

The North Has Pengchengzhen

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Abstract

This research examines the current situation of Cizhou ware production in Pengchengzhen, Handan, Hebei Province, China. Participants in my project were local artisans, ceramic workshop owners and government officials. Pengchengzhen is a small town with about one thousand years in making ceramic. During the 1950s, the local ceramic craft business went through Socialist Transformation and was integrated into state-owned economy until the beginning of the twenty-first century. Most of the local artisans and ceramic workshop owners were previously workers in the state-owned factories. Through a look at their work, experiences and beliefs, I explore what Cizhou style means to them, how they see the state-owned period, and how they are coping with the problems of survival as not only craftsmen, but also successors to the local ceramic making tradition in contemporary China.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Han Li. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethic Board, Project Name “Cizhou Pottery, Tradition and Modernity”, No. Pro00057211, May 11, 2015.

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Introduction

“The Party's general line and general task in the transition period is to basically accomplish the country's industrialization and the socialist transformation of agriculture, handicrafts and capitalist industry and commerce over ten to fifteen year or a longer period of time (Mao 1977: 81-82)¹”

This was what Mao Zedong said in the meeting of Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (or 中共中央政治局会议) held on June 15, 1953 (ibid). Under the requirement and guidance of the general line, in the next decade, privately owned craft businesses gradually went through the Socialist Transformation and became part of the socialist economy. The craftsmen closed their businesses and went to work in the state-owned factories. Unfortunately, many of these transformed craft factories did not survive into the twenty-first century.

In recent years, the popularity of the phrase *jiang xin* (or 匠心, craftsman's heart) or *gong jiang jing shen* (or 工匠精神, craftsman's spirit) is a growing trend. The phrase made it to third place on the list of the top ten popular phrases of 2016 after it was brought up by the Prime Minister in the report of government work (Cao 2016). Everyone is talking about it. The prevalence of the phrase in many occupations other than craft business makes me wonder what the phrase means to Chinese people, because what the word craftsman entails experienced two crucial changes during the past five decades. Since the idea of “craftsman's heart/spirit” has its root in craftsmanship, any research on this theme needs to go back to craft business.

The Cizhou ware workshops in Pengchengzhen belong to craft industry. When I started the research, the phrase “craftsman’s heart/spirit” was still in its cradle. It was only when I was almost finished with my research and thesis, that this phrase started to echo in my head and sound stranger and stranger. I wish the idea had come to me earlier and I had more time to pursue it. But this is not to say that I regret what I chose for my research. If anything, I feel lucky that I did this research as my Master thesis.

My research is about the artisans and the ceramic wares of a distinctive style they make in a small town in Northern China. The signature objects of the distinctive style are the two giant vases standing on an out-of-town square commissioned by the local government. The two vases could be seen as a monument carrying what is considered the pride and identity of the local artisans, the most glorious achievement in the town’s history, as well as the government’s intention to use it to attract investments and talents, since cultural industry has been gaining support from the state for the last decade. By describing the criticism they received and what they did to meet the challenge, I hope my research could offer some insight on how to understand the reality of the small workshops and what it means to be a craftsman in this town, perhaps also to take a small step in unpacking the “craftsman’s heart.”

Chapter 1 Cizhou Wares and its Stereotype

Cizhou Wares

When being asked about Cizhou Wares, occasionally people of Pengchengzhen would speculate, in different ways, whether Cizhou Wares' production could be traced back to the *Cishan Culture*, a Neolithic culture uncovered 7000 years ago in the neighborhood of Pengchengzhen. A local scholar would hint at a possible but unconfirmed link between the two; lay people tend to speak complacently with a sense of certainty; a craftsman may doubt the assumption from the beginning, drawing his conclusion from the differences between the ways of making the Neolithic pots found in the site of *Cishan Wenhua* (or 磁山文化, Cishan Culture 6500–5000 BC) and the methods of producing ceramics currently used in Pengchengzhen's Cizhou ware production.

Cizhou Ware was named after its place of origin, *Cixian* (or 磁县, Ci County), which got its name from a mountain in its territory, the *Ci Shan* (or 磁山, Cishan Mountain). Cishan Mountain is also the place where Cishan Culture was found and after which the Neolithic culture was named (Ye and Ma 2009: 3, 21-22). Although there is a tempting possibility of the pottery wares uncovered in Cishan Mountain being the ancestors of Cizhou Ware, so far the only confirmable and comparable element connecting them literally stays in their names. Yet it was not the Chinese who gave the name to the ceramic production in this area. The name *Cizhou Yao* (or 磁州窑, Cizhou Kiln) was developed upon the phrase Cizhou type ware which was identified and classified by Robert Lockhart Hobson during the 1920s. So far the earliest record

of Cizhou ware could be found in Ming's text, mentioning Cizhou ware as "the ancient ceramic wares, made in *Cizhou, Zhangdefu, Henan*, (of which) with good quality were similar to Ding ware, bearing no 'tear trace', engraved or painted"² (Ye and Mar 2009: 3, Cao and Wang 1456). Although it is widely recognized in Pengchengzhen that Cizhou ware's achievement reached its prime in Song Dynasty, Hang Jian, the scholar on history of craft and design, argues that the reason that Cizhou ware was not mentioned in written records until Ming was because Cizhou ware was not favored by literati and the court. The products from the five kilns, *Guan, Ru, Ding, Ge, and Jun* (or 官, 汝, 定, 哥, 均), preferred and highly praised by both literati and the court in Song, were all *dan ya* (or 淡雅, quietly elegant) in style, which was considered aesthetically pleasing in Song Dynasty, in great contrast to Cizhou ware's bold and strong decoration (Hang 1994: 127-128). Archaeological evidence supports that in Tang Dynasty (618 - 907) Cizhou Kilns were already in production (Ye and Ma 2009: 6, 24) and have been ever since.

Despite its long history in ceramic production, Cizhou Kilns never became an *Guan Yao* (or 官窑, Official Kiln) in Imperial China. Official Kilns were kilns of which the production was strictly managed and supervised by governmental authorities (Wang 2009: 121). Ceramics produced by an Official Kiln were based on designs provided by the court (Wang 2009: 14, 16). Imperial courts would select the good ones for general official use and allowed the rest to be sold; but no one was allowed to own anything of the leftovers, which had to be destroyed, if the designed objects were made as *yu ci* (or 御瓷, Imperial Ceramic), strictly for emperors to use (Wang 2009: 20-21). Anyone who tried to duplicate the design, or steal the leftovers, of *yu ci* would be sentenced to death.

Although both historical texts and archeological findings indicate Cizhou Kilns also produced large quantity of jars for court use, and even had about forty kilns designated as Official Kilns during Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644), these tribute ceramics were made for the purpose of paying tax in-kind, instead of productions designed and supervised by court (Wang 2009: 17-18). This sort of tax in-kind payment ceramics were usually huge and bulky, and used as large containers to hold grains, liquors, et cetera, in court's kitchen or other storage rooms (Ye and Ma 2009: 66, 190). They were far from being used as dining utensils, tea wares, stationary, or display items, which were allowed to appear in emperors' presence. In other words, it was the practical function, rather than communication or enchantment (Gell 1992, 1998) through visual elements, which was emphasized in Cizhou Kiln's made-for-court ceramics.

Products of *Min Yao* (or 民窑, Folk Kiln) and Official Kilns, among other handicraft industries, represented the hierarchy of and the distance between imperial ruler and ordinary people. Within products fired in Official Kilns, those designated as emperors' ceramics occupied the highest position in rank. Since the tribute ceramics fired in Cizhou Kilns stayed in court's kitchen and storages, they were in practice associated with and handled by people who had their presences there, that is to say, the low level servants who labored and sweated around them on a daily basis. Considering the design of an emperor's ceramic must be approved by the emperor himself, it is safe to put it in another way that, if objects are considered extension of a person (Gell 1998), then, the emperors' ceramics, being the crowning achievement in ceramic production, required to be cared for and handled with great attention, since they signified the emperors' presence and their supreme power. In comparison, the ceramic containers in court's

kitchen were just like the people who worked with them, anonymous and replaceable. The distance between the emperor and the kitchen wares was like the one between heaven and earth.

This is probably why, regardless of the writings in Ming's court texts and archeological discoveries, my informants in Pengchengzhen insist on and take pride in the fact that Cizhou Kiln stayed a Folk kiln during its one thousand years of firing. The positive side of being a folk kiln was that its survival depended on market, instead of court funding like an official kiln. In Imperial China, although official kilns made the best ceramic, they did not last long because the emperors' aesthetic preferences were different. When a new emperor took throne or a new dynasty established, the previous official kiln would lose the funds and close down. The folk kilns enjoyed more flexibility in adapting to market and therefore had a better chance to survive. Artisans in Pengchengzhen had the experience of being belittled as working in Cizhou kilns, which was never as good as an official kiln. "In 2013, I was in a conference introducing myself as someone dedicated to making Cizhou ware and was undermined as merely a big folk kiln by people from the regions of famous kilns. I asked them whether their wares had elements invented by Cizhou kiln. They said yes. Then I said the fire in your famous kilns all died at some point in the history, but ours survives. They clapped for me." When confronted with contempt about Cizhou Kiln's failure to become an Official Kiln, the Pengchengzhen artisans would aptly switch the focus to Cizhou kiln outlasting all other kilns, for it is recognized in China that "*shei xiao dao zui hou, shei xiao de zui hao*" (or 谁笑到最后, 谁笑得最好), he, who laughs to the end, has the best laugh.

Cizhou ware's Characteristics and Stereotype

Compared to the exquisite ceramics produced by the five historically famous kilns previously mentioned, Cizhou Wares were considered thick in body, heavy in weight, dull in color, with decorative images brushed or engraved in freewheeling manner, and therefore usually judged as *sha da ben cu* (or 傻大笨粗, silly, bulky, clumsy and crude). It was probably true that these characteristics were part of the reason why as the largest ceramic production system in Northern China, Cizhou Kiln was not able to gain imperial court's favor, or reach a prestigious family's displaying shelf. Instead, it lived among ordinary people and grew with them. Although these words no longer describe accurately the contemporary works made in Pengchengzhen, artisans there still frequently encounter commentaries that their ceramics are cumbrous and lacking in refinement nowadays.

Historically, depending heavily on waterway transportation, the production sites of Cizhou Kiln spread along the watercourses of *Zhang He* (or 漳河, Zhanghe River) and *Fuyang He* (or 滏阳河, Fuyanghe River). Its products encompassed objects for almost every aspect of human life, including, but not limited to, artifacts for religious activities, funerary objects to be buried with the deceased, daily dining utensils like cups, bowls and plates of different sizes, containers ranging from cosmetic compacts to large water vats, washing and toilet facilities like chamber pots, or bathing basins, toys, oil lamps, and, among them the well-known ceramic pillows (Ye and Ma 2009: 76-77). Despite its rich product variety, artisans in Pengchengzhen complained that whenever Cizhou Kiln is mentioned people tends to connect it with only two product types, either *Mei Ping* (or 梅瓶, plum vase) or *Ci Zhen* (or 瓷枕, ceramic pillow).

Cizhou Kiln developed many decorative methods during its long history of development. These decorative methods were classified into sixty-two categories (Ye and Ma 2009: 78 - 129), which are used in the dating of archeological findings and handed down objects. The sixty-two categories consist of different combinations of white *hua zhuang tu* (or 化妆土, slip), various glaze application and diverse engraving methods. Among these decoration methods, white slip with engraved black glaze has become another aspect of contemporary Cizhou Ware stereotype.

A plum vase in white slip with engraved black glaze is now a widely accepted symbol of Cizhou Kiln, as well as the Cizhou Ware stereotype. Artisans and craftsmen in Pengchengzhen showed mixed feelings towards this symbol. On the one hand, they are proud of the decorative method, which they consider as a signature of Cizhou Kiln and its history, and pleased both the method and Cizhou Kiln are recognized; on the other hand, they grumbled that other types of works were overlooked because of this recognition.

A Practical Solution

Cizhou Ware production was closely connected with and confined by, at least in imperial period, its local resource. This area is rich in coal and iron ore. Mining is to these days the major industry in this area. While coal provided the perfect fuel for firing, the iron in the soil made problem for making fine and white ceramics. For example, before the invention of slip, it was impossible to make white ceramics using local earth. Iron in the grounded powder would melt and ooze out through the object's skin during firing, and coagulate on the surface after the

objects were cooled. The brilliant ancestral bricoleurs here made the best use of things they could get their hands on to solve the problem. They put different stratified layers of soil and stones into different use in firing ceramic, including different material for modeling small sized objects or large ones, white slip to coat the modeled bodies covering up the rough textures and dull grey color, black glaze, color pigments for both over-glaze and under-glaze painting, and refractory clay for sagger making and kiln repairing (Ye and Ma 2009: 213-223). The ancestors put the knowledge of identifying different parts of earth in a jingle of local dialect. When one of my informants took me to the site where earth and stones were dug and collected, he mumbled the jingle while pointing to the plants on the ground to tell me what kind of stone should be underneath and for what purpose the stone would be used. It was in a mountain area where we stood at the top looking down around. Huge areas of earth were dug hollow as if the mountain had been hit by numerous stars falling from the sky. I could not imagine how many pieces of ceramic the earth dug up could have made and where those pieces went. All that I could think of was the story Yu Gong Yi Shan (or 愚公移山, the Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains), in which an old man decided to move the two mountains blocking the view of his house shovel by shovel and was considered stupid by his wise neighbour, as well as the famous remark made by the old man when he was asked what if he died before the mountain, “*Zi zi sun sun wu qiong kui ye, er shan zhi bu jia zeng* (or 子子孙孙无穷匮也, 而山之不加增)”, which means “I have children who have children who will bear more children. But the mountains would not grow.” The story never felt more vivid to me. All the stones and earth dug had been grounded and molded into clay bodies, of which the rough and dull surface was covered by white slip, upon which decoration was made to produce a beautiful appearance by paint or glaze, fired

and sent to other parts of the country. The foolish men here not only moved the mountain but turned it into objects which could be found in every household.

