

# The Concept of the Five Famous Wares of the Song Dynasty —A Modern Invention

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**Abstract** The concept of the five famous wares of the Song dynasty is a fundamental theory that has influenced both researching and learning about Chinese ceramics. Archaeological excavations carried out since the 1950s and particularly during the past two decades have provided modern scholars with many and precious pieces of information that have deeply changed our understanding of the history of Chinese ceramics. They have also undermined the concept itself, but when discussing Ding, Ru, Jun, Guan or Ge experts seldom resist the temptation to remind that it is one of the five famous wares. The aim of this paper is to trace back when and how this definition was coined, by combing through Chinese sources.

**Key words** five famous wares China ceramics ceramic literature Song

The concept of the five famous wares of the Song dynasty (Songdai Wuda Mingyao 宋代五大名窑) is a fundamental theory that has influenced both researching and learning about Chinese ceramics. At the end of the 1980s, Song wares were classified as either official or popular. The first category was constituted by the so-called five famous wares of the Song dynasty, namely Ding (定), Ru (汝), Jun (钧), Guan (官) and Ge (哥). Ten years later, while researching for my PhD thesis, I began to doubt the exactness of this theory, but I explored the problem only from the perspective of the Yaozhou (耀州) kilns (Rastelli, 2008). Then archaeological excavations, particularly those carried out in the past two decades, have seriously undermined the concept, the most obvious cases being the findings at Shenhouchen (神垕镇) in 2001 (北京大学中国考古学研究中心和河南省文物考古研究所, 2003) and by the old Pharmaceutical Factory in 2004 (郭培育, 2005, 2007). The re-dating of Jun ware and the still open question of Ge ware have encouraged this investigation into the origin of the theory of the “Songdai Wuda Mingyao” .

## 1 Yuan, Ming and Qing literature

As the literature written in the second half of the 20th C. implies that this concept had been formulated centuries ago, I began to comb through ancient texts, only to discover that none of them

formulates the concept of the five famous wares of the Song dynasty (Table 1). None of the Yuan, Ming or Qing sources sets aside Ding, Ru, Jun, Guan and Ge as superior wares. Jun is not even mentioned until the second half of the 15th C. and the only text singling out Chai (柴), Ru, Guan, Ge, Jun and Ding, as wares present in the palace treasury, is the Xuande Dingyipu, allegedly compiled in 1428, but more likely to have circulated in the late 16th C. – in any case it does not seem to have influenced later writers and the above-mentioned types were however included in the Ming treasury, not the Song one. Many other 16th C. (and later) literary sources mention or discuss pre-Ming wares, but the number and order of the listed kilns is rather flexible and a Song dynasty date is seldom specified. What emerges, instead, is the clear divide between pre-Ming kilns and Ming production, which coincides with wares made during different reign periods of that dynasty at Jingdezhen (景德镇).

