing kilns of ancient wares, which culminated in the compilation of a new edition of *Zhongguo taoci shi* (History of Chinese ceramics), published in 1982. The abundant archaeological finds recorded in the last three decades have sometimes surpassed this handbook, which nevertheless remains an important reference book.

Chen Wanli's survey began in Linruxian (today's Linruzhèn), where at the time the search for Ru kilns concentrated<sup>33</sup>. As the kilns he investigated did not yield Ru shards, but instead provided considerable amounts of celadon and blue Jun fragments with or without copper-red splashes, he decided to extend his investigation to the neighbouring Yuxian. Following the information in the Qing dynasty edition of *Yuzhou zhi*, which located the kilns in the western part of the prefecture, he concentrated his efforts at Yezhugou, a small village five km west of Shenhouchen, in neighbouring Shanxian. Here he collected a large quantity of shards from vessels for daily use coated with opal blue glaze, either monochromatic or purple-splashed. On the basis of these finds, Chen Wanli advanced a revolutionary theory: the appearance of Jun ware, to be considered a type of celadon, was closely related to the decline of Ru ware and its production time, at least as far as Yezhugou was concerned, was from the Jin to the Yuan dynasties. This was also suggested by the fact that, as reported in the *Yuzhou zhi*, today's Yuxian was first named "Junzhou" during the Jin dynasty in 1184. Regarding Jun ware with copper-red brushwork, Chen concluded that it dated to the Mongol period, as the abstract nature of the decoration and the less refined quality of both body and glaze pointed out. As to the delicate question of the official use of Jun ceramics, Chen omitted any reference. The hypotheses of the intimate connection between Ru and Jun wares and the dating of the latter to the Jin dynasty were reiterated a few years later in Chen's *Zhongguo qingci shi lue* (Brief history of Chinese celadon) and were also embraced by a contemporary scholar, Guan Songfang<sup>34</sup>, and by the handbook *Zhongguo ciqu* (Chinese ceramics), published in 1963<sup>35</sup>.

Despite the rich archaeological finds from Henan to Hebei through Xin'an, Tangyin, Anyang and Cixian, the question of the provenance of Jun flower vessels, believed to be Northern Song official ware, remained unsolved, as none of the shards collected at the above-mentioned sites matched this type and were attributed to the Yuan dynasty. This prompted another archaeological investigation, organised by the Palace Museum and carried out in 1964 at Yuxian, Linru and Shanxian by Ye Zhemin, Feng Xianming, Fang Guojin and Du Naisong – the Linru exploration was meant indeed to search for the Ru kilns. The results of the surveys where published a few months later: Ye Zhemin presented the finds from Yuxian<sup>36</sup>, while Feng Xianming related on the investigation carried out at Linru<sup>37</sup>.

At Yuxian, the Palace Museum team inspected the Liujiamen, Liujiagou, Shangbaiyu and Xiabaiyu sites in the Shenhouchen area, and Bacun, a small village 25 km north-east of Yuzhoushi. On the basis of what had been discovered, Ye concluded that Shenhouchen was the leading kiln centre for Jun ware and that it had begun production in the Song dynasty, when it manufactured the best Jun ware. According to Ye, these extremely refined specimens were not appreciated by the Song court, and objects for display, such as pen basins, lian containers, zun vases and lu burners, were refined objects of appreciation for the ruling class. After the Song dynasty, domestic vessels, despite their wider production network, did not maintain the previous excellent technology and in the Yuan dynasty Jun ware inexorably declined. The survey at Bacun revealed that, although this site also produced some Jun specimens, their quality was not very high and the kiln centre belonged instead to the Cizhou system, as demonstrated by the great quantity of samples decorated in black on white background collected on site.

In the Linru bulletin, Feng Xianming reported that out of the eleven investigated sites, eight, distributed in Yanhedian and Dayudian, yielded Jun shards of the strong serviceable type. As their characteristics were comparable to those observed for the Shenhouchen samples, given also the geographical proximity of the counties, Feng applied Ye Zhemin's criteria and concluded that the kilns producing high quality specimens, such as Donggou in Dayudian, were active in the Song dynasty, while the lower quality fragments from Chengou and Tiaomugou in Yanhedian were interpreted as later products. From these comments, it appears that in the 1960's the leading scholars were convinced not only that Jun ware began to be manufactured in the Song dynasty, but also that "high quality" was synonym with "Song dynasty" just like "Yuan dynasty" surely meant "decline". These rigid equations have proved to be a dangerous burden for the correct interpretation of the development of Chinese ceramics.