The natives of Pengchengzhen commented their way to make Cizhou Ware beautiful was like getting a girl ready on her wedding day before she *shang huajiao* (or 上花轿, step in the bridal palanquin), or, to understand it better, walking down the aisle in Western weddings. Romantic as the saying goes, this method of making Cizhou Ware also created challenges. It is not unfamiliar to any of us that when we apply a solution to solve a problem, we are probably creating other problems for ourselves. For Cizhou Ware, the problem was the by-product of getting-ready-for-palanquin method. To ensure a Cizhou object was born successfully from fire, the getting-ready-for-palanquin procedure has to be done within a period of time when the object's mud body was molded and contained certain amount of moisture. Anything done before or after that period will end up in the surface decoration peeling off the body. Cizhou people met this challenge with speed and skill.

Over decades of practice, artisans have developed and embodied the ability to determine whether a mud body's wetness is suitable for the next step from a light touch on the surface, the color of the mud body, and how fast a gentle brush with clear water dries. A certain level of moisture of the white slip is also required to proceed to the next step in decoration. All the decoration has to be finished within certain amount of time.

From handed down Cizhou objects and archeological findings, viewers usually get the impression that the objects were painted in freewheeling manners. The getting-ready-for-palanquin procedure was one part of the reason; the other part was the ceramic

workers had a production quota to meet every day. A painting worker who lived in Ming Dynasty in Pengchengzhen had to paint three hundred bowls a day (Ye and Ma 2009). It is quite usual to see miswritten Chinese characters or freely brushed strokes on Cizhou Ware. Compared to the well designed and planned patterns on an emperor's vase, it is not a surprise that Cizhou Ware's decoration seemed hasty.

Zhaode Square

The two giant vases stand on *zhao de guang chang* (or 昭德广场, Zhaode Square) (figure 1.), by each side of Provincial Road *S315*'s extension part. This part of Road *S315* is also known by the name *ying bin da dao* (or 迎宾大道, Yingbin Avenue), which literally means guests-welcoming avenue in Chinese, as it is the main entrance point of *fengfeng kuang qu* (or 峰峰矿区, Fengfeng Mining District) from the east. Following the road's name, Zhaode Square, which sits here like a gate, is also called Yingbin Square, with a doorway of approximately 4 km in length connecting the entrance of Fuyang Road which runs through the entire Fengfeng Mining District and *Pengchengzhen* (or 彭城镇, Pengcheng County) from east to west. At this major entrance point of Fengfeng Mining District the two vases stand to greet the locals and guests, as well as to bid them a farewell.

Zhaode Square is a round shaped public space, with a diameter of approximately 150 meters, separated into two semicircles, the northwest half and the southeast half, by Road *S315*. If someone is driving towards Pengchengzhen along *S315*, he will pass the northwest part on his

left side. The first thing he encounters would be a group of three metal frames, following which one giant vase comes. The metal frames are supposed to represent *yin feng tai* (or 引凤台, Phoenix Attracting Dais). Phoenixes are mythical creatures recognized as auspicious animals and the king of birds in Chinese culture. According to Mr. Wang, the maker of the vases and one of the designers of the square, the red metal frames' name comes from a passage in *Jin Shi* (or 金史, history of Jin Dynasty) that in 1202 AD a flock of phoenixes stayed in *shi sheng Tai* (or 石圣台) in the mountain *Gu Shan* for two days (Zeng 2004:402-403). Yin Feng Tai was built here to play the role of *Gu Shan's shi sheng tai* to attract phoenixes to come to Fengfeng Mining District. Phoenix is a symbol rich in metaphorical meanings in Chinese culture. It means outstanding talents when General Huan Wen praised Wang Jinglun, the fifth son of the Prime Minister in Eastern Jin (AD317-420), as “*you feng mao*” (or 有凤毛, having phoenixes' feather) (Liu 2006). The job fair annually hosted by Jiangsu Province for people with oversea education experience since 2009 is called “*yin feng gong cheng*” (or 引凤工程, Phoenixes Attracting Project) (Talent Explore 2017). The same wish was embedded in the red frames on Zhaode Square that people with talents and skills could come to and settle down in Fengfeng Mining District and help with the development of this area. Yet phoenixes would not come unless there is something equally outstanding and virtuous (Wei 1974: 571).

The giant vase follows immediately after the group of Yin Feng Tai. It is a typical plum vase of a massive volume, decorated in black and white. Next to the vase is a small area of trees, following which are two cubicle columns. The columns are another reinvention of a wooden

structural bracket, something considered an important element in Chinese traditional architecture and in which Chinese take great pride by Mr. Wang.

“The columns are called Dougong Fangzhu (or 斗拱方柱), where the base was designed to imitate a Dou gong bracket system supporting a square pillar above it. Dougong bracket is seen as a symbol of Chinese culture. In ancient China, it was widely used to build houses and towers without the aid of screws, nails or bolts. The craftsmen back then are considered by contemporary Chinese incredibly talented in that they invented and developed the structure and applied it in various types of buildings, from common residential houses, to temples and royal palaces. It stands for the wisdom of Chinese people.”

Another nine pillars and an installation stacked up by metal blocks spread along the periphery encompassing the square. For the patterns of clouds carved over the whole body of them, the nine pillars are called *xiang yun zhu* (or 祥云柱, Auspicious Cloud Pillars). Mr. Wang told me they represented the nine towns, Pengchengzhen being one of them, under the administration of Fengfeng Mining District. The stacked blocks on the north part symbolize mountain *Gu Shan* (or 鼓山), while the one on the south mountain *Yuan Bao Shan* (or 元宝山). Both mountains are located in the territory of Fengfeng Mining District. Right in front of the two cubical mountains are two artificial ponds, which were dry most of the time except when the rain collects in them, representing the two rivers, Fuyang River and Zhang River running through this district. In ancient China, administrative regions were divided by mountains and rivers.

Therefore places are often noted by the landscape, especially less known places. It puts places, big cities or small villages, in people's mental map by noting well known mountains and rivers. It also creates a sense of affiliation between human and nature, between the individual and the ancestral, and between the transient and the perpetual. My home city Tianjin would be described as the city located by the side of Hai River; Pengchengzhen, the source of Fuyang River; and a tiny anonymous village in Tai'an, sitting at the foot of mountain Tai Shan. Next to the stacked blocks mountain, by the side of Road S315 another group of Yin Feng Tai stands at the end of the square's diameter.

The layouts of the two semicircles are exactly the same, mirrored by road S315. Every man-made object of Zhaode Square is abstract and was simplified to be barely recognizable. For me, who is a Chinese but not local, I could see the pillars with clouds as something bearing good meanings. The exact meaning of the nine towns working together in the same district would skip me. I could not tell the piled up blocks represent the two mountains either. Both Dougong bracket and the giant vases are of a more clearly recognizable shape. But I doubt someone who does not know what a Dougong bracket is would recognize those here. As Mr. Wang explained to me by piling up the popular symbols, the square shows the passers-by the location of the Fengfeng Mining District, the nine towns under its administration, the Cizhou ware production as one of its well-known cultural heritage, the Yin Feng Tai as the willingness to build the platform for people to apply their knowledge and skills, and together to build something as durable and ingenious as the Dougong bracket system to prop up a bright future. The square's name Zhaode, manifestation of virtue, resonates with the meaning of Yin Feng Tai, attracting phoenixes with virtue and achievement.

Some knowledge of the area and Chinese culture is required if one wants to figure out what these blocks, frames and pillars are trying to say, except for the giant vases. Compared to them the vases are far less abstract. They are easily recognizable as vases, tall and bulky with identical decorative patterns clear to naked eyes even from far away. They stand on two pedestals respectively, with several spotlights surrounding them. The spotlights would be turned on when the night falls, making sure the two vases are clearly visible even in dark hours. The vases' volume and the solution to make them discernible during night beg the question of what is intended to show to the passengers by these two gigantic vases. Everything in the square are borrowed symbols except the mountain blocks and the vases. Since the mountain blocks could hardly be representing the local achievement and virtue, it has to be the vases playing the crucial role. If so, how to understand the achievement and virtue through the visual elements of vases?

The Two Giant Plum Vases

The shape of vases is of typical plum vase (figure 2.). Vases in the same shape, and of a much smaller size than these two, a size that could be handled by a human, were originally used as wine vessels and got the name Plum Vase from being used to display plum branches in Song Dynasty (Mou 2013).

In Chinese culture, vases are described using the same words for describing human body. These two plum vases were designed to be 9.9 meters in height, with the *kou bu* (or 口部, mouth) opening at the top supported by a cylinder shaped *jing bu* (or 颈部, neck), their *jian bu* (or 肩部,

shoulder) slowly expanding downwards reaching a maximum diameter of 5.18 meters at their *fu bu* (or 腹部, belly), and then the diameter of the body gradually reduced to a minimum 3.36 meters at *zu bu* (or 足部, foot).

Numbers matter in Chinese culture. They carry meaning both individually and in combinations. Mr. Wang told me, although he designed it to be 9.9 meters in height, the finished product is shorter than that because the ceramic body's contraction that happened during the firing process. Yet it has been reported as 9.9 meters tall in the news without measuring them for sure. The number *jiu* (or 九, nine), in Chinese culture, is both the highest number, symbolically representing the king or emperor, and a non-concrete number, expressing the idea of infinity. For example, the Chinese idiom “*Jiu Wu Zhi Zun*” (or 九五至尊), using the number nine and five, refers to the position of an emperor or the imperial throne. The combination 9.9 also shares the same pronunciation with the phrase *jiujiu* (or 久久), meaning long lasting. Mr. Wang said he designed the vases to be 9.9 meters, on the one hand, because the number 9 represented the highest in power, on the other, hoping that they could hold the record of the tallest vase in China for as long as possible. At least by the end of 2016, this design matches the reality. Being 9.9 meters tall, it is currently the highest ceramic vase in China, in some sense, the King of vases. This situation will not last forever. Another vase, perhaps with another meaningful number in height and definitely taller than 9.9 meters, appearing somewhere else, is not something unimaginable, for Chinese likes to compete with each other in numbers to achieve the position of the highest, the largest, et cetera.

Besides the size, another thing about the vases, which is hard to be missed, is that, instead of having a smooth surface as the hand thrown vases, they stand like two sets of 3D jigsaw puzzles, fitted together by curved ceramic tiles leaving seams among pieces. As Mr. Wang said, each vase was made of 485 pieces of tiles. Both the dimension of the tiles and the surface decoration were calculated by computer and sculpted by machine. The result was considered a success by both the local government, who commissioned the work, and artisans, who work in traditional hand-thrown and hand-painted ways. The local government praised Mr. Wang as the only one who could have done the job successfully. One of the well-known local *da shi* (or 大师, master) visited Zhaode Square only to check whether the assembled vases' surface was as smooth as the one of a hand thrown piece and commented that he was amazed by the smoothness of the well fitted tiles and the coherence of the decorative patterns.

What I think we should see here is that the local government and the master viewed the two vases from different perspectives. The master focused on whether a machine made vase could live up to the criteria of a handmade piece, for example, whether the shape is right and the decoration is coherent. To me it feels the master was trying to compare Mr. Wang's work with his own. He compared side by side the difficulties of carrying out the design made in computer, whether the tiles would fit together to create a smooth surface, with not having the same problems himself with his handmade wares. The way the master appreciated the decorative lines and shapes was through the same lenses.

What the government concentrated on was whether Mr. Wang fulfilled the contract and how well the finished vases worked with the plan of the entire square. This was directly connected to

the political career of the local officials. In China, to build a public space like Zhaode Square is usually planned and commissioned by the government. It was the government of Fengfeng Mining District in this case. Building such a public space is considered one item which could be added to the list of achievements of District Mayor during his term of office. Projects sharing a similar effect include building bridges, roads, or hosting a festival promoting local culture, as what was done in the summer of 2016. Zhaode Square was built during 2010 and 2011. As one of my informants commented, it seemed reasonable that the district government back then would want to build the square, because until then the former government had already hosted one Cizhou Culture themed festival, erected four bridges over Fuyang River, and paved roads and streets reaching out the entire district. A square would save the government from repeating itself. But it needed to be that the square was for the benefit of local people.

