# Analysis of the Ecological Chain of Porcelain Panel Art in Laoyatan Community, Jingdezhen, China

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#### Abstract

Porcelain panel making, a traditional craft in Laoyatan, Jingdezhen, China and the national intangible cultural heritage of China, makes an art of porcelain paneling integrated with porcelain panel painting and has become a living decoration and architectural decoration with local characteristics favored by the public. This research applied literature research and field research approaches to analyze the current state of the environment, crafters, and auxiliary industries in the Laoyatan community. Further research was carried out on the cultural characteristics of porcelain panel art, art and inheritance models, and the ecological chain of porcelain panel art generated by the cultural landscape of porcelain making. The research found distinct characteristics of the traditional handicraft community. It carries deep cultural connotations and traditional techniques, interprets the Chinese craftsman spirit and the Laoyatan porcelain panel art ecosystem system, shows the strength and charm of Laoyatan community porcelain panel art, and provides an academic path and theoretical foundation for future research on the development and cultural management of Laoyatan community porcelain panel art.

**Keywords:** Laoyatan community; porcelain panel; art ecological chain

## Introduction

Jingdezhen is a famous cultural city with a rich history, with more than 2,000 years of pottery history, more than 1,000 years of official kiln history, and more than 600 years of royal kiln history. Chinese ceramics represented by Jingdezhen are artistic treasures that China has dedicated to all mankind, and have a wide impact Focusing on people's lifestyle and aesthetic

taste, since the Chinese Ministry of Culture and Tourism approved the establishment of the "Jingdezhen Ceramic Culture and Ecological Protection Experimental Zone" in Jingdezhen City, Jiangxi Province, Jingdezhen ceramic culture has regained its glory, but there is indeed something behind it. Many traditional craftsmen work hard, but they are not noticed. Just like the porcelain panel handicrafts in Laoyatan community, most people in Jingdezhen don't know where Laoyatan is or how the porcelain panels are made. Searching documents in Jingdezhen local chronicles, Jingdezhen libraries and archives found that there are almost zero documents related to the study of porcelain panels. Porcelain panels have become a marginal culture of Jingdezhen porcelain making. The development status of Laoyatan porcelain making village has only appeared in a few self-media found in.

In 2023, the famous anthropologist Professor Fang Lili recently proposed the concept of "Jingdezhen Post-Agricultural Revolution". The ceramic industry system in Jingdezhen urban area has gradually collapsed and spread to the surrounding countryside. The arrival of "artists" has driven rural development, forming a post-agricultural development model that combines "post-cottage industry", "post-market", "post-acquaintance society" and "post-pastoral lifestyle", which is the development path of Chinese-style cultural development (Fang Lili. 2023), the formation of Laoyatan Porcelain Art Village is the embodiment of "post-agricultural civilization", which is also the revival of traditional handicraft culture.

The formation of the Laoyatan Porcelain panel Art Community is a process of collision between traditional culture and modern culture, local culture and world culture. It transforms cultural heritage into cultural resources, attracting people from all over the country and even overseas. Artists come to Laoyatan to take root in life and create. The craftsmen here are also residents, producing, living and doing business locally. Therefore, auxiliary industries related to porcelain panel art have been established in Laoyatan, forming an ecological chain of porcelain panel art industry and services. The public exerts its contribution to the ceramic art industry in Jingdezhen and is a distinct representative in Jingdezhen.

However, under the background of multiple impacts from cultural ideology, social environment, and natural environment, young people's understanding of and interest in traditional culture has gradually decreased. In the inheritance and development of porcelain panel craftsmanship, it is faced with an increasing number of inheritors and an extremely high burden for the inheritance of skills. A lot of pressure and many other challenges, for the sustainable development of the porcelain panel art industry in Laoyatan has had a negative impact. Therefore,

this study will conduct an in-depth study of the development status of Laoyatan community and the ecological chain of porcelain panel art, fill the gaps in local literature, help us better understand and protect the local porcelain panel culture, and make better use of porcelain panels. The cultural ecology of porcelain panel art opens up new ideas in the context of the rise of traditional culture and promotes the inheritance and development of porcelain panel handicrafts.

