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COLLEGIUM  
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Seminar

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*Post-Industrial Ceramics in  
China's (former) Porcelain Capital*

Thursday, 24 October, 4:15 p.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall  
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala  
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## ABOUT MARIS GILLETTE

Maris Gillette took her MA in Chinese Studies and received a Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from Harvard University. She is Professor of Anthropology at Haverford College, PA, where she has also served as Chair of the Anthropology Department and Associate Provost for Curriculum.

Most of her research and publications concern objects and the people who make and use them. She has done extensive field research on Chinese Muslims, publishing the monograph *Between Mecca and Beijing: Modernization and Consumption among Urban Chinese Muslims* (Stanford University Press, 2000) and several articles on Chinese Muslim historical memory, ritual, and material culture. Since 2004, Gillette has been studying the ceramics workers in China's most famous porcelain industry, which is located in the city of Jingdezhen in southeast China. She has published articles on porcelain entrepreneurship, copying and counterfeiting in the contemporary ceramics industry, and workers' experience of precariousness after the collapse of the centralized economy. Gillette has also made a film about this history, entitled *Broken Pots Broken Dreams*, and she has curated and co-curated several installations and exhibitions at Haverford College, the Peabody Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

While at the Collegium, Gillette will work on a book about Jingdezhen's porcelain industry, from the moment it first caught the attention of the imperial court in 1004, through centuries of government sponsorship, to the present moment of privatization. She will also conclude work on a short comparative study of Muslim foodways.

## ABSTRACT

In China, the name "Jingdezhen" is synonymous with "fine porcelain." The city is widely recognized as China's "porcelain capital"—but officially lost this title to a competitor producer, the city of Chaozhou in Guangdong Province, in 2004. In this presentation I consider how locals confront the reterritorialization of China's porcelain production in Jingdezhen's recently deindustrialized setting. China's imperial government managed, supported, and expanded Jingdezhen's porcelain industry for centuries, leading to the city's domination of ceramics markets around the world. When the Chinese Communist Party took control of Jingdezhen in 1949, they immediately began an intensive program of rebuilding and expanding porcelain production. From the late 1950s through the mid-1990s, government officials supervised every aspect of porcelain production and distribution, from mining china stone and kaolin, to mass-producing dinnerware, to making new ceramic products such as porcelain knives. However, the 1980s and 1990s drive to marketize and privatize led the government to stop issuing credit to the industry in 1995. 99% of Jingdezhen's factories collapsed. Faced with new competitor industries in Guangdong, Fujian, and Henan, an influx of new foreign products, and no government loans or management, many Jingdezhen ceramists reinvented themselves as porcelain artists. Local officials pushed Jingdezhen as a tourist destination, ironically seeking to capitalize on its industrial history at the moment that state policies caused porcelain production to contract. As with so many cities facing industrial decline, city officials refigure industrial remnants as sites of nostalgia, production is displaced onto history, and the fate of industrial workers becomes the problem of private individuals.