Among the many questions regarding the Linru kilns, which once again had yielded celadon and Jun shards, but no Ru ware, Feng Xianming also had to address that of the relation among different genres. He believed that in northern China during the Song dynasty there existed four major ceramic families, i.e. Ding, Yaozhou, Jun and Cizhou, whose formation was not casual. According to him, the fact that Jun was not recorded in ancient literature as serving the court, like Ding and Yaozhou, was not crucial, because the quality and shapes of some handed down Jun flower vessels bore some common features with Ding, Ru and Guan wares. Further evidence was the style of the characters *fenghua* incised on the base of some handed down pieces, which was identical to that seen on official Ru ware, and finally the fact that in the Jin dynasty the *Fenghua Hall* no longer existed, as it was a pavilion in the Song imperial palace at Kaifeng. Feng concluded by asserting that under Jin rule, it was unlikely that the main Jun kiln centre, namely Shenhouchen, fired vessels for the Southern Song court, therefore it must have been established during the Song dynasty, rather than the Jin period, as Chen Wanli had suggested.

<sup>33</sup> Chen Wanli 1951a; Chen Wanli 1951b.

<sup>34</sup> Guan Songfang 1958, pp. 25–26.

<sup>35</sup> Jiangxisheng 1963.

<sup>36</sup> YE Zhemin 1964, pp. 27–36.

<sup>37</sup> Feng Xianming 1964, pp. 15–26, 9.

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## The Controversial History of Jun Ware

In 1973, because of the capital construction programme in Yuzhoushi (still Yuxian at that time), the Henan Department of Cultural Relics and Archaeology intervened inside the city's ancient wall by the north gate with a campaign that unfolded in three seasons between 1973 and 1975 (a fourth one was carried out in 1986). This time the archaeologists did not restrict themselves to surface investigation, they explored the area by drilling and excavating a few key points. The results were sensational: eleven kilns, some circular, some "horse shoe"-shaped and a few rectangular ones, were unearthed together with workshops; in some cases a distribution plan with three kilns encircling a workshop was clear. The archaeologists discovered samples of Ru (meaning Yaozhou type), Yingqing, Cizhou type with black decoration painted on white background, Temmoku, and of course Jun ceramics. The latter were coated with sky blue, bean green, milky, purple red, dark green or cream coloured glaze; shapes included all sorts of flower vessels and high-footed bowls characterised by sturdy, but fine-textured body covered with thick and lustrous glaze. On the basis of these finds, Zhao Qingyun, author of the report, concluded that Jun ware was first produced at the beginning of the Song dynasty, when the quality was excellent and the types various. The best kilns were those in the Shenhouchen area, particularly the Liujiamen ones, which mainly produced sky blue specimens, together with some dark green, milky and purple pieces; among the fully glazed samples, the most frequent shapes were bowls with small ring handle (ba xi), chrysanthemum plates (juhua pan), saucers with everted rim (zheyuan die) and lidded boxes (gai he). Zhao then summarised the development of Jun ware as follows: early Song dynasty pieces were the best, but their quantity was limited. At the end of the Song period, Jun kilns north of the Yellow River fell in the hands of the invading Jin dynasty, therefore the demand for Jun ware south of the Huang He increased dramatically. At the same time, in order to satisfy the needs of the imperial court, the Song ruling class, besides plundering private kilns, dispatched officials to supervise the firing of Jun ware (at sites south of the River) and established official kilns dedicated to the production of ceramics for the court. Unfortunately Zhao Qingyun does not elaborate on this debatable reconstruction of the history of Jun kilns.

In the same paper, Zhao made two more important statements, destined to influence many later studies on Jun ware. The first correlates Jun flower vessels with emperor Huizong: the Juntai kilns provided the pots to display the miniature trees and rockeries in the park that in 1105 emperor Huizong ordered to be realized in the eastern capital. But once again Zhao Qingyun did not explain the reasoning behind this assumption. The second dates the flourishing period of Jun production to the reign of emperor Huizong (r. 1100-1125) on the basis of the discovery of a coin mould inscribed Xuanhe yuanbao, corresponding to 1119-1125. What is not specified is that this mould was not found in one of the stratigraphic layers of an excavated trench, but collected nearby, therefore it should have not been considered as scientific evidence for the dating of best quality Jun ware. Recently the authenticity of the coin mould has been challenged because it does not conform to many contemporary moulds and on the reverse it bears an inscription that assigns it to an earlier reign period.