## **Research Objectives**

- 1. To research the current state of the environment, craftsmen, and auxiliary industries in the Laoyatan community.
  - 2. To research porcelain panel art and heritage patterns.
  - 3. To analyze the function of Laoyatan porcelain panel art ecological chain.

#### Scope of research

- 1. Research subjects: Evolution and Current status of the Laoyatan community and porcelain panel art (traditional porcelain panel making and related crafts, auxiliary industries), Laoyatan community craftsmen (porcelain panel making craftsmen, artists, etc.)
- 2. Geographical scope: Laoyatan Community, Jingdezhen City, located in an urban village just south of Jingdezhen city. The author will conduct selective research on the Laoyatan porcelain panel making workshop to learn about the Laoyatan porcelain panel art culture through representative workshops.
- 3. Time span: From 1988 to now, the time point when the first porcelain panel makers in Laoyatan arrived in Laoyatan was around 1988, so the time frame is set from 1988 to the present.

#### Conceptual Framework

The unique location and rich cultural background of the Laoyatan community provided a solid foundation for its development. The community is full of environmental factors such as life, workshops, and commerce, reflecting the complexity and vitality of the Laoyatan community, gradually forming an artistic ecological chain (Figure 1). Through this ecological chain structure,

traditional crafts are preserved while also providing a platform for artists and craftsmen to display and develop themselves, forming a unique cultural and economic ecosystem.

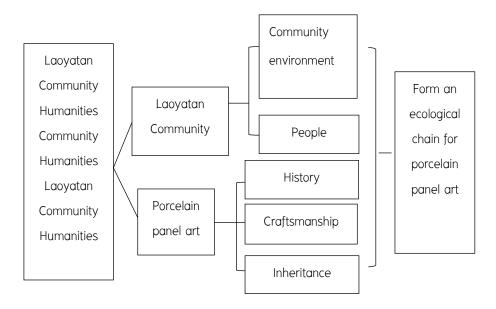


Fig.1 Conceptual Framework

(source: Created by researchers, 2023)

## Research Methodology

#### 1. Literature analysis

Through functional channels such as CNKI and libraries, the author collects historical documents related to Laoyatan porcelain panel art culture, porcelain panel making crafts, etc. in Jingdezhen, and combines them with field research data to analyze and summarize them.

#### 2. Field investigation

Jingdezhen Laoyatan Community is the largest porcelain panel distribution center in Jingdezhen and is also famous for its porcelain panel making craftsmanship. It is located in the south of Jingdezhen City and belongs to an area of the Licun Back Street Community. Scholars will conduct on-the-spot investigation and research, conduct a tour of the Laoyatan porcelain panel handicraft workshop, and collect information through interviews with community porcelain panel art craftsmen and auxiliary industry people, so as to understand the characteristics, inheritance and inheritance of Laoyatan porcelain panel art. Achieve a comprehensive understanding of the industrial ecology.

#### Research Results

#### Objective 1. Status quo analysis

#### 1.1 Surrounding environment

Laoyatan, the largest porcelain art community in Jingdezhen, is located south of Jingdezhen. It is along the South River, connected to the Changjiang River, Linli Village Street in the north (a bustling area in the old town of Jingdezhen), and two kilometers from the central square. It is an urban village.

Laoyatan is close to the ceramic commercial area: mainly Ceramics Antique City, Jinghan Ceramic City, and Taoxichuan Cultural and Creative Base; close to ceramic colleges, mainly: Ceramics University and Ceramics Research Institute; nearby transportation areas include: train station, old bus station; dozens of restaurants and accommodations nearby, close to railway hospitals. The convenient location is a prerequisite for the survival and development of Laoyatan (Figure 2).

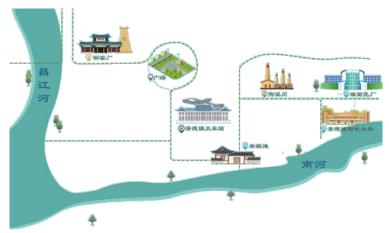


Fig.2 External environment map of Laoyatan

(source: Created by researchers, 2023)

## 1.2 Internal environment

The internal structure of Laoyatan can be subdivided into workshop areas, commercial areas, and living areas (Figure 3).