Table 1 Yuan, Ming and Qing literature

Date	Title	Author	Brief note
13th C.	Tanzhai Biheng (坦斋笔衡) (quoted in Chuogeng Lu (辍耕录))	Ye Zhi (叶真)	Mise, Ding, Ru, Longquan, [N.] Guan, Xiuneisi/Neiyao, Jiaotianxia
1260-1279 1370 1646	Fuxuan Zalu (负暄杂录) (quoted in Shuofu (说郛), included in Shuofu Xu (说郛续))	Gu Wenjian (顾文荐), Tao Zongyi (陶宗仪) (1329-1410), Tao Ting(陶珽)	In the Song dynasty, as white wares from the Ding kilns had rough mouths, Ruzhou was chosen instead
1366	(Nancun) Chuogenglu ((南村)辍耕录)	Tao Zongyi (陶宗仪)	Mise, Yue, Ding, Ru, Longquan, N. Guan, Xiuneisi, Jiaotianxia
1387 or 1388 1459	Gegu Yaolun (格古要论) Xin Gegu Yaolun (新增格古要论)	Cao Zhao (曹昭)	Chai, Ru, Guan, Dong, Gege, Xiang, Gaoli, Ding, Jizhou, Cizhou, Jian, Longquan, Raozhou, Huozhou, Dashi
(1428) End 16th C.	Xuande Dingyipu (宣德鼎彝谱)	Wu Zhong(吴中), Lü Zhen(吕振)(1365-1426), et al.	In the treasury of the imperial palace there are specimens from the famous kilns of Chai, Ru, Guan, Ge, Jun, and Ding
Hongzhi reign (1487-1505)	Songshi Jiaguibu (宋氏家规部)	Song Xu (宋诩)	Lists Chai, Ru, Guan, Dong, Ge, Dingzhou, Yu, Peng, Longquan, Jizhou, Shufu, Xiang, Huo and finally Jun
Middle 16th C.	Qixiulei Gao (Xugao) (七修类稿 (续稿))	Lang Ying (郎瑛)(1487-1566)	Geyao and Longquanyao were fired in Longquan district Chu prefecture...
End 16th C.	Lidai Mingci Tupu (历代名瓷图谱)	Xiang Yuanbian 项元汴 (1525-1590)	White, purple and black Ding (12 pieces), Guan (10, from Kaifeng and Hangzhou), Ru (3), Longquan (10), Ge (1 from Longquan), Jun (4), Dongqing (2 from Zhenliu)
1572	*Liuqing Rizha (留青日札)	Tian Yiheng 田艺蘅	Ru, Longquan, Ding, Jun, Guan, Xiuneisi, Ge and Xuande wares
1591	Zunsheng Bajian (遵生八笺)	Gao Lian (高濂)(1573-1620)	See next entry
Ibid	Yanxian Qingshangjian 燕闲清赏笺 [6 <sup>th</sup> chapter of the Zun sheng ba jian]	Gao Lian (高濂)(1573-1620)	One section dedicated to Guan, Ge, Chai and Ru wares; one to Ding; one to Longquan, Zhang, Jizhou, Jian and Jun and, and to new and old Raozhou kilns
Wanli reign (1572-1620)	Qingbicang (清秘藏)	Zhang Yingwen (张应文) (ca. 1524-1585)	When discussing kiln wares, Chai, Ru, Guan, Ge, Ding must be named. Then he discusses Jun, and after that Longquan and qinghua

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Date	Title	Author	Brief note
1595	Pinghuapu( 瓶花譜 )	Zhang Qiande( 张谦德 )	Chai, Ru, Guan, Ge, Ding, Longquan, Junzhou, Zhangsheng, Wuni, Xuande, Chenghua, etc. Chai and Ru were the most precious, but they do not exist anymore, Guan, Ge, Xuan and Ding are at present treasures, Longquan, Junzhou, Zhangsheng, Wuni and Chenghua vases are in proper order seen as important
1614	*Liuliuqing ( 留留青 )	Xu Maosheng ( 徐懋升 )	Ru is a Song ware Ru, Longquan, Ding, Jun, [N.] Guan
1621	Changwuzhi( 长物志 )	Wen Zhenheng ( 文震亨 ) (1585-1645)	
1621-1627	Bowu Yaolan( 博物要览 )	Gu Yingtai ( 谷应泰 )	Discusses Ru, Guan, Ge in one section; Ding, Longquan, Jian, Jun in another, and finally Dashi, Boli and Raozhou
1620s	Wuzazu( 五杂俎 )	Xie Zhaozhi ( 谢肇淛 ) (1567-1624)	Discusses in detail Chai ware, then states “Besides Chai, there are Ding, Ru, Guan and Ge which are all Song wares. Ding and Ru are as white as jade. Those in use at the Song court have copper mouth, therefore their value is lower”
1621-1627	Gudong Shisanshuo ( 骨董十三说 )	Dong Qichang( 董其昌 ) (1555 – 1636)	“Everybody names Chai, Ru, Guan, Ge and Ding the 5 kilns; on this the author also agrees” , then lists Dong, Xiang, Jizhou, etc., but not Jun
	Yanshanzhai Zaji ( 砚山斋杂记 )	Sun Chengze ( 孙承泽 ) (1592-1676)	Groups together Chai, Ru, Guan, Ge, Jun and Ding and is the first to associate Jun ware with the Song dynasty
	Yanzaige Zhixinlu ( 燕在阁知新录 )	Wang Tang ( 王棠 ) (1705-1748)	“Handed down Chai, Yu [ 禹 ], Guan, Ge, Jun and Ding need not to be discussed, in the previous dynasty there were the imperial kilns of Yong, Xuan, Cheng, Hong, Zheng, Jia, Long and Wan”
1774	Taoshuo( 陶说 )	Zhu Yan( 朱琰 )	Yue, Pise, Chai of Later Zhou; Ding, Ru, N. Guan, Xiuneisi, Ge and Longquan are specifically Song kilns, followed by Jizhou, Xiang, Dong, Junzhou, Cizhou, Jian, Shanxi and Gaoli wares
1778	Wenfang Sikao Tushuo ( 文房肆考图说 )	Tang Bingjun ( 唐秉钧 )	Lists Ding, Ru, Guan, Ge, Longquan, Jizhou, Pengzhou, Xiang, Dong, Junzhou, Cizhou, Jian, Shanxi, Gaoli and Raozhou
1736-1795	Nanyao Biji ( 南窑笔记 )	Anonymous ( 匿名者 )	Chai, Ru, S. Guan, Ge, Jun and Ding are Song wares. In the N. Song, Junzhou made pen basins, lian incense burners, flowerpots and basins
1815	Jingdezhen Taolu ( 景德镇陶录 )	Lan Pu ( 蓝浦 )	Ding, Ru, N. Guan, Guan, Dong, Longquan, Ge, Zhang Longquan, Jun, Suiqi are Song ceramics imitated at Jingdezhen

