

Tourism development and transformations of the cultural landscape in Jingdezhen's ceramic industry

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INTRODUCTION

Jingdezhen occupies a central position in the history of porcelain production in China, and its urban space, social structure, and local culture have long been profoundly shaped by the ceramic industry. In recent years, however, Jingdezhen has faced the depletion of kaolin resources (Wu & Zhu, 2020) as well as growing market competition from other porcelain-producing regions (Zhang et al., 2020). In response, the city has sought to leverage its rich ceramic culture to promote tourism-led industrial transformation, with the dual aims of conserving clay resources and fostering regional economic development (Yang & Zhang, 2022). Since the 1980s, measures such as organizing ceramic culture festivals and constructing ceramic cultural parks have facilitated the rapid expansion of tourism, turning Jingdezhen into a popular destination for domestic and international visitors (Liang & Jiang, 2024). The growth of tourism has not only generated economic benefits, but has also given rise to the so-called “Jing Piao phenomenon,” in which ceramic artists and young entrepreneurs from other regions are attracted by local ceramic culture and congregate in Jingdezhen, forming communities centered on ceramic creation (Fang, 2008; Zhong et al., 2023).

With the development of sightseeing-oriented tourism, ceramic cultural heritage has begun to be re-appropriated: some disused kiln sites and factories have been converted into tourist spaces, and production processes have been re-staged for visitors. In this context, tourism development is, on the one hand, regarded as a means of alleviating resource and industrial pressures and, to some extent, as providing new platforms and economic support for traditional crafts, thereby contributing to the transmission of skills and the enhancement of public awareness of ceramic culture (Wang et al., 2021). On the other hand, it has raised concerns about the possible distortion and instrumentalization of traditional culture and production processes. During the process of touristification, the selection of which craft stages are presented, and the ways in which they are spatially arranged and narratively framed, can profoundly shape visitors' understandings of “tradition” and “locality” (Shen & Li, 2010; Horner, 1993; Ruozuo et al., 2024).

Against this backdrop, this research adopts the lens of cultural landscape to examine how, during Jingdezhen's transition from an industrial production center to a tourism-oriented city, natural resources, spatial configurations, buildings, and production processes are re-used and reconfigured. It focuses on how ceramic culture is mobilized in the process of touristification and explores the implications of tourism development for the ceramic cultural landscape of Jingdezhen.

In Japan's Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties, “cultural landscape” is defined as landscape areas formed by local residents' livelihoods or other productive activities in relation to regional natural conditions, which are indispensable for understanding the lifestyles and livelihoods of the Japanese people. In the case of Jingdezhen, the ceramic industry has long been grounded in local natural conditions—such as porcelain stone, water systems, and fuel supply—and, since the Tang dynasty, has given rise to a spatial structure organized around kilns, workshops, and river ports.

With regard to natural resources in Jingdezhen, a considerable body of research has examined topics such as the historical development of kaolin extraction, resource depletion, and the transformation of resource-dependent cities. However, these studies largely remain at historical or macro-level discussions of industrial transition. There has been relatively limited attention to how fuel, water systems, and clay and stone are sourced and processed, and how these material practices have been altered and reconfigured in the course of tourism development. In terms of space and architecture, existing research has primarily focused on the renewal design of former factory sites and kiln complexes,

landscape-making, and the formation of cultural parks. Much less attention has been paid to how the functional structure of the original production areas has been reorganized after touristification. Regarding production processes, recent studies on “craft experience” and “craft demonstration” have mainly evaluated them from the perspectives of policy promotion, project design, or educational functions. By contrast, there is still a lack of systematic analysis and comparison of which traditional production steps are actively mobilized in tourist settings, and how these steps are simplified or rewritten in performances oriented toward visitors.

In sum, research on Jingdezhen has often remained at a macro or sectoral level, lacking an integrated analytical framework. In response, this research adopts the perspective of cultural landscape and treats spatial and architectural form, natural resource use, and production processes as interrelated elements to be examined systematically.

This research aims to identify the main types of transformation in Jingdezhen’s ceramic cultural landscape during the process of touristification, to compare differences between traditional production areas and contemporary tourist districts in terms of changes in resource use and the touristification of production processes, and to analyze how tourism development influences the understanding of traditional ceramic culture and the ways in which it is represented in the landscape.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The notion of cultural landscape emphasizes the composite landscapes that emerge from long-term interactions between human activities and the natural environment. In both UNESCO frameworks and related systems in Japan, cultural landscapes are understood as spatial forms that combine a natural base with productive and everyday practices, and they explicitly recognize landscapes shaped by daily livelihood activities as objects of conservation and use. This perspective is particularly useful for understanding the formation and transformation of Jingdezhen’s ceramic culture through the interlinked relationships among resources, production, and space.