Fig.3 Internal environment map of Laoyatan

(source: Created by researchers, 2023)

Entering the Laoyatan boundary, the houses here are uneven, and there are various branches and alleys. There are basically porcelain panel workshops, ceramic stores, art studios on both sides of the road, and of course there are porcelain panel framing shops, small shops, small restaurants, express delivery stations, etc. You will see scenes of porcelain panel making, porcelain panel painting, burning kilns, porcelain panel framing, porcelain panel sales, transporting porcelain panels, etc.

The workshop area is also divided into a porcelain panel handicraft workshop (accounting for 80%) and a porcelain panel painting art workshop (accounting for 20%). The two workshop environments are very simple and simple (Figure 4). Porcelain panel handicraft workshops are basically three models: family style, front store back living, and top and bottom workshop; porcelain panel painting art workshops can be divided into family style and shop style. The family style is basically in the middle and back of Lao Ya Tan — a residential area, which saves rent and makes it easy to buy white porcelain panels and kilns. The shop-style is basically a front store and back living model.



**Fig.4** Laoyatan Workshop (source: Created by researchers, 2023)

The commercial area takes up relatively little space in Laoyatan, because the main street of Laoyatan is relatively short, and there are nearly 50 street-side stores. The first 10 stores mainly sell fired porcelain panels, and the middle store mainly sells porcelain panel art paintings. There are about 30, mostly foreign painters, and more than 10 stores mainly sell food stalls, breakfast shops, vegetable stores, express delivery, and framing.

The living area is in the middle and rear of Laoyatan, including family-style workshops and residential areas. The family-style workshops are in the middle and the residential areas are in the rear, close to Nanhe River. Many porcelain panel workshop owners have two residences in Laoyatan, one is a workshop, where they work and live together, and the other is a family residence.

#### 1.3 "People" in the Laoyatan community

"People" in Laoyatan refer to those who "live and produce" in the Laoyatan community. Generally, there are four types: porcelain panel craftsmen (residents), porcelain panel painting craftsmen (residents), artists, and people in the auxiliary industry. They are the driving force behind the development of Laoyatan porcelain panel art.

Porcelain panel crafters are the core of the inheritance of porcelain panel techniques. As for Laoyatan porcelain panel making techniques, Zhong Xinwei, an art porcelain factory worker who is one of the top ten porcelain factories operated by the state, mastered porcelain panel technology in 1951, he mastered porcelain panel technology and passed it on to his apprentices Nie Xinglong and Yu Yongsheng of the art porcelain factory, and then to "Liu Laoer" from Duchang. Regarding the rise of the porcelain panel industry in Laoyatan, I have to say about the influence brought about by the group activities of the Duchang people's "Liu's". This group of people worked hard and endured, and their porcelain panel production continued to improve, and they had a good reputation. As family workshops and ethnic heritage continued to expand, the porcelain panel industry here gradually grew.

Laoyatan porcelain panel painters are craftsmen who paint porcelain panels for a living. Some of them have their own studios in Laoyatan, some are attached to the porcelain panel workshop; some are from descendants of the Laoyatan porcelain panel workshop; some are from overseas painters who have settled here, and some are local fixed painters. Their works are limited to "handicrafts". They are inexpensive, and target the mass market. They are very popular, making Laoyatan even more vibrant.

Artists include university teachers and students, as well as painters from all over the world. They come to Laoyatan to try out various techniques and create works. Their special needs have prompted the Laoyatan workshop owners to continuously improve their "one-stop" service for porcelain panel art, and the fame of Laoyatan porcelain panel art also continues to expand. Some university teachers will cooperate with the Laoyatan Porcelain Panel Workshop to lead students to create works and learn porcelain board crafts on site. Around the theme of "a city of dialogue with the world", Jingdezhen created a ceramic cultural environment to provide a platform for young people to realize their dreams (Jiao, Kou & Ye, 2020), and attracted many foreign artists to Laoyatan. Laoyatan began to become international, the variety of porcelain panels began to become more creative, and the porcelain panel business circle became wider and wider, forming a unique cultural landscape.