A hint that transpires from these sources, without being clearly stated, is the link that associates Chai, Ru, Guan, and Ge, which presumably resides in the bluish tinge of the wares. Chai, Ru and Guan are also connected to the court—together with Ding, but Ge is not. The only Ming text to date specifically Ding, Ru, Guan and Ge to the Song dynasty is the Wuzazu, published in the 1620s. However it won't be until the middle 18th C. that Ding, Ru, Guan, Ge, Longquan ( 龙泉 ) and Jun ceramics will be regularly associated with the Song dynasty (see the Taoshuo, Nanyao Biji and Jingdezhen Taolu).

It seems, therefore, that from the end of the 16th C., Ding, Ru, Guan and Ge are always listed, but no one says that they were the outstanding wares of the Song period. The fact that they are often listed in this order is due to their history: Ding used to be accepted by the Song court, but was then substituted by Ru ware until Official kilns were established first at Bianliang ( 汴梁 ) and then at Lin' an ( 临安 )—first the Xiuneisi( 修内司 ) and then the Jiaotianxia( 郊坛下 ) factories. In a paper on new research angles on Song and Yuan ceramic

production, Qin Dashu( 秦大树 , 2008), to whom I am deeply indebted, sees the “Songdai Wuda Mingyao” concept taking shape already in the Ming dynasty. It is possible that, being a foreigner, my perception of ancient Chinese sources is defective, however the fact that only the Qingbicang and the Gudong Shisanshuo explicitly mention “five kilns” , shows that the theory was not ripe yet. The very historical succession as repeatedly narrated tends to fix the order as Ding, Ru, Guan, Ge, but I do not detect any specific intention to single out five or any other number of wares.

## 2 Minguo period literature

So where does the concept of the “Songdai Wuda Mingyao” come from?

As schematized in Table 2, in 1915, Xu Zhiheng wrote that “Chai, Ru, Guan, Ge and Ding” , the famous five Song kilns, was a common phrase among ceramic experts, and in 1928, Chen Wanli, the father of ceramic archaeology (together with Feng Xianming), reiterated saying that every scholar knew the comprehensive term “Chai, Ru, Guan, Ge, Ding” . However, like Xu Zhiheng, he excluded Jun and kept doing so as late as 1963, when he introduced Guan ware as one of the four famous Song kilns, as Chai was in fact related to the Five Dynasties, and Jun was described after Longquan. However in 1937, Wu Renjing and Xin Anchao in the preface to their *Zhongguo Taoci Shi*, had defined Ding, Ru, Guan, Ge, and Jun as timeless, although the very concept of the “Songdai Wuda Mingyao” was not explicitly formulated.. In the chapter dedicated to Song ceramics, the order is Ding, Ru, Guan (distinguished in “old” , Xiuneisi and Jiaotaxia), Ge, Di, Jun, Jingdezhen, Cizhou ( 磁州 ), Jizhou( 吉州 ) and Jian( 建 ) *yao*. Ge and Di are said to be private kilns, and Jun is not connected to the Song court, although it is said to have been made from the beginning of the dynasty.