The designing concept behind the square isn't difficult to understand once one knows geographic information about the place and the symbolic meaning of the blocks and pillars on the square. To attract outside talent has always been one of the tasks the local government considered important. The square makes it clear that the local government has been trying to attract outside talents by promoting their Cizhou Ware. The spotlights surrounding the vases on the pedestal made sure the vases could be easily seen even if one only drives by in the evening. There is no doubt that these two vases were chosen to represent Cizhou Ware. The question then becomes what could be told from the two vases and their decoration.

Chapter 2 The Criticism and the Pride

The Cizhou Style and the Criticism

The surface of the two vases is done in one of the decoration approaches considered characteristically Cizhou-type, carved black over-glaze upon white slip. Despite the fact that Cizhou Ware has developed many decoration styles during its long history of firing, for example red-and-green coloring, and blue-and-white porcelain, only the black and white type, which was frequently seen on Song Cizhou wares, was remade to be the representative of current Cizhou ware. Both the local government and artisans are fully aware that Cizhou ware is more than the black-and-white type. The local museum, China Cizhou Kiln History Museum, hosts the exhibition which intends to reconstruct the changing and developing of Cizhou ware by displaying the archeological findings chronologically from Song Dynasty to Republic Era. Yet only the decorative methods developed in Song dynasty were selected to be the symbol of Cizhou style in contemporary Pengchengzhen.

With a closer examination of the vase, one would easily see that there is no intricate drawings or colors on the surface. Below the vase's opening at the top, the main part of the body is covered with scrolling stems and four peony flowers in full bloom. A belt of fret patterns connecting end to end separates the vase into main body and foot area, where the vase gradually draws into the embrace of lotus petals.

Decoration method and pattern of the two giant plum vases represent the Cizhou type which is used as the emblematic of Cizhou Ware as a whole. Objects in this style are frequently seen in

Pengchengzhen. Small wares, such as vases and plates, are placed in the displaying windows of every ceramic shop. Large objects, often vases, guard the doors of those shops. Ceramic mugs, pen holders and ash trays decorated with the same pattern were seen on the desk in the office of every government official I met. A walk in the main street during weekend morning when all the shops are open and the two sides along the street are crowded with vendors, Cizhou type wares, together with white and fine china, could be spotted in the collection of every vendor. Cizhou type wares are presented more as decoration pieces, while white and fine things are usually daily dining utensils. Similar visuals, but not made as ceramic products, can be seen all over Pengchengzhen. The entrance of the tunnel road running through mountain Yuan Bao Shan is embellished with a ring of black scrolling stems against white background. The huge poster that served as the background of the stage in the celebration of Cizhou Kiln Culture Festival 2016 had an even taller plum vases printed on cardboard beside it. Scrolling vines and peonies spread in Cizhou Kiln Hotel, where I stayed during my three visits in Pengchengzhen. The scrolling vines and peonies pattern is clearly not only used as decoration on ceramic, but has become a symbol of local culture.

What they represent as Cizhou type is not one single decoration method, but a dominant theme, which includes a number of ways of engraving and painting upon black and white glaze or white slip in Cizhou wares making in contemporary Pengchengzhen. Scrolling stems and peony blossoms is one of the popular patterns, among which there are other subjects, for example dragon, phoenix, fish, playing babies and etc. Objects done in the same style could be found in almost every ceramic shops along the streets in Pengchengzhen. The local artisans said ceramics in this style had been on the market for a long time. An art professor I know said,

compared to the first time he visited Pengchengzhen, which was about 20 years ago, the ceramic market was already like this and had not changed much since then. At the conference called “Carrying Forward the Culture and Art of Cizhou Kiln, Advance the Development of Ceramic Industry” (or “弘扬磁州窑文化艺术，促进陶瓷产业发展”) in August 2016, Ms. Huang, a professor from Tsinghua University, recounted her visits to Pengchengzhen as a disappointment.

“The first time I came here, which was in the early 2000s, I was fascinated by the Cizhou wares. They looked beautiful and different from ceramic done in other places. I bought two gorgeous vases for a reasonable price. More than ten years has passed, I was invited by the Cizhou Kiln and Culture festival this year. I came and brought my son with me this time. My son and I have been wandering in town for the past few days. I am sorry to say this, but I saw nothing new. Every shop sells the same things as twenty years ago. My son said to me, ‘mom, I am fed up with Cizhou ware now. I am going to throw up if we visit more shops.’ I teach ceramic design and wanted to buy something for my course. Yet, I am surprised that, with more than ten years passed, the Cizhou wares sold in Pengchengzhen are still the same things from ten years ago.”

My Mistake

The first time I visited Pengchengzhen I went there to work on a project about the Buddhist scriptures carved inside Xiangtangshan Caves in the summer of 2014. Although our team stayed there for two weeks, we did not have the luxury to be flaneurs until the last day of our stay.

Xiangtangshan Caves are a group of Buddhist grotto temples which could be traced back to Northern Qi dynasty. It is a tourist spot, of which the business hour is from 9 to 5. We were only allowed to start our work around 4 pm. We worked in the grottoes until 3 or 4 in the morning and then slept the whole day in the hotel. It was only in the last day of our stay we had some time to wander around in the town. It was during these few hours I got to know about Cizhou ware for the first time.

In our first encounter, what made me curious was the difference between two working modes, between working in a small workshop and in a factory's production line. We left the town in a hurry but Cizhou ware and the two different ways of producing ceramics in contemporary Pengchengzhen have stayed in my head. One of the most prominent small workshops I visited is located in a state-owned but privately ran museum of firing kilns dated back to Yuan Dynasty. Only a few people work there and each of them was in charge of one stage of making Cizhou ware. There were one thrower, one sculptor, one carver and one painter. They worked in semi-underground, hundreds years old caves with dim light. It was cool and humid, which was considered good for the clay bodies of Cizhou ware. Occasionally others would help the thrower to move a piece off the throwing wheel when the piece was large and heavy. They were introduced to us one by one by the owner of the workshop. The youngest worker among them was a thrower in his early twenties, who already won several awards in ceramic making skill competitions held at both state and provincial level. It left with me the impression that working in a workshop like this would give people not only a means to support themselves but also personal achievement and professional growth.

The other place we visited was a factory which produced Cizhou wares of the same style on a much larger scale. A private owned gallery exhibiting collections of ancient Cizhou wares in a recently built building was part of the factory. The working site of the factory was in another building, rather plain compared to the one hosting the gallery. There, dozens of people were grouped by their task and allocated in two large rooms, one for molding and glazing, and the other for decorating. The walls of the entire working site were half brick and half glass. A long corridor run through the entire working area from the entrance to the end of the building. One can easily grasp what is happening inside each room by standing in the corridor for a few seconds and looking around. Each person had a small station to perform one segment of all the stages involved in making Cizhou ware. The workers, mainly males, in the molding and glazing room spread their wheels, molds, buckets of glaze and other tools on the ground around them. In the decoration room, workers of both gender sat or stood behind lined up desks carving and painting. It was dusty and noisy. Our visit was guided by the manager of the factory, yet none of the workers there was introduced to us.

I could not forget about the contrast of the two ways of organizing Cizhou ware production. In the first workshop, it seemed the tone of everything was set to be traditional; while the second one modern. It felt to me the relatively traditional setting was more likely to bring professional growth to the people who worked there; while the workers in the comparatively modern setting seemed alienated from the wares they made. This difference, which was only proved to be imaginary in my later fieldwork, was the original reason that brought me back to Pengchengzhen in the summer of 2015.

When I reflect back on the first impression I had about Cizhou ware production, it felt obvious that some fieldwork could have saved me from making the mistake. I was too eager to connect what I saw with grand theories encountered in class without close scrutiny. It was purely imaginary that the setting of a small workshop in a hundreds-years-old cave was more helpful when it came to prompt professional growth for the people who work there. Both the small workshop and the large factory I visited were in fact registered as private owned companies. The difference between them was the scale of their business. It is possible for the small workshop to use the ancient caves as working room, in the way it was used in the past hundreds of years, because it employs only one person for each stage involved in making Cizhou ware. Since the small one has a limited number of people it could employ, the owner chooses to employ the best talent he could find and afford. The owner of the factory employed dozens of times more people than the small workshop. Among these workers there were a few award winners of ceramic making skill competitions with the rest being skilled laborers. Winning awards of ceramic skill competitions is itself a one-in-a-million thing, figuratively speaking. For a relatively larger factory which produces Cizhou wares, only a small proportion of people hired being award winners seems reasonable. The small, more traditional, workshop setting does not necessarily provide a better environment than the factory for workers to pursue higher achievement. Personal motivation may have played a more important role. If there is difference in stimulating personal motivation, the large factory may have played a more positive role than the small workshop, because the factory I visited has been a partner of both local government and provincial government in hosting Cizhou ware themed activities and ceramic skill competitions for years.

Its workers have had more information on how to, as well as easier access, to participate in these events.

Another problem, I realized in reflecting on my mistake, was the way I interpreted the worker's relationship with his/her surroundings, by which I mean his/her working equipment, setting, and interaction with peers. My mistake was that I considered a worker's surrounding as a stage built up by himself/herself to perform his/her role in the working space. For sure, an individual person is not a "bounded biological organism, but should be extended to all the object and/or events in the milieu from which agency or personhood can be abducted (Gell 1998, 222)". My mistake lied in taking the working space as extended from the workers instead of the business owners. This is not to say that the working space says nothing about the workers who inhabit it. But as my in first encounter, it was the owners who provided the working space, guided my visit and introduced or did not introduce the places and workers to me. My first experience said more about the owners instead of the workers.

The real difference in ceramic production lies between the factories which make porcelain for daily use and the workshops making traditional white and black Cizhou wares. In the factories producing porcelain for daily use, the clay used to make porcelain is not local earth, the porcelain bodies are molded or shaped by machines, and decorated with decals of which the design comes with the order. While in the workshops making Cizhou wares, including the one I regarded as factory in the above paragraphs, all the steps, molding, glazing and decorating, are done by human hands. It is the second way of making Cizhou wares that is the focus of this

paper. For the convenience of discussion, the factory with the private gallery mentioned previously would be regarded as a large workshop.

My Initiation to the Workshops

I was introduced to the artisans and masters by the former mayor of Pengchengzhen. The former mayor, Mr. Zhang, and I became acquainted during my stay in Pengchengzhen for the project on Buddhist scripture in the summer of 2014. During that time, I spent most of my time in the Xiangtangshan Caves in Mountain Gu Shan. Mr. Zhang was interested in our project and gave us much help. He introduced us to the local Bureau of Cultural Heritage Administration, visited us in the mountain in the night and brought us supplies. Before I went back to the town in 2015 I got in touch with him first, told him what my research would be and asked him whether he could introduce me to local artisans and masters. In retrospect, I did the right thing by contacting him first. By right, I meant what was good for my research and considered appropriate by the locals. But I did not know it was right until I went back again in the summer of 2016 and did something “wrong.”

In the summer of 2016, I went back to Pengchengzhen for about two weeks to ask some follow-up questions and attend the first Cizhou Kiln and Culture Festival. During my stay in 2015, I was treated as a welcomed guest and invited to many lunches and dinners, which usually lasted for hours, by both Mr. Zhang and other people I got to know during my research. I was grateful for their hospitality, but felt I burdened them. So when I went back in 2016, I decided to

go there quietly, without contacting Mr. Zhang beforehand, and only call the artisans to see if they would be in the workshop before I visit them. The first artisan I visited in 2016, to whom I was introduced by Mr. Zhang in the previous year, reminded me of and helped me to correct my negligence after he learned that I had not contacted Mr. Zhang. He called Mr. Zhang and invited him and his wife for lunch, exactly the burden I thought I would put on them if I contacted Mr. Zhang in advance. The artisan explained that I should not see it as a burden, but “a respectful thing to inform Mr. Zhang that you are here, because he was your initiator to the town and other artisans. It would be considered improper not to tell him,” even though I was not there to see Mr. Zhang. Besides, “since you are here, it is also a good opportunity for Mr. Zhang and me to get together. We have not seen each other for a while. As the saying goes, ‘*ru xiang sui su*’ (入乡随俗, when in Rome, do as the Romans do.) Now that you are back in our town, you should follow our custom. I shall be the host and take you and Mr. Zhang out for lunch.” We ended up with a three hour lunch, eating and catching up, in a good restaurant where the artisan is a regular customer. Mr. Zhang asked me about my plans and said he would get a guest pass of the Cizhou Kiln Festival for me. In the end, I was grateful again that Mr. Wang had insisted on inviting Mr. Zhang for lunch.

Like almost every dinner I attended during my stay, it started with me feeling burdening my host but ended with me getting unexpected help, more information or contacts, which made me grateful that my host had insisted on the dinner gathering. It was also in this way I was introduced to my first two informants, one prestigious artisan and his son-in-law, who run a successful business together. In 2015, after Mr. Zhang understood what my research plan was, he

invited the artisan's business manager, Mr. Chen, to a dinner gathering without saying anything about me or my research. Besides Chen, Mr. Zhang also invited one person I know from my previous Buddhist scripture project and several others whom I did not know then. Mr. Zhang booked a private room in a restaurant and I was introduced to everyone there. Everything went well that night. I laid out my research plan with Chen and everyone else at the dinner. Chen agreed to help me as much as he could. Everyone shared with me bits of information they thought might be useful for my research. We talked while eating and drinking. By the end of the dinner, Mr. Chen said I could go to his workshop to work and learn starting next morning. Everyone gave me their phone numbers and asked me to call them if I need any help.