After this excavation, most Chinese scholars traced the origin of Jun ware back to as early as the Tang dynasty, recognised as its prosperous phase the Northern Song period, during which the Juntai kilns produced "numbered Jun" for the court, and believed that its decline began with the Jin conquest, while the Yuan regime was responsible for its extinction<sup>38</sup>. Only a few specialists, among whom were westerners, were not totally convinced that Jun flower vessels were official ware for the Northern Song court.

Between 1980 and 1981 a new survey in the area already explored in 1964 located 111 (148 according to the Yuzhoushi Administrative Office for Cultural Relics) new sites, thus showing the enormous scope of the Jun kiln centre in Yuzhoushi<sup>39</sup>.

However fruitful, this investigation did not dissipate the doubts surrounding the periodization proposed after the 1973-75 excavation, and in 2001 Qin Dashu launched a new archaeological campaign, in which the author had the privilege of participating for a short period of time<sup>40</sup>. The aim of the team, jointly composed of members from both the Institute for Archaeology and Museology of Beijing University and the Henan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, was to establish when Jun ware was first made and how it developed in time, in the attempt to solve the dispute among scholars on these very topics. As the Jiajing (1522-1567) edition of the Junzhou zhi, published in 1553, had indicated and the 1960s investigation had confirmed, Liujiamen, in south-west Shenhouchen, was the original kiln site of what then became the Jun complex and for this very reason the joint team began its work precisely from Liujiamen.

The campaign was very successful (it was declared one of the top ten excavations of 2001) and the accurate stratigraphic reading allowed for a scientific interpretation of the finds. The activity of the excavated sites was divided into three periods and four phases, starting at the beginning of the 12th century and ending around the middle of the 14th century. This periodization was based not only on relative stratigraphy and analysis of unearthed material, but also on comparisons with dated specimens, in order to be more reliable. Reporting in full the excavation results is beyond the scope of this paper, but they can be summarised as follows.

<sup>38</sup> Cao Ziyuan 1984; Henansheng 2008a, p. 169.

<sup>39</sup> Cao Ziyuan 1984; Henansheng 2008a, p. 169.

<sup>40</sup> Beijing 2003, pp. 26-52.



**First period, early phase:**

in this phase, the Lijamen kilns manufactured their most exquisite pieces. The main product was celadon (57%), followed by biscuit (21%) and Jun (13%); very small quantities of white and black wares were also produced. There was a great variety of shapes, usually small, but excellent and regular, some of which imitated gold and silver ware. On Jun pieces, the glaze was applied rather thinly, the resulting colour was tasteful and uniform, but where the coating ran particularly thin on the edges, it turned ochre. Very few samples were decorated with large copper red splashes that often covered the whole surface, some others were coated with sky blue glaze on the inside and red on the outside. Celadon samples were characterised by bluish green glaze, sometimes even spring onion green (congcu), transparent and glassy. On both celadon and Jun open forms, the glaze stopped by the foot and the base was also coated; the technique consisted of fully glazing the object and then shaving the base of the foot ring, or fully glazing and then firing the piece on spurs which left big scars, unlike those employed for Ru ware which were extremely small. Each object was fired in its own saggars.

**First period, late phase:**

in comparison with the previous period, specimens give the impression of a certain deterioration: quantity, quality and variety decreased, biscuit-fired pieces increased (52%) revealing their unsuccessful rate; celadon remained the main product (36.9%), followed by Jun ware (4.5%). A few shapes disappeared and generally speaking, the foot ring became wider and thicker. Spring onion green celadons became rare and the bluish green ones were suffused with yellow. The sky blue Jun glaze was no longer as tasteful and uniform as in the previous phase, with its mottled effect and the colour often turning either dark blue or almost white. Very few pieces were red-glazed, instead purple spots were regularly applied inside bowls and dishes. In this phase, the glaze tended to stop by the foot, the base usually left unglazed, occasionally showing drops of glaze as if done at random.

The glaze of white wares was truly white, applied on half the body which could be fully or half coated with white slip.

Objects were still fired each in its own saggars, but none of them was fully glazed and placed on spurs.

