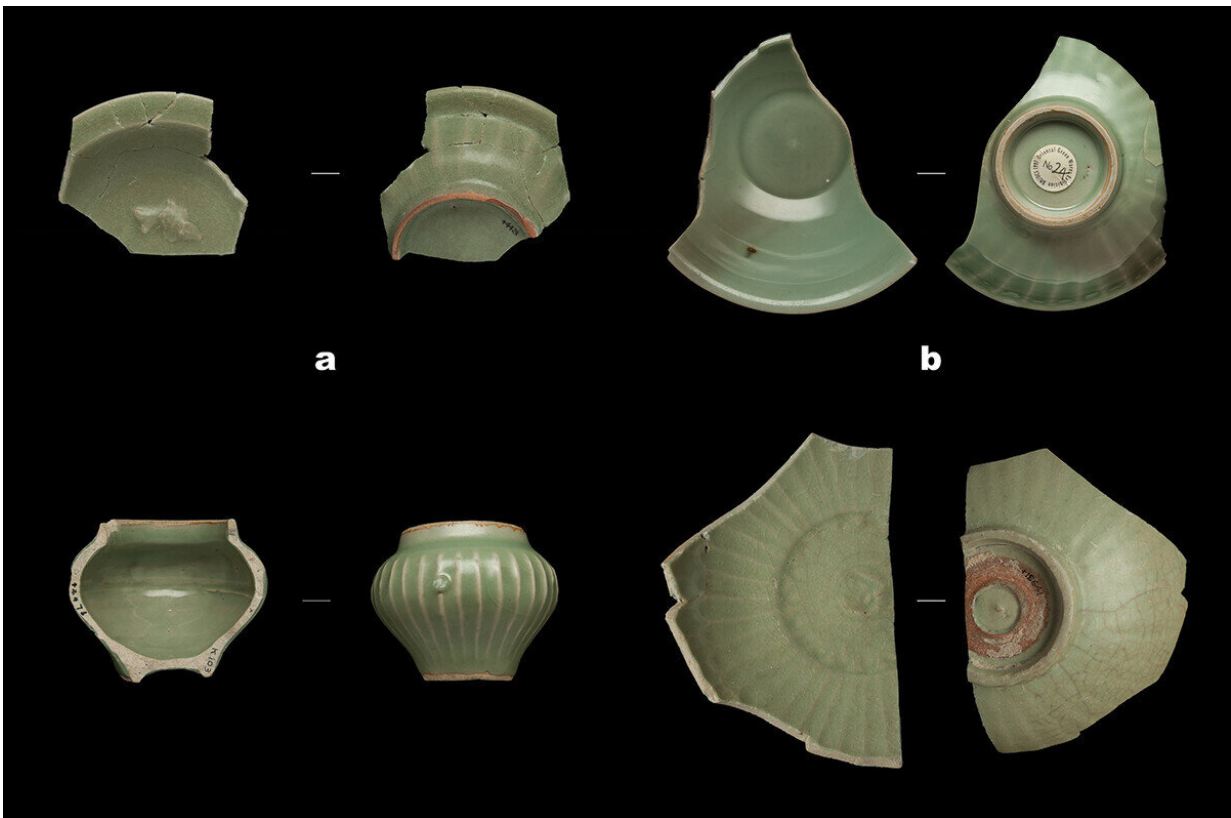


How ceramics are telling the story of 14th century Chinese trade

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Longquan celadon sherds from southern Iran, the Williamson Collection (a, c-f) and Kush in Ras al-Khaimah, UAE (b). Credit: *World Archaeology* (2023). DOI: 10.1080/00438243.2023.2216183

The history of Chinese trade is sometimes still a bit of a mystery due to the lack of historical records. This is where archaeologists are relying on

ceramics to tell the story.

Analysis of high-quality glazed ceramic pottery, called celadon, has shown that this greenware was produced in the Zhejiang Province in China from the 12th to the 15th century on a scale that was unparalleled anywhere in the world at that time.

The research, conducted through a long-standing partnership between Durham University and the Palace Museum in Beijing, found that the trade in this product was one of the earliest 'global' manufacturing and export industries.

Large-scale production

The study indicates that this high-quality and highly valued ceramic was used across China as a tableware and exported across the Indian Ocean as far as East Africa, Arabia, Egypt and Iran.

The researchers say the phenomenal scale of production within the kilns at Longquan in the Zhejiang Province is solid testimony to China's technical skill and development at this time.

The pieces of ceramics, which can often be precisely dated, contain a wealth of largely untapped information on the extent of trading networks through time.

They show not only the significant scale of the production but also a level of integration between the Chinese domestic economy and overseas trade and consumption, demonstrating China's economic reach and power during the later 13th and 14th centuries.

The work is published in the journal *World Archaeology*.

More information: Ran Zhang et al, Longquan celadon: a quantitative archaeological analysis of a pan-Indian Ocean industry of the 12th to 15th centuries, *World Archaeology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/00438243.2023.2216183](https://doi.org/10.1080/00438243.2023.2216183)

Provided by Durham University

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