This is considered a proper way to introduce one to others informally but seriously in Pengchengzhen. It was not formal because it happened outside working hours in a nonworking related environment for a personal matter. Unless there is a scheduled meeting, a formal introduction is often within half an hour, which is much shorter compared to a dinner gathering. For a personal matter like mine, an after work dinner with food and drinks gives people more time to ask questions and get to know more about each other, and is considered more relaxing and enjoyable. When in a work setting, the talk among the participants would be closely connected to the working topic. For example, when I was introduced to the officer in charge of Cizhou Kiln and Culture Festival to get a guest pass in 2016, we talked about nothing but my research project for about 40 minutes in his office. Yet, when we were sitting around the dinner table, our conversation switched among topics like "Try this course. It is our local specialty," "How do you became interested in Cizhou ware?" "I have been to Tianjin, you home city. It is a

nice place and I love the food there.” “Do you know that plum vases were initially liquor containers instead of displaying objects?” “Cizhou ware business is not an easy one.” etc.

The dinner was initiated by Mr. Zhang, who is currently the headmaster of a local vocational institution and the former town mayor. A dinner invitation extended by someone whose social status is like Mr. Zhang’s is not something people would pass in Pengchengzhen. Usually it is the other way around, where the business man would be inviting government officers to meal in the hope of building a friendly connection to them. Mr. Wang sees this unspoken custom as backward and shared with me two incidents related to inviting others to meal. One of them was with Mr. Zhang when Zhang was the town mayor before they became buddies; the other was with the executive manager of the porcelain factory in the nearby town.

“After Mr. Zhang was appointed the mayor of our town, every workshop’s business manager in our area invited him out for meals. They wanted to build a friendly connection with him so that the government would collaborate with them when there are business opportunities. I did not invite him for anything because I get work by my ability and skills. While I was working on a government’s project, Zhang visited me and commented that since he become the mayor everyone else had invited him out for dinner except me. A meal itself does not mean anything to him. But I knew he associated me not inviting him with me not respecting him enough. At that moment, I jokingly said that ‘eating and drinking was not as important as getting the work done well. You are visiting me to see how the work is going on here. I know you care more about the project than anything else. Let me show you the progress.’ Zhang was satisfied with what he saw and did not mention the dinner thing again that day. Now that we have become buddies, we

would occasionally get together and have a drink. After he finished his term of office, he was appointed the headmaster of Fengfeng Vocational Education Centre and asked me to collaborate in a course for his students on numerical control related subjects.” What was emphasized was not whether Wang treated Zhang to a meal, but that all other owners of local ceramic business had invited Zhang except Wang. It was considered normal for the business owners to treat the new town mayor after he took office to welcome him. Initiating a dinner could be considered a gift for the new mayor given by the workshop owners to show their respect and willingness to cooperate with the new mayor. Since the local government has a lot of dealings with these workshop owners, if the dinner went well, the workshop owners would feel assured that a friendly relationship with the government and new mayor was possible in the future. After the new mayor accepted the respect, he would be expected to reciprocate by being a *fu mu guan* (or 父母官, parental official). The dinner could be read as a confirmation given, by the workshop owners, to the new mayor to express that they recognize him as the local “Parental Official.” The new mayor would have the responsibility to govern the town as if he is the parent of the town’s residents, understanding their difficulties, having their best interests in his heart, governing impartially and holding zero grudge if there is divergence between him and the people. Although, technically speaking, all the residents in Pengchengzhen could be called the Parental Official’s *zi min* (or 子民, filial people), not everyone would invite the new town mayor for dinner. It is important and possible for the ceramic workshop owners to do so rather than a random person in the street for at least two reasons. First, these workshops have frequent and direct dealings with the local government. As for the random person in the street, the distance between him and the mayor could be as far as watching someone disappearing as a dot at where

the sky meets the earth, until the government comes and knocks on his door. Secondly, because of the frequent dealings with the government, it creates opportunities for the workshop owners to get to know other officials, who could introduce the workshop owners to the new mayor after he takes office. Without a middleman, a workshop owner who does not know the new mayor personally has a much smaller probability in getting the mayor to dinner, until the government comes to his door. Both the interaction and the acquaintance with the government are resource that the majority does not have.

Workshop owners would treat the town mayor in hope that they could gain favors from him in the future. The favor might be a purchase of the vases made by the well-known masters, a profitable contract, or a cooperative opportunity which might put the workshop in the news or the mental map of higher authorities. It is hard to foretell what kind of favor they would eventually get nor when they would get it, because it depends on what the government needs, but they would hope that the mayor would reciprocate by not making their lives hard during his term of office at least. Since treating the mayor was an accepted way to show their respect, it bound together the social identities of both the workshop owners as “filial” civilians and the mayor as “parental” governor, and the relationship between them. Both the social roles of the mayor and the civilians were expressed by the act of inviting the mayor to dining. The dinner table was the stage on which the governor was invited by the workshop owners to play, acknowledge and confirm each other’s roles. Not treating the new mayor would very much likely be associated with unwillingness on the workshop owner’s part in acknowledging the authority of and establishing a good relationship with the mayor. In a small town like Pengchengzhen, a mayor is one of the most powerful people. It is believed whoever offends a powerful people like the

mayor would run the risk of being *chuan xiao xie* (or 穿小鞋, given tight shoes to wear). Here what is important is the belief that if one does not conform to the custom, one should expect consequences. Mr. Wang considered treating the mayor to gain favor as a corrupted custom and told me that his friends made the comment that he was being naïve and stupid not inviting the new mayor to meal. When everyone showed their respect for Zhang, the new town mayor, Wang, the nonconformist, who, instead of *sui da liu* (or 随大溜, drifting with the main stream), doing what the majority have been doing, wanted to get business by his work and skill, could be considered disrespectful, opposing the government's appointment Mr. Zhang, or rendered a disobeyer of new mayor himself personally. It is obvious that Wang acknowledged Mayor Zhang as the authoritative figure and got the implication from his comment that Wang "was the only workshop owner who had not had dinner" with him and how he responded to the situation. Wang swiftly switched the emphasis on treating the mayor to getting the government assigned work done, a shift from respect paid in informal dinners to a well-done work which could be added to the governor's list of achievements. In this way, he also contributed to the role of a governor who was able to hire the right people for the right job, which is considered far more important than being treated with dinners. In the end, the not treating the mayor to dinner incident became a prop which gained reputation for both Mayor Zhang and Wang on the stage of their interaction, instead of undermining the mayor's authority. Mayor Zhang was seen, by Wang, as the "parental" governor who had integrity because he did not accept any gift or dinner invitation from Wang, while Wang was considered by Mayor Zhang as the upright and capable artisan who won business by his performance. In other words, Mr. Wang saved Zhang's face. When Zhang

talks about Mr. Wang, he regarded him as the only one in Pengchengzhen, probably in China, who could make the giant vases standing in Zhaode Square as porcelain vases.

It is clear that in Pengchengzhen it was usually the artisans and workshop owners who invited officers to dinner. When it happened the other way around, that is to say, when the former mayor invited the workshop owner to dinner, it implied either potential business opportunities or a personal favor. Therefore it meant either the former mayor was going to give a favor or ask for one. Either way, it works for the workshop owner. In Pengchengzhen, ceramic workshops are mostly small family-owned business. The workshops are usually ran by father and son, master and his son-in-law, father and daughter, or husband and wife, with a few hired full time help who are not their family members. The scale and business mode of these workshops are closely connected with Cizhou ware's wet body technique, its handmade production way, and the main purchasers being the local government and antique dealers. Dealing with antique dealers is something the Cizhou artisans are trying to avoid because the vases and jars they made as replicas of archeology findings, for example plum vases with scrolling peonies or jars with phoenix, have been purchased for a few thousand RMB Yuans, made look ancient, and sold as antiques for dozens of times more by antique dealers. Dealing with antique dealers put stains on the artisans and their work. It is bad for both their reputation and business especially when they are already state certified masters in the craft of making porcelain and want to do business with the local government. Therefore the business opportunity from the government is regarded as highly important. When the former mayor extended a dinner invitation, the workshop owner would most likely accept it.

Having the right person as introducer helped greatly for my research. In the similar way, I was introduced to five more artisans, several government officials, and the retired Chief Engineer of Handan Ceramic Cooperation and her husband, the retired Chief Manager. In the artisans' workshop, the owners insisted that I stay for meal. During meals like this, I got to know their wives and children. Sharing meals became a ritual for me to get more and more acquainted with the artisans and their families. The distance between me and them was shortened bit by bit with the tea they constantly added in my teacup and the vegetables and meat they put in my bowl. Mr. Zhang joked that because the town used to be poor sharing food and liquor was the way for them to show their hospitality. But rarely would the hired people stay for lunch, let alone supper. My interaction with them mostly happened around their work station.

Other than being introduced, I also went around the town to find smaller workshops on my own. The official from the local Statistics Bureau told me there were about 40 workshops at the time when I was conducting my research. The five workshops I was introduced to by different officials are the most prominent ones. During my stay, the owners of these five workshops introduced me to three more workshops. All together, they are considered, by both the local government and the artisans I interviewed, the workshops which best represent the achievement of contemporary Cizhou ware. It made me curious what smaller or less achieved ones would look like. So I went around the town trying to find them. The result was hardly fruitful. First, these workshops spread all over the town and are usually hidden in the alleys. They are no road signs or posts along the streets or alleys giving me any indication where to find them. When I asked around, people always pointed me to the two sites which have firing kiln relics from ancient dynasties and about which I already knew. Without someone who knows the way, an

outsider like me could easily get lost in the willowy alleys among walls built by used saggars, slag, or broken jars. When I finally found one small workshop by myself, I failed to persuade the owner to be part of my research. We talked for about twenty minutes, during which he tried to sell me vases and ceramic pillows which I could not afford. After his wife confirmed that I had no intention to buy anything, she asked her husband to stop talking to me and go back to work. The man apologized awkwardly and accompanied me to door. I felt frustrated afterwards but also came to realize how lucky I was to have known Mr. Zhang and had him as my introducer.

The First Layer Underneath the Surface

The workshops I visited and will be talking about in the following passages make Cizhou ware of the same style. Both the small ones and the large one break down the process of making Cizhou ware into three general stages, including molding or wheel throwing, glazing, painting or carving, and firing. The difference is where the small workshop hires one or two persons for each stage of work, the factory hires dozens more, which makes it possible for a further division of labor in each stage in the larger workshop. From time to time people in the small workshop would assist each other in work when an extra pair of hands is needed. The people in the factory help each other too while the help usually comes from workers who do the similar job.

The similarity of labor division and way of organizing the production between the small workshop and the large one is the result of the technical process of making Cizhou ware. The local people have been using the local earth to produce ceramics for almost one thousand years.

Because of the characteristics of the local earth, the finished clay bodies are usually thick, with rough surface in dull taupe. Tiny dark brown balls of dissolved and precipitated metal particles would cling onto the surface because the local earth is rich in iron. To cover up the unattractive surface and imitate the Ding Ware (Ye and Ma 2009: 3), a white slip, made from a different layer of local earth, was developed. Decoration and glaze would be added upon the clay body after a layer of slip is applied. The finished products then look finer and whiter.

The unattractive clay body and this layer of slip together play an important role in organizing Cizhou ware production, both in the past and now. The slip and the clay body would adhere to each other only if the slip is applied to the clay body when the clay body contains certain amount of moisture. A clay body either dryer or wetter than that would result in a defective object with glazed surface peeling off. This technical particularity requires people who work respectively in molding/throwing, slipping, painting/carving, and glazing to work together closely. A clay body which was dried too long will be thrown back into the grinding machine; a slipped body which is not painted and glazed in time will go to waste. This technical particularity determines that, when someone decides to produce Cizhou ware, regardless of the scale of the business, he/she needs to hire people for every stage of work. It could be a one man workshop where one person does all the work step by step, or a workshop of many people working together. A small workshop would need to have at least one person for each step of job; a large workshop would need to hire more people in every stage to meet larger volume of production.

This particularity also sets the ceramic business in Pengchengzhen as different from other porcelain production areas in China, for example Jingdezhen. In Jingdezhen, because of the earth

there makes clay bodies perfectly fine and white after firing, no slip is ever needed. The clay bodies made of local earth could be stored for decades before firing. Making ceramic in Jingdezhen does not require workers with different skills to work together. They could sufficiently build their own business by specializing in one particular job, for example by being throwers, molders, painters or someone who could make beautiful glaze. A thrower could store and sell the clay bodies to painters or glazers; someone who is good at painting does not need to hire other to make clay bodies for him to paint; a glazer could order clay bodies from any thrower. Firing service could also be found if one does not own a kiln. It is also possible for people to have combined business of clay body making and firing. As one of the artisans commented, one crucial difference between making Cizhou ware in Pengchengzhen and porcelain in other places is the *shi pi gong yi* (or 湿坯工艺, wet body process) used in making Cizhou ware. While the slipping, carving, painting and glazing have to be done within certain period of time after the clay body is molded, clay bodies molded in Jingdezhen could be dried and stored for decades, or traded and transported to buyers who specialized in painting or glazing. The clay body of Cizhou ware would easily collapse if it is transported to a different location while it is still wet.