Table 2 Minguo period literature

Date	Title	Author	Brief note
1913	Yaoqishuo( 窑器说 )	Cheng Zhe( 程哲 )	Quotes the YanzaigeZzhixin lu, then discusses Yuan dynasty Peng, Longquan, Xiang, Ou, Jian, Raozhou, Jizhou, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Guangdong, Gaoli, Dashi and Cizhou wares. Then goes back to the 5, saying that, except for Chai, Ding, Ru, Guan and Ge are Song kilns. Recounts the history from Chai by quoting earlier texts
1915	Yinliuzhai Shuoci( 饮流斋说瓷 )	Xu Zhiheng( 许之衡 )	Ceramic production in China can be divided into 3 great periods: Song, Ming and Qing; the most famous wares of the Song are 5, namely Chai, Ru, Guan, Ge and Ding, furthermore there is Jun, also very precious. The remaining kilns are all small
1925	Zhuyuan Taoshuo( 竹园陶说 )	Liu Zifen( 刘子芬 )	Chai, Ru, Guan, Ge, Ding, Longquan, Junzhou, , Jian’ an[Jian] are famous kilns of the Song dynasty
1926	Cishi( 瓷史 )	Huang Yu( 黄燠 )	The 12 most famous kilns of the Song dynasty are Rao, Ding, Ru, Guan, Ge, Jian, Xiang, Ji, Dong, Jun, Yao, Deng. With Guan, also mentions Ge and Longquan
1928	Longquan Qingci Zhi Chubu Diaocha( 龙泉青瓷之初步调查 ) (in: Chen Wanli Taoci Kaogu Wenji( 载 : 陈万里陶瓷考古文集 ). Beijing: Zijincheng Pubiishing House, 1989: 33-38)	Chen Wanli( 陈万里 )	Every scholar knows the phrase “Chai, Ru, Guan, Ge, Ding”

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Date	Title	Author	Brief note
1935	Qingci Zhi Diaocha Ji Yanjiu( 青瓷之调查及研究 )	Chen Wanli( 陈万里 )	Longquan in Zhejiang is famous for celadon. Be of long standing, anyone who' s done the smallest research on ceramics knows the phrase Chai, Ru, Guan, Ge, Ding. Song dynasty Ge ware comes from Liutian kilns in Longquan
1935	“Ciqi Gaishuo (瓷器概说)” (in: Canjia Lundun Zhongguo Yishu Guoji Zhanlanhui Chupin Tushuo ( 载 : 参加伦敦中国艺术国际展览会出品图说, Illustrated catalogue of Chinese government exhibits for the International Exhibition of Chinese Art in London). vol. 2. Shanghai: The Commercial Press: 9-34)	Guo Baochang ( 郭葆昌 )	“The Northern Sung Dynasty had the greatest number of noted porcelain manufactures to its credit. The Ting, Chun, Tung, Ju, Kuan, Lung-chuan, and Ko Ti”
1937	Zhongguo Taoci Shi( 中国陶瓷史 )	Wu Renjing ( 吴仁敬 ), Xin Anchao ( 辛安潮 )	The most famous Song wares were Ding, Ru, Guan, Ge, Di, Jun. Ge and Di were private kilns. (No mention of Jun related to court)
1938	Zengbu Gujin Ciqi Yuanliukao ( 增补古今瓷器源流考 )	Shao Zhimin ( 邵蛰民 )	
1942	Guwan Zhinan( 古玩指南 )	Zhao Ruzhen ( 赵汝珍 )	Copies exactly the same phrase as in the ZhongguoTaoci Shi, but in the sequence substitutes Di with Longquan.
1946	Ciqi Yu Zhejiang( 瓷器与浙江 )	Chen Wanli( 陈万里 )	Criticizes Guo Baochang' s classification; Dayao produced Zhang Sheng' er' s ware

In his Guwan Zhinan, published in 1942, Zhao Ruzhen reported exactly the same phrase as in the Zhongguo Taoci Shi, but in the sequence substituted Di with Longquan.