In tourism studies, the concept of cultural landscape is often employed to highlight that tourist spaces are not naturally given, but rather the result of selective, organized, and staged processes within specific trajectories of development. This perspective suggests that analyses of touristification should attend not only to the reconfiguration of spatial form, but also to how elements of “tradition” are selectively presented in exhibition and experiential settings. Research on traditional crafts further indicates that tourism development can simultaneously create new opportunities for craft transmission and risk turning production processes into performances that are simplified or detached from their original productive context. For crafts such as ceramics, which are highly dependent on local resources, patterns of natural resource use constitute a crucial basis for understanding the relationship between craft practices and local environmental conditions.

Methodologically, Ziyae’s “cultural landscape matrix” and its subsequent extensions offer an analytical approach for understanding landscape transformation that links material space, practical processes, and cultural meanings within a single framework. While existing studies on Jingdezhen address topics such as the renewal of factory districts and kiln sites, changes in resource use, and the transmission of craft techniques, there is still a lack of research that systematically analyzes “space,” “natural resources,” and “production processes” within a unified cultural landscape framework.

Building on the above discussion, this research conceptually operationalizes the “ceramic cultural landscape of Jingdezhen” into three interrelated analytical dimensions: (1) Space and architecture: Focusing on kiln sites, factories, and their surrounding neighborhoods, this dimension examines how functions such as production, exhibition, experience, and commerce are redistributed at the building and district scales, and how this reallocation reshapes the original production-oriented spatial structure. (2) Natural resources: Taking fuel, water, clay, and stone as key elements, this dimension investigates how these components are transformed from traditional production resources into landscape elements or symbolic motifs in contemporary tourism spaces. (3) Production processes: Using the traditional porcelain-making workflow as a reference, this dimension analyzes which stages are rewritten or gradually marginalized in touristification and experiential programs, and considers how “selective

preservation and representation” affects both the integrity of the production system and public understandings of the craft.

Through these three dimensions—space, nature, and production processes—the research undertakes a systematic analysis of how Jingdezhen’s ceramic cultural landscape is reshaped in the course of tourism development.

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

This research examines representative tourism-oriented districts within Jingdezhen’s ceramic industry. The study sites were selected based on two main criteria: the reuse of traditional production spaces and the degree of tourism-oriented development. Regarding traditional production spaces, the selected areas had previously functioned as established ceramic production bases. Regarding tourism development, the selected sites currently exhibit clearly identifiable tourism-service or tourism-use characteristics, including functions oriented toward visitors such as guided tours, shopping, and hands-on experiences. They are also recognized as tourist destinations in local government documents, cultural and tourism platforms, or visitor evaluation systems.

Semi-structured interviews are used as a primary method of data collection. Interviewees include craftspeople engaged in ceramic production, shop owners and workshop operators within tourist districts, and managers of kiln sites. The interviews focus on several core topics, including the types of resources used, their origins and modes of acquisition, the use of substitute materials or processes, and the reasons for these changes.

For the analysis of production processes, the traditional 72-step porcelain-making workflow is used as a reference framework. On-site recording sheets and questionnaires were designed and are being used to conduct systematic surveys of ceramic workshops, shops, and experiential facilities within the selected districts. For each investigation point, the survey records the production processes currently employed in everyday manufacturing, the processes presented to visitors as demonstrations, and the processes incorporated into experiential programs. The specific spatial setting of each process and the roles of participants are also documented. For processes that have been adapted for tourism, additional attention is given to whether the workflow has been simplified, divided, reordered, or substituted, as well as to modifications in tools and equipment for purposes such as display, accessibility, and visitor safety.

The analysis is conducted in three steps. First, interview data and field records are organized to identify patterns of change in the use of raw materials, fuel, and water resources, with particular attention to resource origins, substitution patterns, and reasons for change. Second, using the traditional porcelain production system as a reference, observed processes are coded according to their occurrence in production, demonstration, and experiential contexts, and instances of simplification, reordering, or substitution are identified. Third, observations of space and architecture are compared across the selected cases to examine how changes in resource use and the touristification of production processes are manifested spatially. Through these three analytical steps, the research examines the reconfiguration of Jingdezhen’s ceramic cultural landscape in the course of tourism development.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Theoretically, this research contributes to cultural landscape studies by integrating natural resources, production processes, and spatial transformation within a single analytical framework. By examining how these elements are selectively preserved, reorganized, or reinterpreted through tourism development, the study provides a more comprehensive perspective on the transformation of traditional craft-based cultural landscapes.

Practically, the research provides a reference for the conservation and tourism utilization of Jingdezhen’s ceramic heritage. By identifying changes in the relationships among resources, production activities, and spatial functions, the study may support more context-sensitive approaches to the reuse of former production spaces, the presentation of traditional ceramic processes, and the design of tourism

experiences, while helping to avoid excessive simplification and decontextualization of traditional craft culture.

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