**Second period:**

considerably different from the first. Judging from the amount of unearthened samples, production intensified, but biscuit-fired pieces shot to a staggering 79.5%, while celadon constituted 16.4% and Jun 3%; white and black wares also increase and sancai made its appearance. Shapes now included big size incense burners, xi washers, pen basins and meiping vases, but characteristic pieces were large bowls with lobed sides and barbed (water caltrop) rim, small lobed plates and large xi washers fully glazed and fired on spurs. In general shapes lost their balanced round profile in favour of a bulging upper body that contrasted with the tapering lower part. Both glaze and body quality worsened in comparison with the previous phase, as testified by the many impurities in the body visible through the transparent glaze. Celadon, albeit shiny, assumed a dark nuance sometimes suffused with yellow; very few samples maintained their bluish green and glossy appearance. Jun glazes remained bright and glossy, usually light sky blue, but because of the varying firing conditions, they could turn sky blue, greyish blue, milky and even a sombre reddish brown (huizhe). Purple splashes were frequent, on wan bowls and pan dishes they assumed the shape of patches or streaks. The glaze of white ware became egg white with a greyish tone.

The vast majority of the objects produced in this period was coated in glaze stopping before the foot, except for a few guan jars and xi washers which were fully glazed and then shaved or alternatively fired on spurs.

**Third period, early phase:**

the relative layers have yielded the highest amount of samples, which show that both quantity and variety were at their highest point. There were several changes in comparison with the second period: biscuits were still the most abundant find at 78%, while finished products consisted of celadon (14.5%), Jun (2.2%), white (2.2%), and black (2%) ceramics. The production of white ware in particular prospered, with many pieces decorated in black on white background and some showing red and green enamelled motifs. Representative shapes were small incense burners with two ear handles, large incense burners with appliqué motifs, large jars with straight neck and meiping vases. The profile of bowls and dishes tended to be skewed with not large radius, making the object look angular. The foot ring, often wide and thick, became small with the walls splayed towards the exterior, while the base had a central nipple; in general the foot was rather carelessly executed.

Jun specimens manifested great changes in the coating colour, with a further decrease in light sky blue while the quantity of milky glazes increased; the hue of purple blue and brown-green glazes varied irregularly and repeatedly on the same pieces and it tended to run badly. Many samples grew a layer of white needle-shaped crystals the interface between body and glaze, indicating long cooling after firing. The glaze layer that resulted was rather thick and uneven, with strong opalescence, shiny surface, and densely distributed tiny holes (called "palm eyes"). On large shapes appliqué decoration began to appear. The quantity of wan bowls, pan dishes and guan jars with purple splashes increased. Dark green celadons suffused with yellow grew in number, the glaze was still lustrous, but insufficiently warm and humid.

White ware also saw an incremental increase, but the quality was lowered with the glaze colour often resulting grey white or yellow suffused, dim and with many black impurities showing through.

Except for a few xi washers and guan jars, which were glazed down to the foot, in most cases the glaze did not reach the foot and the manufacturing in general was insufficiently refined. In this period cylindrical saggars were adopted to fire piled up white ceramics, but the bare circle inside many Jun specimens revealed that the piling-up technique was employed also for Jun ware.

**Third period, late phase:**

in this phase the relative amount of biscuits fell to 61.4%, while celadon and Jun wares increased respectively to 31.1% and 6.9%, both white and black ceramics diminished. Shapes became monotonous, represented by small wan bowls and pan dishes, big xianglu incense burners, meiping vases and lianzuoping, that is, vases with joint support; characteristic objects were large incense burners with heavy appliqué motifs and lianzuoping decorated with applied pushou mask. The profile of bowls and dishes was often straight with a slight outward curving. In comparison with the previous phase, the foot ring was rather regular, not many samples showed the central nipple on the base, but in many cases the latter had a tilted surface rising towards the outside and lowering in the middle. Both body and glaze quality were comparable to the previous phase.

Jun pieces tended to be coated with a thick glaze layer that ran badly and the result was not homogeneous. Purple was the most frequent colour for the glaze, while dark purple blue was rare, but truly beautiful. The few sky blue specimens sported a deep nuance. On the surface of milky Jun glazes, the white and light blue colours clearly mingled and flowed. There were also greyish blue, greyish green and sombre reddish brown Jun wares. On the same object the glaze hue changed in depth, it was shiny, but insufficiently refined and showed many "palm eyes". Purple red splashes were less frequently applied.

Celadon mainly showed two tones: a rather dull, dark green suffused with yellow, or a light bluish green, similar to the spring onion green of the early period, very transparent and glassy.

No object was fully coated: the glaze always stopped before the foot.

Besides white ceramics, Jun and celadon wares were also fired in piles loaded in cylindrical saggars.