It seems to me that in the first half of the 20th C., scholars began to focus on a restricted group of wares that previous sources had associated with the Song dynasty. We can perceive the singling out of Chai, Ru, Guan, Ge and Ding as the most famous Song kilns in books published at the beginning of the Minguo period. However the list was still fluid and included at least six kilns; Jun was usually excluded from this shortlist and often came after Longquan. Moreover the association with the court was made only about Chai, Ding, Ru and Guan for their particular history, but they were not explicitly defined as imperial wares (except for Guan, obviously). Very simply, the concept had not been elaborated yet.

### 3 Post-1949 literature

In the 1950s, Chen Wanli remained true to his word, but two publications issued in 1958 suggested that by then the “Songdai Wuda Mingyao” concept including Jun kiln was already an acquired notion (table 3): Guan Songfang opened his paper on the dating of Jun kilns to the Jin dynasty (rather than the Northern Song) by saying: “it is common knowledge that Jun was a famous Song kiln and together with Ding, Ru, Guan and Ge was classified as the five famous kilns of the Song dynasty” . In his paper dedicated to Ge and Ru kilns, Sun Yingzhou defined Ge as one of the five famous wares of the Song dynasty. Although it is difficult to pinpoint who exactly formulated the “Songdai Wuda Mingao” theory in its modern form, that is, Ding, Ru, Jun, Guan and Ge, a crucial turning point was Feng Xianming' s paper on Song dynasty Ru kilns, published in

1964, where he declared that Jun ware was not only made in the Northern Song period, but it also served the imperial court (together with Ding and Yaozhou kilns).

The view that Jun, in particular the so-called “numbered Jun”, was made by imperial order at the end of the Northern Song period was perfected by Li Huibing in 1982, thus finalizing the concept of the five famous wares of the Song dynasty. This does not mean that every publication issued in the 1960s ~ 1980s endorsed the “Songdai Wuda Mingyao” assumption. Both the 1963 *Zhongguo De Taoci* and the 1982 *Zhongguo Taoci Shi* cautiously avoided the wording, however when the latter discussed Junyao, it explicitly pointed out: “in later times Junyao was seen as one of the five famous wares of the Song dynasty”.

Table 3 Post-1949 essential literature

Date	Title	Author	Brief note
1951	Ruyao De Wojian (汝窑的我见) (Wenwu Cankao Ziliao, (2): 46-53)	Chen Wanli (陈万里)	Ru is one of the 4 famous Song kilns, but he does not include Jun
1951	Yuzhou Zhixing(禹州之行)(Wenwu. (2): 53-56)	Chen Wanli(陈万里)	The rise of Jun is closely related to the decline of Ru. Ru was not made in the Yuan dynasty, Jun was made in the Song and Yuan, not Ming. In the Ming it was imitated. Bacun, which is characterised by purple splashes, was probably one of the earliest minyao(民窑) south of the Yellow River
1955	Chen Wanli Taoci Kaogu Wenji(陈万里陶瓷考古文集)(Beijing: Zijincheng Pubiishing House, 1989: 149)	Chen Wanli(陈万里)	Ru was supplied to the imperial court together with Guan ware made at Kaifeng
1955	Songdai Beifang Minjian Ciqi (宋代北方民间瓷器)	Chen Wanli(陈万里)	
1957	Zhongguo Qingci Shilue (中国青瓷史略)	Chen Wanli(陈万里)	The development of Jun ware was connected to the decline of Ru ware
1958	Jindai Ciqi He Junyao De Wenti(金代瓷器和钧窑的问题)(Wenwu Cankao Ziliao, 2: 25-26)	Guan Songfang(关松房)	Everybody knows Jun is a famous Song kiln and it is classified together with Ding, Ru, Guan and Ge, as the 5 famous great kilns of the Song dynasty
1958	Tan Ge Ru Er Yao (谈哥汝二窑) (Gugong Bowuyuan Yuankan, 1: 62-65)	Sun Yingzhou(孙瀛洲)	Ge is one of the 5 famous wares of the Song dynasty
1960	Gugong Bowuyuan Shinianlai Dui Gu Yaozhi De Diaocha(故宫博物院十年来对古窑址的调查)(Gugong Bowuyuan Yuankan, 1, 104-126)	Chen Wanli (陈万里), Feng Xianming (冯先铭)	Ru is one of the 4 famous Song wares. Ru was made at Dayudian (Donggou, Yegou and Huang sites); later Ru was for court use. Jun indirectly connected to Song
1960	Zhongguo Lidai Mingyao Taoci Gongyi De Chubu Kexue Zongjie(中国历代名窑陶瓷工艺的初步科学总结)(Kaogu Xuebao, 1: 89-104)	Zhou Ren (周仁), Li Jiazhi (李家治)	There are several unsolved problems, for example, Ge ware: it is one of the famous Song wares, but whether it really was made in the Song period is not clear yet
1962/63	Zhongguo De Ciqi (中国的瓷器)	Jiangxi Jingdezhen Taoci Yanjiusuo (江西景德镇陶瓷研究所)	No mention of the 5 famous Song wares. Jun ware is regarded as the continuation of Ru ware
1963	Zhongguo Lidai Shaozhi Ciqi De Chengjiu Yu Tedian 中国历代烧制瓷器的成就与特点 (Wenwu, 6: 26-41)	Chen Wanli(陈万里)	Ru and Guan were specifically fired for the imperial house (as opposed to Yaozhou and Linru). Guan is one of the 4 famous Song kilns. Jun is not said to be one of the famous Song wares and is not associated with the court; he only says that, given the proximity of the sites, Jun and Ru must have been closely connected. At present, Ge ware is determined either by literary records or by handed down pieces