Compared to various ways ceramic production is organized in Jingdezhen, making Cizhou ware in Pengchengzhen is less flexible. As another artisan who works as both molder and glazer in a small workshop remarked, to make Cizhou ware people who have different skills always need to work together closely in the same workshop in Pengchengzhen. The artisan compared making Cizhou ware with living a good life, that in order to create a good live people need to pull their talents together and work side by side as a team.

This thin layer of slip is what the local people have been proud of, and by which they define what Cizhou Ware is, as well as identify themselves as the successors of making Cizhou ware. In many occasions during my visit in Pengchengzhen, the idea that the slip defines Cizhou ware was expressed in various ways. One of the well-known local ceramic art masters, Master Ren, certified by the country, commented that the slip was what distinguished Cizhou ware from porcelain made in other areas of China. “Having a layer of slip is the typical characteristic of Cizhou Ware. As long as a layer of white slip is applied, it (a ceramic ware) should be called Cizhou Ware. Without the slip, it, at least, does not belong to the Cizhou type.”

The slip covers up the rough texture and dull color of local earth, making it whiter, finer and smoother. One government officer, Mr. Fang, illustrates the function of the slip in “*ci zhou yao xiao diao*” (or 磁州窑小调, A Cizhou Kiln Ditty), which includes the following verses “How clever the slipping technique, just as though a young woman (gets ready for) getting into her bridal palanquin; with glaze evenly applied upon its face, with dragons depicted and phoenixes painted it is (charming and) ready to be presented in the hall.³” The text in Chinese is metrical and catchy. It conveys the idea that the slip works like the makeup foundation for a bride, covering up, maybe, the uneven tone of her skin, enlarged pores, freckles, or simply to make her skin look one shade whiter, when she is getting ready for her wedding day. With the foundation slip applied, the makeup upon it would look better and the bride considered more beautiful. As the bride is ready to get into her bridal palanquin to be carried to where the wedding ceremony is happening and the guests waiting, the Cizhou ware slipped and decorated with brush paintings of dragons or phoenixes could be presented in a place where the Cizhou ware would be the focus of attention, a place where plain daily ware normally would not. The slip is recognized as “wisdom

of the ancestor” by local people. All of my informants agreed, it turned the porcelain, which could only be sold cheaply to villagers as a daily ware, into a fine object which could be displayed for decorative purpose or given to others as a present.

“The fire of Cizhou Kiln has been burning for a thousand years

We have been affiliated with the Kiln God for hundreds of generations

Ever since Pan Gu separated heaven and earth

Cizhou has been firing ceramics

Lang ge li ge lang, lang ge, lang ge li ge lang⁴

Set aside the squiggly and tortuous alleys stretching out like willow branches

Let us look at saggar walls built generation by generation

Hold an umbrella and walk long the alleys

A spray of plum blossoms has already reached over the wall

Carve out a peony and let it grow along the surface of the vase

Throw bowls and plates and use them to serve the tasty dishes

Pinch a puppy and let it run on the ground

Mould a teapot and give it a chubby waist

Lang ge li ge lang, lang ge, lang ge li ge lang

How clever the slipping technique

Just as though a young woman getting into her bridal palanquin

With glaze evenly applied upon its face

With dragons depicted and phoenixes painted it is ready to be presented in the hall

The technique of Cizhou ware is ingenious

The ancestor handed it down to us and we should pass it on

Seventy-two steps we count in heart

The kilns will collapse if we do not fire good ceramics”⁵

Mr. Fang wrote the above ditty himself and explained that his writing was a summary of “the history of Cizhou Kiln, people’s emotional connection with it, the territorial characteristics, the signature plum vase, peony pattern and the producing steps, as well as the quality of Cizhou ware.” He enjoyed performing it for his acquaintances in many occasions. The entire ditty is about two minutes long and his performance had been well received. The retired Communist Party Secretary of Handan Ceramic Cooperation, Mr. Lu, praised Mr. Fang as “a gifted young man who is able to capture the essence of Cizhou Ware.” A local artisan commented that Yang’s ditty was a vivid illustration of both Pengchengzhen and its Cizhou ware production. The casting crew from Hebei TV Station thought the ditty would make a good material in the documentary they were making about Cizhou ware and wanted to film Mr. Fang’s singing the tune.

Although Cizhou ware looks fine and white because of the slip, it is not as fine, nor as white, as the porcelain made in Jingdezhen. Jingdezhen is the most famous porcelain making town in China, with a long history in making fine white porcelain. Because of the abundance of and easy access to kaolinite, Jingdezhen’s porcelain enjoys the fame “as thin as paper, as white as jade, as bright as a mirror, and has the sound of a bell (Elaine 2014).” The saying, which is popular in

Pengchengzhen, “The South has Jingdezhen, while the North has Pengchengzhen” (or 南有景德, 北有彭城), indicates that the ceramic made in these two towns are equally matched in fame by juxtaposing the names of the two towns next to each other. Although this saying could be seen in almost every text on Cizhou ware or Cizhou kiln, I could not find the reference where the above saying was originally stated. People who work in ceramic related jobs in Pengchengzhen attach great importance to the saying. Someone even suggested the correct sequence of the words in the sentence should be “The North has Pengchengzhen, while the South has Jingdezhen,” because, he insisted, the Cizhou Kiln in Pengchengzhen was established earlier than the kilns in Jingdezhen, which is a popular belief in Pengchengzhen but could hardly be proved true. Even though the slip is able to make Cizhou ware appear to be much whiter, the white of Cizhou ware is a creamy white instead of pure white. Cizhou artisans do not see this as weakness of Cizhou ware, even though the slip was devised to create an ideal white surface but only succeed at a creamy one. Instead, they seize on this point to promote their work and distinguish it from, not only porcelain made in Jingdezhen, but all other fine and white porcelain. When they talk about the creamy white color of Cizhou ware, they associate it with the color of ivory and ancient white jade, arguing that “Cizhou ware’s unique whiteness is able to give spectators the feeling of mildness and gentleness, with which a bold, glaring and pure white ceramic vase could not compare.” Both ivory and ancient white jade have enjoyed a long history in China, being valued as symbols of wealth, high social class, good virtue and even purifying power (Zhang 2009). Ivory products are regarded as objects with collectible value which only increases over time in contemporary China. The popularity of investing in ivory products could be seen from the series of light box advertisement displayed in every subway station in my home city Tianjin all year

long, exhorting people to stop regarding ivory products as “symbols of status” with “collectible value” and refuse to buy ivory products because the purchasing has resulted in slaughter of elephants for their teeth. By associating the color of Cizhou ware with the yellow tinted whiteness of ivory, the Cizhou artisans are trying to advance their handmade Cizhou wares to the social status enjoyed by ivory products, hinting that Cizhou ware could be the substitution for the ivory collectibles, especially when ivory products are unaffordable for ordinary people and stained with illegal and brutal slaying of elephants. In this way it attempts to turn what is considered a flaw of Cizhou ware into an advantage.

The Second Layer Underneath the Surface

While the slip was invented, it was invented to make the fired objects look whiter and finer. During the time when long distance transportation was limited to waterways only, the slip was a practical solution for such a problem. With the development of transportation and e-commerce, clay rich in kaolinite with affordable price is easily acquirable. The technology advancement has also made possible a variety of clay formulas to be used to produce compound which could be used as substitution for Pengchengzhen’s local clay earth. In fact, several ceramic producing companies, among them the well-known Yuhang Porcelain Co. Ltd. and Wutongshu Jiaju Co. Ltd., have been successfully running their factories in Fengfeng Mining District for decades. Both of the two companies hire hundreds of workers, do not use local earth, have mechanized production line, and produce perfectly fine and white daily wares, sanitary porcelain, and objects for decoration. There are really not many obstacles in getting other kind of clay to fire porcelain

in Pengchengzhen. Using local earth to make Cizhou ware is not because the artisans do not have other options in obtaining other better material. It is a choice the artisans made for themselves. The purpose the slip serves today is different from that of the past. In the history, the slip was applied to make the ceramic look like Ding Ware, which was white and clear. Its main function was to make Cizhou wares conform to the aesthetic trend of that time. Yet, in contemporary Pengchengzhen, the slip is the element the local artisans employ to distinguish Cizhou ware from other porcelain, as well as a standard to determine whether the artisans are successors of Cizhou Kiln. In the past, the slip said more about the buyers' preference, while in contemporary Pengchengzhen, it is more about what the artisans want to do.

Slip is one of the elements which define Cizhou style. But the slip only holds practical meaning when the clay body is made by Pengchengzhen's local earth. If it is applied on, for example, a Jingdezhen type clay body, the slip will show zero significance. No matter what to paint on the slip, it makes no difference from painting on the Jingdezhen clay body directly. The only thing the slip could add to the already white and fine clay body would be trouble, the trouble to apply the slip only when the clay body contains certain amount of water, plus the trouble to paint on the slip only when the slip is neither too dry nor too wet. It is only when painting needs to be done on a rough and dull clay body made by the less good earth of Pengchengzhen, that a slip could play its role. In this sense, to make porcelain with local earth is not something forced on the artisans of Pengchengzhen, but a decision made by the artisans themselves. To use local earth is, to some extent, locked in with the slipping technique. For Master Ren who regarded the slip as "the typical characteristic of Cizhou ware," using local earth would keep this recognized feature in his own work, as well as other local artisans'. If

Pengchengzhen artisans intend to “pass on” firing Cizhou ware, as Mr. Fang wrote in his ditty, then using local earth and the slip is considered the way of inheriting and carrying on the practice by these artisans.

The connection of the soil of an area and the people who inhabit the area also manifests on other level in Chinese culture. In the story of *Nvwa Zao Ren* (or 女娲造人, Nvwa Made Men), a myth well-known among Chinese, human beings were initially made by the goddess *Nvwa*, using clay, imitating her own reflection in the river, to ease her loneliness. This is a myth almost every adult knows and tells it to the children. In the myth, earth, or soil, becomes where a person originated and what the Chinese were made of in the very beginning of time. Although people do not believe the myth for its literal meaning, the symbolic meaning of soil remains in their mind. In Chinese culture, people have been harboring the idea, expressed by a popular idiom *luo ye gui gen* (or 落叶归根, falling leaves should go back to their roots), for hundreds of years. In this idiom, human beings are like leaves. As human life coming to its end, humans should go back to their root, as the leaves fall back to theirs. The root in this context does not mean the family we go back to everyday after school or work. It refers to the homeland, from where one moves away for different reasons and wants to go back in his late years. The word homeland could be translated as *gu tu* (or 故土, old soil) literally. Home is the soil on which we used to stand and from which we grow. The earth under the feet is the root for Chinese people.

For artisans in Pengchengzhen, using local soil to make porcelain is to use something only they could claim as theirs to fire ceramic, an expression of their identity, molded into Cizhou ware, as *peng cheng ren* (or 彭城人, Pengchengzhen native). “Cizhou ware should be made with

Cizhou earth. If you make it with earth from other places, how could you call it Cizhou ware? It will not be Cizhou ware anymore.” One artisan, Mr. Yue, suggested, to understand Cizhou ware and carry on the practice, one should go back to learn about the local soil, because it was the soil which determined the eventual ceramic products. Although it was the ancestors who figured out how to make ceramic, “people of one particular place were supported and nurtured by the water and soil of that place, therefore it was the peculiarity of our soil and water what gave inspiration to our ancestors,” said Mr. Yue. Even though their work differs from one another to different extent, all of the artisans and masters I interviewed share the same opinion with Mr. Yue.

Although almost all Pengchengzhen artisans use local soil to make Cizhou ware, Mr. Yue pushes the idea further than other artisans. While most of the artisans produce objects of, or related to Cizhou style either in object types or decoration patterns, Mr. Yue’s work could hardly be called typical Cizhou wares.

An example of the typical Cizhou ware would be the two giant vases standing on the pedestal on Zhaode Square. What they show to viewers is exactly what was criticized by Ms. Huang, the professor specialized in ceramic design from Tsinghua University, in the conference “Carrying Forward the Culture and Art of Cizhou Kiln, Advance the Development of Ceramic Industry” as a style that “has not make any progress for more than ten years” and seen everywhere in Pengchengzhen that it was making her son want to “throw up.” Besides the decoration showed by the two giants vases, what is recognized as typical Cizhou style could be frequently seen in the workshops of local artisans, as well as in the ceramic shops along

Pengdong Street. Although there is certain degree of transformation among various application of one same theme, the differences among artisans' executions are limited.

In contemporary Pengchengzhen, what artisans produce are mainly vases, plates and tea wares, occasionally dining wares and stationery. Cizhou vases and plates are mainly produced and used as decoration. Tea wares and stationery serve certain practical function. Dining wares have practical function too, but more often as result of mass production decorated by decalcomania. Rarely dining wares are made in Cizhou style. Although artisans would sometimes experiment with making dining wares, it is usually for fun or their own use instead of being sold as merchandise. If one walks along the street in Pengchengzhen, it is easy to see tall vases standing by the doors of ceramic shops of which window displays are mainly smaller scaled vases and decorative plates, which could be hung on a wall or set on a wooden stand, for decoration purposes. Archeology findings show that in the past there were more than 5000 types of ceramic products used for every aspect of human life (Ye and Ma 2009). The current Pengchengzhen Cizhou type production is mainly made up by tea wares, vases and plates.