On the basis of careful stratigraphic analysis, presence of dated objects, such as coins, comparisons between excavated pieces and datable ones, and historic context, archaeologists have suggested a plausible periodization, summarised in the following table:

First period, early phase	1101-1125	Song dynasty, beginning 12 <sup>th</sup> C.
First period, late phase	1127-1160	From Jin invasion to mid 12 <sup>th</sup> C
Second period	1161-1234	From mid 12 <sup>th</sup> C. to end of Jin dynasty
Third period, early phase	1235-1307	From Yuan conquest to beginning 14 <sup>th</sup> C.
Third period, late phase	1308-1368	Yuan dynasty, 14 <sup>th</sup> C.

The author does not believe that archaeological strata can be dated to the exact year, but the periodization proposed by Qin Dashu and his team is very reliable, if precise years are substituted by approximate times.

Regarding the history of the Liujamen kilns, the 2001-02 excavation bulletin points out that they underwent two developing and two declining phases<sup>41</sup>. Since production began at the end of the Song dynasty, the quality of both Jun and celadon wares was extremely high. Jun in particular could compete with Ru, Ding and Yaozhou ceramics and thus may have catered for the court and high ranking government officials, but at present this is impossible to ascertain<sup>42</sup>. The geographical proximity between Yuzhou and Baofeng encouraged technology transfer between the two kiln centres, which shared similar raw materials. Generally speaking it seems that Jun potters adopted many techniques first implemented by their Ru colleagues: from applying a thick layer of glaze on biscuit pieces, to firing on spurs fully glazed specimens, to making opalescent sky blue glaze. However Jun ceramicists of the Song dynasty invented a unique and stunning effect by adding copper red pigment. The Liujamen kilns are noteworthy also for the celadon they produced, distinct from both Linru and Yaozhou type.

The Jin conquest over the Song was long and bloody, it brought death and disruption to the Yuzhou area. This is reflected by the decline in both quality and quantity observed on samples unearthed from the so-called "first period, later phase" cultural accumulations, discussed above.

The enthronement of emperor Jin Shizong (1161-1189) delivered a certain stability to the country: the relationship with the Southern Song empire became relatively stable and the economy recovered. Production at the Liujamen kilns improved again, although it never matched the excellence of the first period. The opal blue glaze technology was adopted by many other kilns in Henan and, as a consequence, Jun ware gradually shifted from sheer refinement to a more popular style.

With the Mongol invasion, northern China once again was thrown into chaos. The situation slowly improved with khans Kublai (1260-1294) and Temur (1294.1307) who, in order to revitalize the handicraft industry, had craftsmen organised in corporations controlled by local authorities. As a consequence, private affiliations also formed and thrived. At Shenhouchen this translated into the establishment of many small kiln sites, revealing a high presence of private enterprises. Although ceramic quality diminished, quantity and variety increased and the production area broadened further. Nevertheless Jun ware had by now embarked on the journey towards decline, as importance was no longer attached to quality, but to quantity.

During the 14th century, Longquan and Jingdezhen ceramics, besides supplying the court, also invaded the common market both in south and north China, thus encouraging the downfall of the Shenhouchen kilns.

In 2004 the construction of a residential compound in the old Yuzhou Pharmaceutical Factory, 300 meters away from the area excavated in 1973-75, prompted a salvage excavation by the Xuchangshi Cultural Relics Working Team and the Yuzhoushi under the direction of the Henan Provincial Institute of Archaeology and Cultural Relics. The fruitful results were announced a year later and presented at the Jun kiln conference in 2005<sup>43</sup>. Four furnaces, 215 waste pits, 27 water wells and hundreds of ceramic fragments were brought to light. "Numbered Jun" samples were retrieved from waste pit T0417H1 and from four more pits in trench T0501, but they differ in various details from the 1974 finds: they are not as fine, their shapes are bigger and include other forms besides flower vessels, such as purple glazed ewers with square spout, the numerals are not incised on the base, but on the cloud-shaped foot or the foot ring, some pieces are complete (while in 1974 only fragments were discovered), a group is coated with purple glaze (previously thought to be an early Ming imitation made at Jingdezhen), another, without numerals, sports a bright turquoise coat, and yet another an aubergine glaze. Unfortunately, being a salvage excavation, it was not well controlled and once again no adequate stratigraphic analysis was produced. This makes dating more difficult. The involved archaeologists have proposed a Yuan date for the T0417H1 group, on the basis of the presence of stem cups and specimens coated with turquoise glaze, whereas the second group is assigned to an earlier period, as coins dating to 1156 were also unearthed.