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Date	Title	Author	Brief note
1964	Henansheng Linruxian Songdai Ruyao Yizhi Diaocha 河南省临汝县宋代汝窑遗址调查 (Wenwu, 8: 15-26)	Feng Xianming (冯先铭)	Like Ding and Yaozhou, Jun kilns made vessels for the court, but Jun is not mentioned in ancient texts. ① As the quality of numbered Jun is as high as Ding, Ru and Guan, Jun also served the court. ② the style of the fenghua( 丰华 ) inscription on Jun pieces is identical with that on Ru pieces. ③ There was a fenghua hall in the Jin palace, so it must indicate a Song date
1982	ZhongguoTaoci Shi ( 中国陶瓷史 )	Zhongguo guisuanyan xiehui ( 中国硅酸盐协会 )	Jun has been regarded as 1 of the 5 famous wares of the Song dynasty, although its name was not recorded in Song literature
1982	Junyao De Xingzhi Jiqi Chuangshao Niandai( 钧窑的性质及其创烧年代 ) (Gugong Bowuyuan Yuankan, 2: 55-59)	Li Huibing ( 李辉柄 )	Jun was made by imperial order at the end of the Northern Song period
1989	Zhongguo Taoci Shi Gangyao( 中国陶瓷史纲要 )	Ye Zheming ( 叶喆民 )	Starts mentioning the 5 famous wares, but then proceed independently from that cliché. However agrees that Juntai was the kiln producing official Jun for the Song court. Tends to classify kilns either as guanyao or minyao. Ge is listed as a Song famous ware, but it is different from Ru, Guan and Ding because it is not mentioned in Song literature. Some people believe black-bodied celadon is literary Ge ware, others that it imitates Guanyao

## Conclusions

I have only scratched the surface of the written sources to be analysed, however it is possible to conclude that the “Songdai Wuda Mingyao” concept, substituting Chai with Jun, is a 20th C. notion that surreptitiously emerged in the 1950s and slowly, but inexorably asserted itself until it became fixed in the 1980s. It does not reflect the perception of Song kilns by Ming scholars and even less the perception of Song wares by their contemporaries. Why this concept was elaborated is difficult to establish. What scholars, connoisseurs and collectors knew, liked and collected may have played a role to begin with, but not after 1949, when research became more scientifically-based. The choice of Jun kilns over Longquan kilns, for example, seems totally arbitrary, as Longquan ware cannot be considered inferior to Jun ware. This aspect needs to be further investigated together with the question of Ge ware.

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