It is not beyond understanding that, with the development of technology and discovery of new material, most object types did not survive except vases and tea wares. Vases and tea wares hold practical function and aesthetic value in contemporary Chinese life. Flower has long been part of Chinese literati's life. The alcohol vessel became plum vase because of the plum blossom put and displayed in it. Tea wares are visually appreciated when people get together and drink tea. Every time I visited a workshop, the owner would invite me for tea. Every workshop I visited had a tea room, or at least an area with a tea set, which included an electric boiler, one or

two teapots and cups way more than needed. The teapots and cups were made by themselves or given to them by other local artisans (figure 3.). One of the activities which would spontaneously occur was discussing and appreciating the tea cups. When vases and tea wares are being comprehended for other than their practical value, it was their visual factors on which people concentrate and from which they derive aesthetic enjoyment. These visual factors lie both in the shapes and decoration. For Cizhou ware made in Pengchengzhen, it is largely the decoration that distinguishes Cizhou ware from other ceramic, and was criticized by the TsingHua professor, Ms. Huang. During its long history of firing ceramic, Cizhou developed not only thousands types of objects, but also various styles, for example, celadon wares (or 青瓷), black-and-white-carving (or 黑白刻), red and green painted wares (or 红绿彩), three colors glazed wares (or 三彩), and blue-and-white wares (or 青花瓷) (Ye and Ma 2009). Yet the only style that prospers and could be widely seen on the street and in artisans' workshops is the black-and-white and carving-and-painting. The prevalence of this decoration in contemporary porcelain production in Pengchengzhen begs the question, among different styles developed during its long history of firing, how come only the black-and-white and carving-and/or-painting style flourished and what does it mean for local artisans?

Chapter 3 The State Owned Period and Afterwards

The State Owned Period

The state owned period lasted approximately from the early 1950s to early 2000s, one year before Master Ren was going to retire. Research on making replicas of Song Cizhou ware started in the 1953, as a task assigned by the Bureau of Light Industry of Hebei Province (or 河北省轻工厅) (Handan Taoci Zhi 1990: 101, 424), and to meet the orders made by the same bureau for exporting purpose (ibid: 391). These orders made up the first batch of export products made in Pengchengzhen in 1955 since founding of People's Republic of China. In the following decade, Cizhou ware replicas were exhibited at the Leipzig Trade Fair in 1957, and in Great Hall of the People (or 人民大会堂) as the symbol of achievement of Hebei Province during the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the founding of PRC (ibid: 101). During this period, not only the research on making replicas of Song Cizhou ware, but the entire ceramic industry was encouraged and supported by the state. In 1952, Prime Minister Zhou Enlai put forward a task to bring back the porcelain production of the Five Famous Kilns. Cizhou Kiln does not belong to the famous five but got a lift during this period because Pengchengzhen is the one of the oldest ceramic production areas. "The outstanding heritage of Cizhou Kiln was recognized under the shine of Chairman Mao's policy on art and literature after liberation (Mei, 1958)." After several years of interruption during Cultural Revolution, ceramic production went through a recovery period in the 1970s and reached its prime in the 1980s and 1990s.

Division of Labor

During the four decades, the ten state owned factories received both financial investment and technical assistance, as well as intellectual support from the state. Scholars from the Ceramic Department of Central Academy of Craft Art were delegated to go to Pengchengzhen to lead, together with local engineers, the research on artistic ceramic (Mei 1958; source 1990, 101). The concept of artistic ceramics was coined by one of the scholars, Mei Jianying during this period as “the individual ceramic work hand-made or painted by an artist” that should be “the original work, not the duplication (Mei 1958).” This concept has been used in Pengchengzhen ever since. The other development that potentially helped with the prevalence of this concept came as the result of the assistance from the state in replacing manual labor with machines in shaping ceramic products and making decal images. These machines not only separated manual production small scale from the mass production, but also stratified workers into two general groups roughly, with one group closer to artists making artistic products manually, and the other closer to mass labor working on the production line. In the private-owned ceramic business in the 1930s, a thrower’s income was about 10 percent more than the painter’s; while, among the workers who had the high income were those who loaded the kilns or were in charge of firing, earning double of what the throwers and painters did (Handan taoci zhi 1990: 271). It was clear that before the socialization of the private sectors the painters hired by kiln owners did not get better pay than the rest, nor did they enjoy higher social status. Instead, the relative advantage was enjoyed by the firing crew. The situation in the ceramic factories changed during the state owned period partly because of central government’s economic plan. According to Master Ren, during the 1970s and 1980s people working in artistic product research enjoyed special policies

in payment, for example, when 30% of the rest working labor in the factory got a raise in salary annually, 100% of the research people would get a raise because the factory leaders considered artistic products of greater importance for the state's plan in earning foreign currency. The people who made artistic ceramics were gradually weighted as more important in the factories. However, they were still part of the working crew. The gap in social status between them and others was not as wide as it is today.

The research on artistic products back then was led by the scholars from Central Academy of Craft Art. Teachers and students of different craft art institutions in Beijing and Tianjin came to Pengchengzhen for collaboration. Song Cizhou wares were considered the crowning achievement of ceramic production in Pengchengzhen. Yet by the end of Qing Dynasty, the black and white Song type wares disappeared from the market (Handan taoci zhi 1990). The investment and help in the research on Song Cizhou ware came from the state, as part of its planned economy. As Master Ren recalled, the research on the visual factors of Cizhou ware and the recovery of the skills to duplicate those factors could not be possible if it were not for these scholars and students. Not only their effort brought Song Cizhou replicas back to production, these scholars and students also brought the young people in Pengchengzhen their career dream. Yue spoke with warmth when he recollected watching these scholars and students working and going in and out of No. 7 Ceramic Factory filled with respect and admiration for them while he was a young boy.

“Those scholars were different from the local workers in my eyes, for example the work they did and the way they talked about ceramics. They were more polite and better educated

than local people. I wanted to do what they did. Back then, I was a student in Ceramic Vocational School studying painting skills and soon to be allocated to work in one of the ceramic factories. Most people in our town worked in the ceramic factories. The best jobs one could find were in the No. 7 factory making artistic ceramics. But the job allocation back then did not take into consideration one's training. Rather, people were assigned to where more hands were needed. I was put in the decoration firing section after I graduated. I could not settle for the job but wanted to work as a painter. So I applied, with the consent of the factory, to go to Tianjin Academy of Craft Art for further education. When I came back, I had to go back to the No. 5 factory, where I used to work, but was finally assigned a job in product design."

So was the case for both Mr. Wang, the maker of the two giant vases, and many other people who work in these workshops now. The young people thirty years ago were drawn to the painting work by the skill and talent they saw in the scholars from outside the small town. These scholars and researchers were still part of the working force but doing jobs which were different from the majority on the production lines. "The designer job was the second best job next to being a director, a job requires skills instead of hard labor (Hang 2001: 133)." They got better payment and their work was attached greater importance by the factories and the state. In other words, they were better acknowledged. The other major local industry was mining. Compared to the miners, working in the ceramic factories was considered a much better job, according to the retired manager of Handan Ceramic Cooperation. When the scholars came to town, they soon became the "elites" in an occupation which was already considered better than others. They were the embodiment of the career goal for the soon to be worker youth. Luckily, for the young men

thirty years ago, the goal was not something beyond their dream. It was both practical and attainable. None of those young men could foretell that, thirty years later, because of the career goal they set for themselves, they would be titled “Master of Ceramic Craft,” “Successor of Non-material Cultural Heritage” by governments of different levels, or simply be called “artists.” In a Pengchengzhen workshop nowadays, the painters are usually the center. When there is more than one painter in the workshop, the one with the above mentioned titles, who is most likely the owner of the workshop, is the prestigious one. Throwers work as hired help. People who specialize in glaze enjoy social status higher than throwers and regular painters but lower than the prestigious ones. Whenever I was invited to a dinner, it was always with the painters and glazers, or workshop owners, who if they are not the painters, then they must be the sons or sons-in-law of the most prestigious painter in their workshops. My interaction with the throwers never went outside the workshop. We stayed in the working cave talking and gossiping. In some workshops, painters would stay for lunch and take a nap in beds prepared for them during a 3-hour lunch break, which is the local custom. A bed in the work place is an indication of a social level above others. I did not know this until I made the comment, “every government official I met has a bed in the office. Working in Pengchengzhen’s government must be a tiresome job” to one of the officials who also had a bed in his office. “It does not mean that being an official is a tiresome job. It only means everyone you have met with are high level officials in this area,” I was told. Truly, Pengchengzhen is a small town that I can get out of by riding a bicycle for 10 minutes. The bed is not something to reduce the burden of commuting to the workshop twice a day, but an object of convenience provided by the workshop to its valued employees. The throwers never stayed. They all went home for lunch and came back in the

afternoon. The difference in the status in the division of labor reflects what is considered important in the current Cizhou ware business. It is the decoration painted upon the ceramic objects. It is the appearance.

The No.7 Ceramic Factory

In Pengchengzhen, there were approximately 40 private workshops by the end of 2015, making what the local artisans call artistic porcelain.⁶ Most of the artisans who work in these workshops, regardless of whether they are the owners or hired help, are mostly former employees of the ten ceramic factories, which unfortunately did not survive into the twenty-first century. Before the ten ceramic factories closed down, at its prime in the 1980s, with more than 30,000 employees, the ceramic industry provided Pengchengzhen not only jobs making ceramic, but also factories making consumables for firing ceramic, for example, the saggar factory and decal print factory, two secondary vocational schools teaching ceramic related subjects, a kindergarten, a hospital, and even a cinema, and all these working units had “ceramic” in their names and belonged to Ceramic Corporation Ltd. (Handan taoci zhi 1990). Most of the artisans I met during my field work have spent all their lives in Pengchengzhen. For example, when Master Ren first moved to Pengchengzhen, he was a twenty years old young man who just graduated from a vocational institution in another city trained in ceramic art. He was allocated to work in one of Pengchengzhen’s ceramic factories, and has stayed in this small town ever since. He married a local girl, had two children, and was the director of the Ceramic Research Institution when he was laid off work, one year before he was going to retire. His two children, like many people of

their generation, grew up in the town, went to the ceramic vocational school, joined the workforce in the ceramic factories after graduation and were laid off work too. According to the retired manager of Handan Ceramic Cooperation, back in the days when the factories were still in business, it was beyond their imagination that one day the state owned factories would close and the workers all be laid off work. When the Ceramic Corporation closed down all these factories and work units, to local people, what they lost were not only their jobs, but also a way of life.

After the closing-down, some of these former state employed workers gradually opened their own business. These ceramic workshops are now their means of support. The five workshops I constantly visited during my field work are currently the most prominent ones in town, of which the work represents both the achievement of the artisans who see themselves as the successors of Cizhou Kiln, and what is recognized and criticized. Local government usually seeks for collaboration with them when Cizhou Kiln themed activities are planned, and would show officials around in these workshops when they come to visit from other towns or cities. Artisans of the elder generation, like Master Ren, working in these five workshops are in their sixties and seventies. They are the most recognized figures of Cizhou Kiln and most influential masters in making Cizhou ware. Children of Master Ren's generation are the main workforce in these private workshops. They grow up during the prosperity of state-owned factories. Not very long after they grew up and joined the trade, the factories closed down. Master Ren's generation was employed by the ceramic factories in the early 1960s and have witnessed the waxing and waning of the ceramic industry in Pengchengzhen. The influence of the state owned period stands out in our conversation.

No. 7 Ceramic Factory was frequently mentioned in the conversations I had with the artisans and government officials, as if it were a shrine of artistic ceramic production. To Mr. Yue, No. 7 Ceramic Factory was the factory for which he wanted to work but could not; to Master Ren, it was the place in which he had work for half his life only to find it was closed over one night; to Mr. Fang, the current director of an office of Fengfeng Mining District government called Deepen the Reform of the System, it is the project in which he wanted to revive the past glory the factory enjoyed during the state-owned period. No. 7 Ceramic Factory (or 第七瓷厂) was established with a concentration on research and production of artistic ceramics while other ceramic factories were reformation based on previously privately owned business (Handan taoci zhi 1990:, 165). It was remembered by the ceramic made within its walls. The result of the research included Song Cizhou imitation, ceramic figures, displaying plates and ceramic murals. Song ceramic wares were considered the highest achievement in the Pengchengzhen's history of firing ceramic. Until Qing dynasty, the ceramic wares fired in Pengchengzhen could not compete with the fine and white objects made in southern part of China. Bringing back the skills of making Song type Cizhou ware was not only fulfilling the task for state's planned economy, but also restoring the glory which had been fading away for the past 1000 years. When such a glory was bestowed on Master Ren's generation, it was hard for them to forget about it. A large part of the artistic ceramics made in Pengchengzhen today are imitations of Song type Cizhou wares. The patterns of these Song imitations are not creations made by contemporary Cizhou artisans. They are patterns found on Song Cizhou wares. Although elements are grouped and arranged in different ways and painted by different hands, the way these visual elements work is closer to

rearrangement and distortion of existing "modules" (Ledderose 2001) found on real Song Cizhou wares.