In 2008 the final report of the 1973-75 excavation (so far presented only as a bulletin) was published as a lavish volume. The second chapter is dedicated to the archaeological finds, concentrated in four areas, which, on the basis of the prevalent ceramic genre they have yielded, they have been respectively named Jun, Ru (meaning Yaozhou type), Tianmu (i.e. black) or black-decoration-on-white-ground kiln area. The stratigraphy of all the presented trenches curiously includes only two ancient layers: the first attributed to the Ming dynasty, the second to the Song period.

<sup>41</sup> Beijing 2003, pp. 48-50.

<sup>42</sup> Beijing 2003, p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> Guo Peiyu 2005; Guo Peiyu 2007; Li Baoping 2008.

The large quantity of shards from flower vessels were all discovered in the Jun kiln area which, besides this typology, also yielded a very few black, white, and black decoration on white ground samples. The Jun fragments were all unearthed from waste pits, the richest being H7, located in the Song layer and dated to the middle to late Northern Song period.

Jun specimens for domestic use were unearthed in small quantities from the so-called Ru and black-decoration-on-white-ground kiln areas. The shape repertoire is confined to bowls of the wan and bo types, the former showing various profiles, and pan dishes. The glaze is monochromatic, either pale sky blue or sky blue, it may or may not cover the exterior of the foot ring, but it always coats the base. These are all dated to the Northern Song period, while a handful of samples retrieved from the Jin-Yuan cultural stratum in trenches T17 and T18 (respectively in the Ru and black-decoration-on-white-ground kiln areas) are assigned to this later date<sup>44</sup>. The objects in question, wan bowls, pan dishes, a lid and a saucer, are coated with a pale sky blue, sky blue or milky glaze stopping before the foot ring and leaving the base bare. Only a few pieces show unremarkable copper red splashes, usually very small, that cannot be compared with the stunning specimens that grace ceramic collections all over the world. The new finds, not unearthed from excavated sites, but collected here and there and therefore devoid of their archaeological context, present similar characteristics.

Judging from the quantity and quality of the unearthed Jun vessels for domestic use, none of the sites excavated in 1973-75 seems a leading kiln centre for this genre.

In the archaeological report, the Henan Provincial Institute of Archaeology and Cultural Relics reiterates that Jun was one of the five official kilns of the Song dynasty providing flower vessels to the imperial court. This conclusion seems to have been attained without an adequate stratigraphic analysis – how is it possible to have a Song layer directly beneath a Ming one in all the excavated trenches? – and on the basis of a corrupted dating method: as the flower vessels are Northern Song, the stratum in which they were found thus belong to that period. The fact that the few non-Jun pieces brought to light together with flower vessels' samples are rather coarse in quality and do not show typically Song features was ignored, as was the detailed study on shapes realized by the Shenzhen Institute for Cultural Relics, Archaeology and Authentication, presented at a conference in 2006.

Regarding the history of Jun ware, the 2008 report states that the Juntai (that is, the site by the north gate of Yuzhou town) kilns were established at the beginning of the Song dynasty as popular factories, directly or indirectly influenced by many other kiln centres in Henan province, among which are Huangdao in Shanxian and Zhaojiamen in Shenhoushen, both producers of so-called "Tang Jun"<sup>45</sup>. At that time the main product of the Juntai kiln was celadon of the Yaozhou type, while sky blue Jun ware was manufactured in small quantities; the objects were fully glazed and fired on spurs. In the middle Song period, corresponding to the reigns of emperors Zhenzong (997-1022) and Renzong (1022-1063), Jun ware was greatly developed, increasing the variety of forms, refining their shaping and improving the glaze, now evenly applied and shiny. Jun ceramics manufactured by official kilns (when were they established?) supplied the court, while popular kilns producing celadon, white, black and Cizhou type wares satisfied the people's demand for vessels for domestic use.

In the late phase of the Northern Song dynasty, Juntai kilns were monopolised by the imperial court to produce exclusively for the palace. This stimulated further the refinement of manufacturing techniques and the kilns specialised in production of gorgeous vessels for the display of flowers and plants, while objects for daily use disappeared.

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<sup>44</sup> Henansheng 2008a, p. 125.

<sup>45</sup> Henansheng 2008a, pp. 141, 144, 149-153.

## Conclusions

After considering literary sources, both ancient and recent, and archaeological evidence, it is now possible to draw some conclusions on the history of Jun ware.

In the 11th century one of the two main ceramic genres produced in northern China was celadon of the Yaozhou type, that is grey-bodied stoneware coated with transparent green glaze that enhanced the beautiful carved or moulded decoration underneath. The Qingliangsi kilns at Baofeng, Henan, also manufactured it, but during the second half of the century, potters began to experiment with translucent bluish glazes. The specimens unearthed during the 2000 archaeological campaign at Qingliangsi clearly reveal these first attempts, among which an opalescent bluish glaze also appears<sup>46</sup>. However, the most congenial type happened to be that universally known as “Ru ware”. This was so beautiful to attract the attention of Huizong (r. 1100-1126), the emperor aesthete, who monopolized the Qingliangsi kilns to cater exclusively for the court. The imperial patronage must have stimulated Ru potters to refine further this genre, and also set a new aristocratic taste that favoured undecorated pieces fully coated with thick, subtle and smooth bluish glaze.

The spreading of this new aesthetic preference among the upper classes and the requisition of the Ru kilns by the court may have inspired other factories to manufacture translucent bluish glaze. Liujiamen was one of these, but rather than imitating Ru ware, potters perfected the opalescent type, destined to be known as “Jun”. Why this happened is a matter of pure speculation: maybe, once Ru ware was requisitioned by the court, it was prohibited to fire it, or it was too difficult to reproduce, or simply local raw materials were more compatible with Jun effects. As discussed in the paragraph on technology, opalescent blue is achieved only if the percentage of silica, alumina, calcia and potassia falls within a certain compositional range, but given the vast spread of this technology at dozens of kilns in Henan and beyond, it seems that once grasped, it was relatively easy to achieve. On the contrary, the subtlety of Ru glaze proved to be too great a challenge and in fact no private kiln accomplished it.

At the beginning of the 12th century, the main output of the Liujiamen factories consisted of celadon, while Jun was a secondary product, as far as quantity was concerned. The quality of both was in fact of the highest level, so high indeed that, as Qin Dashu has pointed out, they could have catered for the court. Whether they really did is impossible to ascertain, but they must have satisfied the refined taste of the local elite. The demand for superior ceramics may have inspired Liujiamen potters to experiment with copper and create the stunning contrast between purple-red brushwork and blue background.

From archaeological evidence available at present, it appears that Liujiamen was the leading centre for Jun ware, however its history does not necessarily coincide with the history of Jun ware in general, as dozens of kilns were later activated in Shenhouchen alone. Most probably Liujiamen represents the establishment of this beautiful genre and its development from an extremely refined ware to a more popular one, following the Jin conquest. This does not mean that the foreign regime determined the downfall of the genre: Jin specimens unearthed from Liujiamen are very appealing, although in comparison with Northern Song fragments, they are not as exquisite. Archaeological evidence has demonstrated that during the second half of the Jin dynasty, this kiln centre experienced a positive trend, however the market started to broaden, as did the production region. This probably caused an inflation of Jun ware, which induced factories to opt for a more popular style. The same pattern is common to other kiln centres, such as Yaozhou at Huangbaozhen.