The current Cizhou type wares made in Pengchengzhen could not be treated completely as succession of a practice dated back to Song Dynasty, but also a continuation of the achievement made in the state owned period. Its survival in contemporary Pengchengzhen has something to do with people who have been buying them as well. Until 2015, the legacy of No. 7 Ceramic factory has been valued by two group of buyers, the local government and the dealers of fake antiques. These fake antique dealers were not local. They come to Pengchengzhen a few times a year and buy one or two dozen each year. Several artisans told me that they used to, or were still in business with these dealers. Some stopped because they had passed the most difficult time, which was the first several years right after the state-owned factories were closed. They do not want to do it anymore because it tainted their legitimate business even though they were not the ones who made the objects look ancient, nor did they sell them as real antiques. But there are a few who are still selling their work to the dealers. Fake antique dealers want nothing but imitations of Song Cizhou ware, which means they would only buy objects with shapes and patterns seen in museum catalogues. They do not want anything which is made fine and smooth but prefer heavy and crudely made objects. One of the artisans who deals with these dealers and is known for being able to keep the weight of the jars he made exactly the same as each other, commented that because the products made to sell to fake antique dealers need to look rough, Pengchengzhen's artisans made a lot of rough looking vases and jars. It was because of these rough wares the public was left with the impression that Cizhou wares are “stupid, lumpy, clumsy and crude.” When the local government wants to buy Cizhou ware, it buys it from the

“Masters of Ceramic Craft” and the “Successors of Non-material Cultural Heritage,” and give it to visiting officials from other places as gifts. Because these gifts were hand made by the masters and successors, they are considered high in collectible value and symbols of local culture.

Patterns seen on real Song Cizhou ware are popular because they could find reference in the history. When it is coming to finding reference in history, the earlier the better. But ever since the current president of the country took office, there has been a series of anti-corruption activities going on all over the country. Giving valuable gifts to government officials would be easily connected with bribery. The artisans complained that because of the new president’s policy the local government did not buy their work as before. The handmade work of these prestigious artisans are usually expensive, unaffordable for general public.

Meeting the Challenge

The style of this typical Cizhou style is what was criticized as something cramming up the town “making my son want to throw up.” by the scholar from Tsinghua University in the conference in Cizhou Kiln and Culture Festival in 2016. Her remark was bold and straightforward, but well received by both the government officials and the local artisans at the meeting. They applauded for her honesty. Several artisans invited her to visit their workshop and exchanged contact information with her after the discussion.

Cizhou artisans have already seen the problem for themselves. In our conversation, the worry about the future of Cizhou ware was constantly addressed. They criticized the typical

Cizhou style in the similar way the Tsinghua scholar did, but in a milder tone. Mr. Wang perceived the problem as the result of artisans choosing to remain where they were without desire to advance further—"The artisans' way of thinking is outdated, including the Masters and the Successors. The things they make could hardly be called modern and are too expensive. The bewitching title Master has been criticized lately. People want things which are practical."

Master Ren's son-in-law suggested the artisans need to step out of their comfort zone, "visit the big cities and widen their horizon." Business owners blamed each other as being short-sighted for only thinking about their own workshops, unwilling to work together and undercutting other's business. One Successor complained the government had forgotten about him since they stopped purchasing his work. A Master grumbled that the current government had no sense of responsibility when the officials asked to borrow his work to hold an activity in Beijing to promote Cizhou ware and Cizhou culture; instead he demanded that the government buys his work. He was then criticized as short-sighted by other artisans. One government official shared with me the regret of taking the false step by putting all the governmental effort in promoting the previously mentioned Master a few years ago. After he won the Master title, the price of his work skyrocketed and the government could no longer afford to buy his work. Now the government has switched to promoting Cizhou ware and Cizhou Culture as a whole and supporting several prominent workshops all together, but only to find that "The artisans are artists now. They all have their own temperament and ideas. When the government tried to have them work together, no one was interested in what others say or believe. Their work is too expensive and divorced from the market." Both the local government and artisans, regardless of whether they have attractive titles given by the state or not, are all aware that the Cizhou type of

which they have been proud is gradually becoming a stereotype. But the artisans think the government is not paying enough attention to promote their work; while the government feels it is impossible to have the artisans work together towards the same goal.

This dilemma put the artisans in a position that, on the one hand, they have to depend on themselves to survive, and on the other, they need to cooperate with the local government because there is the hope that the government could be effective in attracting business, talents or investment and they do not want the government to give them “tight shoes to wear.” When the artisans and business owners talked about each other, most of the things I heard were not positive. When they told me about themselves, their experience, ideas and how they cope with the challenge, the attitude and tone switched to a different mode. In general, Pengchengzhen artisans and workshops I interviewed are meeting the challenge in different ways. The ideas of three artisans summarized the ways used in Pengchengzhen’s ceramic workshops to cope with the reality.

Master Ren belongs to the oldest generation who are still active in Pengchengzhen’s ceramic workshops. He is one of the widely respected artisans in Pengchengzhen. Before he and his son-in-law had to start their own business, he was the director of No. 5 Ceramic Factory, No. 9 Ceramic Factory, and Ceramic Research Institution (or 陶瓷研究所). These positions were considered high in bureaucratic level and iron rice bowls (or 铁饭碗, secured jobs) during the state-owned period. Yet it could not save Master Ren from the unfortunate fate, shared by tens of thousands other people in Pengchengzhen, and countless more all over China in the 1990s during the SOP Reform (State Owned Enterprise Reform), of having the career he had been building

and the sense of a secured retirement shattered like a ceramic vase. He was left with nothing but confusion and depression because he “could not figure out why the thirty years of my life I devoted to the country suddenly means nothing and why the Ceramic Cooperation and the government would discard me overnight.” It took him one year to recover emotionally. Then he partnered with his son-in-law and started their own business. As of 2015, the artisans with the “Master” title are all people from his generation. Even though, while working in the state owned factories they all studied throwing and molding, the work they do today is largely painting. When Ren’s generation talked about the state-owned period, they spoke with happiness and nostalgia about the achievements they made, the awards they got and the attention came from the factory leaders and the government officials. Maybe it has something to do with the effort and attention Ren put in Research on Song wares. He is an admirer of Song Cizhou ware and Song Culture in general. “Song Cizhou wares were made exquisitely. It could be seen from the Song vases that the artisans back then spared neither labor nor money in making ceramic. I think the decoration of ceramic objects was influenced by Song paintings. For example, I find that the zhezhi hua patterns (or 折枝花, Broken Branch Flower) seen on Song wares were painted as graceful and delicate as those in Song paintings. If I can travel back through time to any dynasty in history, I would choose to travel to Song.” The way Ren perceived the challenge faced by Cizhou artisans was how to win the market. He compared the current situation with the Cizhou ware production before the state-owned period that “in the past ceramics were made for ordinary people’s daily use. Ceramic objects were practical and used in every aspect of life. They were what people needed. But what we make now are only artistic ceramics to be bought as gifts or collectibles for displaying.” The work handmade by someone who has a “Master” title is usually

high in added value. “Because the price is high, ordinary people do not want to spend that much on it. We need the market to survive.” He saw making objects with practical function appealing to ordinary people as the way for his workshop to win the market. Therefore more research needed to be done on how to design new things which would appeal to common people. The research he believed as a good model was the one supported by the state, where the research had the country and the factories invest both money and talent. But it was in the planned economy. At least for the workers, regardless whether they worked in production line or made artistic ceramics, they did not have to worry about finding market. Either the country would have already planned on what to do with the product, or the factories would have people in charge of marketing. The situation is different now. No one would pay for the research or bear the cost, except themselves, if the research goes wrong. Ren and his workshop could only afford to take baby steps, making small amount of practical wares as experiment.

The relatively popular objects they make are tea sets, which have practical function, and vases and plates painted by Ren and other painters in Cizhou style but are more colorful and decorated differently from commonly seen Cizhou wares. The tea sets are handmade by throwers and carvers, and are affordable for common people. The painters rarely paint any tea cups. Still, the vases and plates are way more expensive than the tea sets, because of the added value of being painted by Ren himself, or other painters. Those vases painted by Ren are of course the most expensive ones. These vases and plates are not so different from the Cizhou style wares the government used to purchase. They are still sold as expensive as the Cizhou style wares, only with a wider range of decorative patterns. Peking Opera figures painted in a comical style are Ren’s favorite and what he is known for. Yet the most popular ones have been those painted with

patterns which have auspicious implications homophonically. “People prefer patterns that have lucky meanings, for example the pattern of several persimmon fruits and a jade *ruyi* (or 如意, as-you-wish), of which the homophonic meaning is *shi shi ruyi* (or 事事如意, everything be as one wish) (figure 4.). Businessmen like to buy things like this because they consider it is good for luck.”

Although the decorative patterns changed, he considered the new patterns were in line with Cizhou tradition.” The current difficulty forced the Pengchengzhen artisan to look at what Cizhou tradition is differently. Ren's son-in-law interpreted Cizhou tradition in a spiritual way rather than a material way. “Cizhou Kiln’s tradition is not the plum vases or ceramic pillows displayed in the museum, but the spirit of the people who worked in the kilns in the history.” Ren interpreted the spirit as “The Cizhou Kiln spirit was being *kaifang* (开放, open) and *baorong* (包容, inclusive). It was reflected in workers’ willingness and ability to learn from other kilns, for example learning from Dingyao (定窑, Ding Kiln) in Song Dynasty and blue-and-white porcelain in Ming and Qing.” Similar interpretation was popular among both artisans and the government officials in Pengchengzhen. Almost everyone I talked with agreed with it yet it was impossible to tell who came up with it first. This reinvention of Cizhou Kiln spirit as Cizhou Kiln tradition broke the previous norm of regarding objects, to be exact the objects of Song Cizhou style, as Cizhou ware. The way Master Ren applies the open and inclusive spirit in his work is to experiment with more patterns and colors. Yet the logic behind how a Shi Shi Ruyi vase works for a businessman and how a Cizhou Scrolling Peonies vase worked for the government are not so different. Even though what the government wanted the vase to say was

different from that of the businessman, the vases would all end up as display objects and collectibles. It was the country's anti-corruption trend which pushed the governmental patrons away from the Master's workshop. The workshop then donned the same object with new dresses and attracted another rich customer. Its price is hardly for common people and dependent entirely on Master's reputation. To paint a Cizhou ware, it usually takes less than two or three hours after the throwing and slipping stage, even if the patterns are complicated. Theoretically, he is able to paint at least about three hundred pieces a year. Yet his son-in-law, who is also the business manager of the workshop, told me they set a limit to about thirty pieces of works from Ren to be sold annually to maintain the price of Ren's work at certain range. "Too much would hurt our business, both the current and the future. We would store some of the best each year, hoping their price would go up if my father-in-law cannot paint anymore. He is about seventy now and had a serious heart attack last year. I have to take this in to consideration for the business." Despite the intention to develop products which suit common people's practical use, the most successful ones for the Master and his workshop are still the ones embodied with the Master's personal fame, which would last for a long time even when the Master passed away. The other group of artisans, who are the majority of the people working in Pengchengzhen's workshops, is of Mr. Yue and Mr. Wang's generation.

Yue and Wang's generation were also workers in the state-owned factories. Although not all of them became research staff who works on artistic ceramic immediately when they were allocated to the factories, they all seized the opportunity to pursue higher education in Beijing or Tianjin. Most of them went to Ceramic Vocational School before joining the workforce in the factories. Back then, the school did not provide lessons on throwing or molding, but mainly

focused on painting. According to a former teacher of the vocational school, who is hired by Ren's workshop as a painter, students only started to learn hand throwing in either No. 7 Ceramic Factory or the Ceramic Research Institution after they were allocated there, for the purpose of making artistic ceramic. But he attributed the reason for this lack of training in hand throwing to the students, who, I believe, did not have any power in deciding what the curriculum should be. "Back then the young people were ambitious. No one was willing to learn hand throwing, but all were interested in painting." Both Yue and Wang were young men who liked painting. Yue took painting lessons in the school, while Wang was trained as a mechanic. But both of them were inspired by the visiting scholars and set themselves the goal to get a job making artistic ceramics. Since neither of them were allocated to the dream job, they sought higher education in hope they could advance their career later. Yue was successful. After he finished his study, he came back to the factory and was put in a research position. Wang tried several times but gave up the opportunity for other reasons. He stayed as a mechanic and was successful. Unlike Ren, who stayed in the factories until the last day, both of them resigned in the early 1990s because they "had enough of the bureaucratic absurdities" and eventually started their own business. The factories left them with memories different from Ren's generation and most of their generation who work in or own a workshop do not have fancy certified titles. Their ideas about how to make artistic ceramics are different from the Master's generation and they do more work than painting.