Returning to the development of Jun ware, the Liujiamen kilns have not yielded any so-called “numbered Jun” samples, which so far have been unearthed only at the Juntai site, located just inside the northern gate of Yuzhoushi old city wall, a few km east of Shenhouchen. This peculiar circumstance singles “official Jun” out from mainstream production. Technologically it is a type of Jun, with its opalescent blue glaze and the use of copper, however the fact that shapes are all related to the display and growth of plants and flowers, and copper is not applied in splashes, but all over the exterior of vessels is another distinctive trait that casts “numbered Jun” aside. Finally the fact that the samples were all unearthed from waste pits points to the practice established by the Southern Song palace to smash defective pieces originally fired for imperial use and bury them at the kiln site to prevent them from reaching the open market. But to which court were numbered Jun destined? As Margaret Medley noticed, the elaborate shapes of Jun flower vessels could only have been realized by using a complex system of moulds, which did not exist before the 14th century. But with the material available in the early 1970s, it was impossible to elaborate further on this brilliant intuition. Archaeological excavations should have been enlightening on the subject, but because of the lack of adequate stratigraphic analysis, it is difficult to date, even relatively, both the 1973-75 and 2004 finds. The very few non-Jun specimens unearthed together with numbered fragments in 1973-75 do not advocate the Song dynasty. The turquoise and aubergine glazed pieces discovered in 2004 suggest a late Yuan or early Ming date, supported by the detailed stylistic study carried out by Guo Xuelei and Liu Tao of the Shenzhen Institute for Cultural Relics, Archaeology and Authentication. The results of thermoluminescence tests, executed on both flower vessels and common Jin-Yuan Jun fragments, tend to show that the first group is roughly hundred years later than the second<sup>47</sup>. But unfortunately this cannot be considered as conclusive evidence, because TL tests always include a margin error of one hundred years. Nevertheless it is an additional point that challenges the Song dating. The 2004 excavation could have filled the gap of the 1973-75 one, but the significant differences between the two finds prevent it. In particular the difference in quality poses the question of status: did both sites serve the imperial court? If only the more refined 1973-75 type did, was the other an imitation destined to a slightly less demanding consumer? The difference in the wares unearthed together with Jun pieces raises the question of time: numbered Jun was probably manufactured for a period of time longer than previously thought, from the Yuan to the Ming dynasty. This in turn brings up another question: why do we take for granted that numbered Jun were imperial ceramics? Is it plausible that flower vessels used by Mongol khans continued to be ordered by Ming emperors? In my view both the 1973-75 and 2004 finds were fired within a short period of time, which does not necessarily coincide for the two sites, although the gap, if there is one, cannot be long. Jun flower vessels were extolled by men of letters, who had made collecting and displaying precious object an essential part of their lives, in their connoisseurly writings from the latter part of the 16th century. This means that this type of ceramics circulated rather freely among the literati – an unlikely circumstance if it had been an official ware. Moreover, the fact that it was collected by Ming emperors starting from the Wanli reign (1573-1620) also challenges its previous employment as official ware: imperial specimens would have entered the palace collection at the time of their manufacture. But if Jun flower vessels had not served the court, for whom had they been fired? And why was the production area so restricted<sup>48</sup>?

To solve these questions, further research and new discoveries are paramount. In the meantime, it is important to note that the view, according to which numbered Jun vessels are not Northern Song, but instead late Yuan or early Ming, is widely accepted in the west<sup>49</sup> and by most scholars in China. Only a small group of Chinese experts continues to defend fiercely a Song date and their imperial status<sup>50</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> Henansheng 2008b.

<sup>47</sup> Li Baoping 2008, p. 69.

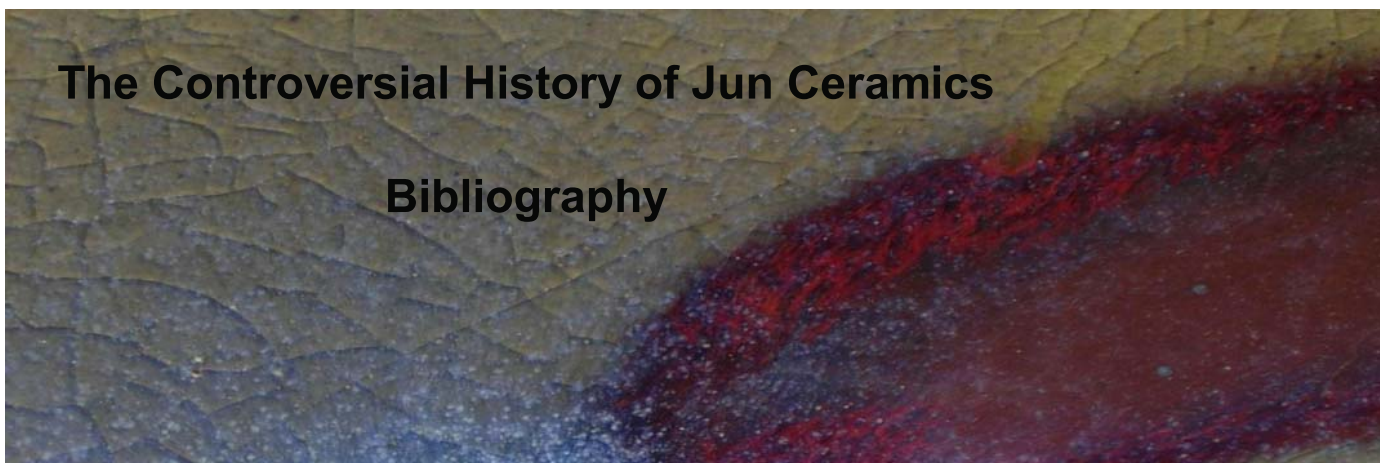
<sup>48</sup> This perception can obviously be refuted by future discoveries.

<sup>49</sup> Kerr and Wood 2004, p. 601.

<sup>50</sup> Feng Xiaoqi 2007, pp. 51–56.



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