Yue was mentioned when the slipping technique was discussed, that even though he does not make conventional Cizhou objects, nor does he use slipping technique very often, other artisans still regard him as a Cizhou Kiln artist. Yue is also an advocator of the idea that "Cizhou

Kiln tradition does not lie in the objects made in the history, but in the Cizhou Kiln spirit of being open and inclusive.” His way of interpreting “open and inclusive” is different from Master Ren. He argued that the essence of ceramic as a craft did not rest in the patterns painted on the objects, but “was buried in the earth used to create the object.” He regarded painting different patterns on vases as “an imitation that stays at the surface” when the spirit at core was “learning about what was needed by people and finding out the right way to satisfy the needs.” This is also his working motto. “I work with designers and give them advice on material, for example what could be done to the earth to achieve certain result.” He respects Master Ren, but opposed the practice of governments certifying “Masters” and “Successors” on the ground that it is an honor which should be left to the future generation to decide. This is another thing on which every artisan I talked with agreed, including the Masters and the Successors. In recent years, *ping xuan da shi* (or 评选大师, master certifying) has become a corrupted event, where, sometimes, the sponsor had no authority and the applicants buy the titles with bribe. The third “*zhong guo tao ci yi shu da shi*” (or 中国陶瓷艺术大师, Ceramic Art Master of China) certifying event was announced illegal by Ministry of Civil Affairs in December, 2016. Being “open and inclusive” for Mr. Yue means to wake up from worshiping certain objects and go deep into the material. “Our Cizhou Kiln ancestors used the local earth to build practical solutions for people’s daily conduct. What we should learn is not to copy the objects but find out what problem we could use it to solve now. The fancy titles distinguish a few but belittle the majority artisans.”

Compared to the work of majority of Pengchengzhen artisans, Mr. Yue’s work looks utterly different and covers a much wider types of objects than his Pengchengzhen peers. Besides vases

and tea wares with decoration style sharing nothing in common with typical Cizhou style, his work ranges from tiny sagger models which were given out as free gifts with a ceramic themed journal, to ceramic murals decorating the wall of subway stations in another province, from street light lampshades to sound-absorbing walls for an opera house. No matter what he designs, he insists on using local earth to make the final product. He thinks that the insight that “a Pengchengzhen artisan should get from the ancestor artisans is first to investigate the characteristics of local earth, then to play with these features and know when to apply what to achieve different purposes.” He attributes this kind of thinking as what should be inherited from their ceramic ancestors. To him, it was the knowledge about the local earth that brought prosperity to Pengchengzhen in the past, instead of particular decoration method: “The decoration style was the result of applying the knowledge of our earth.” For this reason, using the local earth to do different work, other local artisans who make conventional products still regard Mr. Yue as a Cizhou Kiln artist, even though his work does not look like Cizhou type at all. In fact, he is recognized as an artist who “is special, and unlike other Cizhou Kiln artists, who has his own ideas,” recommended to me by Mr. Chen, a businessman who established a successful Cizhou ware business in Pengchengzhen. What should be noticed here is that, although Mr. Yue does not make conventional Cizhou ware, he is still accepted as a Cizhou Kiln artist, instead of just an artist. In recent years, when the Chinese universities sought the government of Fengfeng Mining District to build Summer Social Practice with workshops that make Cizhou ware, Mr. Yue’s workshop has been the first choice for which the local government would seek partnership and collaboration. As an official commented the government felt that “Mr. Yue’s idea and work

is more approachable for young people. Young people is the future of Cizhou Kiln. Cizhou Kiln should be open to them.”

Mr. Wang is another figure worth mentioning. Like others, he agrees that the future of Cizhou ware lies in artisans being “open and inclusive” and opposes the practice of certifying “Masters” and “Successors.” Yet his way of practicing “open and inclusive” is completely different from others. While other artisans are injecting the idea in decorative patterns and product development, Wang applies it in the way of making ceramic. Besides hiring people to do regular work in making Cizhou ware, he brought digital control and engraving machine into his workshop. For him, being open and inclusive is to “bring technological development into making Cizhou ware.” The two giant vases on Zhaode Square were his work. He designed the vases to be two 3D puzzles weighting thirty-six tons with four hundred and eighty pieces respectively. Each piece was shaped and carved by the engraving machine, fired individually and assembled at Zhaode Square. The two vases are considered a landmark of Fengfeng Mining District and something “no one else could do” remarked by the former town mayor. The two projects on which he was working during my field research in 2015 were how to use the robotic arm of the engraving machine to paint, and building a database to be used for making ceramic. When I went back in the summer of 2016, he showed me a bowl painted by the robotic arm experimentally and the database he had been building. The bowl had some problem with the slip and the database was far from completed. Yet, I probably should not write it down here, but, I was overwhelmed by the potential of his projects. For the database, he had been conducting high resolution 3D scanning of carvings, scriptures and paintings in Buddhist grottos and temples, as well as calligraphies and paintings of great artists in the history. The pattern on the experimental

bowl was inspired by the scrolling leaves in Xiangtangsi Grotto. He showed me the zodiac animal displaying plate he made for monkey year 2017 (figure 5.) and sold at a price affordable to most people. It was of typical Cizhou style but the pattern was an imitation of a monkey painting by the well-known artist Han Meilin (or 韩美林). It was carved by the machine, based on the painting of Han Meilin, and then painted by workers in Wang's workshop, which could be seen as a new way to combine together engraving/carving with hand painting, which has been regarded as another Cizhou ware character. If he could solve the problem of the slip peeling off the surface of the fired bowl, he would be able to open a different door for Cizhou ware production. Yet, he was not seen as an artist or an artisan by most of the local artisans.

When Wang's name was mentioned in my conversation with other artisans and workshop owners, he would be criticized as using machines which were "already out of date in America" by someone who knew absolutely nothing about digital control and 3D modeling, or doubted by artisans "if vases are made by a machine, they would not be artistic work anymore. It would be like using decals. Bowls made in that way would be in the category of daily wares." Whether it is the newest machine making the bowls is not important. But the comment from the artisans who have been making things with their bare hands all along implied what Wang had been doing was blurring the border between what was considered daily wares and artistic wares. It was hardly a taboo but not welcomed by craftsmen at the moment. Since it has the potential to bring work of both great artists and the anonymous workers who labored to make everything in Buddhist grottos to ordinary people, if he was the mayor of the town, Walter Benjamin would support Wang's work. I think the former town mayor Mr. Zhang might have some of Benjamin's spirit in himself. He had asked Mr. Wang to teach a course on digital control in the vocational school

where he is the headmaster now. He hesitates to open a course on ceramic making because he did not see a bright future of making ceramic as a regular job, but he was quite confident that the skills Wang could teach the students will be useful for their future. Mr. Zhang was also known for a question he asked Wang as a joke. “Could you find some time to perform a 3D scan on me? I want you to store my data. After I pass away and am cremated, I do not want to be buried in a box underground. I want you to use my ashes and data to make a ceramic figure of me. Would it be as beautiful and delicate as bone china?” “Yes, it is doable.” Wang replied, “But lose some weight and get that beer belly reduced first. Nothing would look delicate if I scan you now.” “Don’t try to play games with me. I know what you are able to do. You can reduce my belly after you import my data into your computer. How about sculpting me a six pack using your software?”

Conclusion

The typical Cizhou style currently prevailing in Pengchengzhen should be understood as more than a simple imitation of Song Cizhou wares. Although the objects look similar in appearance, what the artisans created was more than what could be read merely from the appearance. Right underneath the surface of Cizhou ware, the first layer we could uncover is done by the slipping technique and through the wet body process. This slip layer is considered the crystallization of ancestral wisdom and what needs to be kept in their work by local artisans. The slip not only solves the problems caused by the local earth, it also distinguishes Cizhou ware from ceramic products, especially the perfectly white and fine ones, made in other part of China. A practical solution devised to cover up the uncharming clay body in the past becomes an element of pride, at the expense of ditching better clay material, if the artisans want to call their work Cizhou ware. The layer under the slip is what is considered the real core of Cizhou ware. Earth is the root for the Chinese. By applying the slip, they could continue to work with the local earth. Although the local earth was the disadvantage giving birth to the slip in the first place, it is needed for the artisans to claim their identity as Cizhou Kiln successors.

With the Cizhou type objects cramming up the small town, the challenge facing the artisans is to develop something different than what they have now and still be able to call themselves Cizhou Kiln successors. Rummaging in the closet of history is one of the many ways the Chinese cope with a crisis. What the Pengchengzhen artisans could find are still the same objects, but they switch their focus from the material to the spiritual and reach the conclusion that “being open and inclusive” is what they should do. The methods they are experimenting with could be

summarized in three categories. The first one is to include more patterns to paint on the objects; the second type focuses on the features of local earth and try to make use of these features to make things more than vases and plates; the third kind advocates to be open to new technology and integrate digital control in making ceramic. The first two types are the mainstream ways of making ceramic in Pengchengzhen, while there is only Mr. Wang doing it in the third way. It is hard to foretell which way will “laugh to the end” yet. But I think, this is the beauty of craft.

Before ceramic making was integrated into the socialist economy plan, it was firstly a craft. As a craft, ceramic was considered lower than calligraphy and painting in ancient China. Craftsmen’s social status was much lower than that of painters and calligraphers. When the painters and calligraphers criticized each other’s work, they would use the phrase *jiang qi* (or 匠气, like a craftsman’s work) to express that the work was not good. The greatest achievers among the painters and calligraphers were sometimes literati with high rank court positions who wrote tons of books; while in contrast, many craftsmen in ancient China were illiterate and barely left the world any written record on what they do by themselves. The way of learning a craft in ancient China was usually by apprenticeship, which no long exists in Pengchengzhen’s ceramic making workshops. As an apprentice, one used to learn the skills by observing and serving the master. Their communication mostly stayed in bodily movement and verbal communication.

When previously private owned craft businesses went through the Socialist Transformation (or 社会主义改造) during the 1950s and 1960s, what transformed was not only the economic attribute of craft workshop from being private-owned to state-owned, or ways of working from

working with hands to mechanized production, but also the way of learning a craft from private apprenticeship to public school education. As Master Liu recounted, while he was a student in the vocational school the slogan of vocational education was to “cultivate cultured socialist workers (or 培养有文化的社会主义劳动者).” Another result of the Socialist Transformation was that the research results were kept as written records, with the way of making imitations of Song Cizhou ware being one of them, upon which more research was made possible. These two changes build the foundation upon which the artisans were able to gradually become ceramic artists or Ceramic Craft and Art Masters after the state-owned period was over.

After the state-owned factories were closed, the ceramic business in Pengchengzhen split into two categories, one category being mechanized production of daily wares, and the other hand-made artistic objects. The artisans who participated in my research are all in the second type of business. They belong to two different generations and their work is influenced by their education and life experience. Even though it is impossible to foretell which way of meeting the challenge facing them now would succeed, it is interesting to think about the difference between the craftsman before the Socialist Transformation and the craftsman after the state-owned period. The idea *jiang xin* (or 匠心, the craftsman’s heart) has been advocated in many occupations other than craft business for the past two years. *Gong jiang jing shen* (or 工匠精神, the craftsman’s spirit) was also brought up by the Prime Minister Li Keqiang in a government work report in early 2016. I hope my research could add a little help in unpacking what “the craftsman’s heart” or “spirit” is in contemporary China.

¹ Translated by author. The original text is “党在过渡时期总路线和总任务，是要在十年到十五年或者更多一些时间内，基本完成国家工业化和对农业、手工业、资本主义工商业的社会主义改造。”

² Translated by the author from "古磁器，出河南彰德府磁州，好者与定器相似，但无泪痕，亦有划花、绣花。”

³ Translated by the author from "化妆土的技法它实在是妙啊，好像那大姑娘她上花轿；均匀的釉彩它脸上抹啊，描龙画凤它上了厅堂啊。”

⁴ This line of lyrics are made of words which do not have specific meaning, but words as emotion indicators. Together these words express the feeling of happiness. For example in the song named *Da Huajiao* (or 大花轿, A Large Palanquin), performed by Huofeng, the lyrics are “My heart is as happy as **lang ge li ge lang**. The same usage could be seen in a song named *Chuntian Li* (or 春天里, In Spring), sung by Mucun Guan.

⁵ Translated by the author. The original Chinese text is "磁州窑火它千年烧啊，咱与窑神他百代交啊；自从盘古他开天地呀，磁州烧瓷就传到今朝啊。哪个哩个啞，哪个啞个哩个啞；不说那叽里拐弯的柳条巷啊，单说那世世代代的笼盔墙啊；撑把雨伞咱顺巷走啊，一枝梅花它探出了头啊；雕枝牡丹它瓶上绕啊，拉个盘碗它成佳肴啊；做条小狗它下地跑啊，捏把茶壶它胖胖的腰啊；哪个哩个啞，哪个啞个哩个啞；化妆土的技法它实在是妙啊，好像那大姑娘她上花轿啊；均匀地釉彩它脸上抹啊，描龙画凤它上了厅堂啊；磁州窑的技法它实在是高啊，祖上传咱咱往下教啊；七十二道工艺咱心中数啊，烧不好瓷咱就倒了窑啊。”

⁶ This number was given to me by the local government.

Figures



Figure 1 Wang, Nianfeng. *Zhao de guang chang* (昭德广场, Zhaode Square) 2011. Source: Private Collection.



Figure 2 Wang, Nianfeng. *Mei ping* (梅瓶, plum vase). 2011. Source: Private Collection.



Figure 3 Li, Han. Tea cups in Yue's workshop. 2015. Source: Private Collection.



Figure 4 Li, Han. *Shi shi ru yi* (事事如意, everything be as one wish). 2015. Source: Private Collection



Figure 5 Li, Han. *Monkey year plate*. 2016. Source: Private Collection.

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