People in the auxiliary industry can be divided into kilns, raw material distribution, framing, brocade packaging, logistics and transportation, and sales. Kilns make their living by firing porcelain for others. In the past, there were some kilns in Laoyatan. Later, the owners of Laoyatan made money. Basically, they all had their own kilns, dedicated to their own porcelain panel

burning kilns. Occasionally, they merged kilns with others, and did not make a living by burning kilns, so there were no kilns.

The distribution of raw materials includes mud and gas distribution. These two industries regularly deliver in the early morning every day to ensure the amount of use in the workshop during the day. Porcelain panels generally require medium white clay, and the fired porcelain panels are bright white and delicate. Gas is the energy used in kilns.

There are 3 local framing workshops and 3 gift box stores. In the past ten years, there have been twice as many porcelain panel painting workshops in Laoyatan. Many foreign painters and students come here to paint directly in Laoyatan, and they will directly frame and fix the box at Laoyatan. The framing shops in Laoyatan often cooperate with the box store, logistics and transportation to package and mail to customers, which is convenient for many artists and saves everyone's time and energy. This demand has continuously upgraded the porcelain panel industry chain in Laoyatan.

The sales industry is an important link for Laoyatan porcelain panels to the market. They travel through the Laoyatan community, connecting the creators of porcelain panel paintings, domestic/international consumer markets, and collection/investment markets. They can be artists, merchants, tourists, and media in the porcelain panel art market. Artists use online or offline methods to promote their art works and sell porcelain panel paintings, such as WeChat posting, Douyin live streaming, and Taobao sales; merchants sell in a wider range of ways. They not only use online and offline to sell porcelain panel paintings, but also participate in international commercial cooperation projects.

Merchants have a sensitive sense of commercial smell. They will also cultivate promising artists, become artists' agents, expand the sales channels and scope of porcelain panel art, and enhance the value of works of art; while the media are influenced by the promotion of the previous two, they have come to Laoyatan to achieve a mutually beneficial and win-win effect through self-media promotion. For example: Porcelain Net. "Jingdezhen Memories – Lao Ya Tan" released in China received over 10,000 hits.

## Objective 2. Laoyatan Community Porcelain panel Art and Heritage Model.

#### 2.1 History of porcelain panels

The development of porcelain panel craftsmanship has benefited from the production of inlays. The method for making inlays is to be inlaid in the form of erected panels. This production

technology has improved porcelain panel making technology. However, porcelain panels, as an industry that later flourished, have a long history of making porcelain.

Porcelain panels were first discovered in China with "epitaph inscriptions" unearthed in the "Yue kiln" of the Tang Dynasty. There were also many burnt epitaph inscriptions in Jingdezhen during the Ming Dynasty. The flat-burning technique was used at this stage, and there were both round and square shapes. The downside was that the glaze was uneven and had trachoma. It extended to "tiles" and "porcelain panel paintings" in the middle and late Ming dynasty. It was used to inlay furniture, plaques, and some household utensils, and slowly formed the art of porcelain panel painting in the form of independent painting, in two forms: flat burning and vertical burning of porcelain panels

The foundation was laid (Zheng & Liu, 2003). Until today, Lao Ya Tan was able to make large porcelain panels measuring 5 meters x 2 meters, which are fine and smooth.

2.2 Production process and characteristics of porcelain panels in the Laoyatan Community

#### 2.2.1 Porcelain panel making

There are two types of porcelain panels in Laoyatan: flatware and vertical. In terms of technology: The flat burning process is simpler than vertical burning; the vertical burning process is complicated, so there are fewer craftsmen engaged in vertical burning, and it is more difficult to protect. Therefore, the author focuses on introducing the vertical firing production process.

A vertical porcelain panel is also called an "antique porcelain panel" (Figure 5). The so-called "vertical burning" refers to the firing of molded porcelain billets in a kiln. There are 32 processes in total. There are 21 main processes from quarrying to mud (Figure 6). It is difficult to burn, and the degree of damage is high. Thanks to later research breakthroughs, vertical porcelain panels can currently be fired at a maximum of 1.5 meters to 2 meters.



**Fig.5** Antique porcelain panel production (source: Created by researchers, 2023)

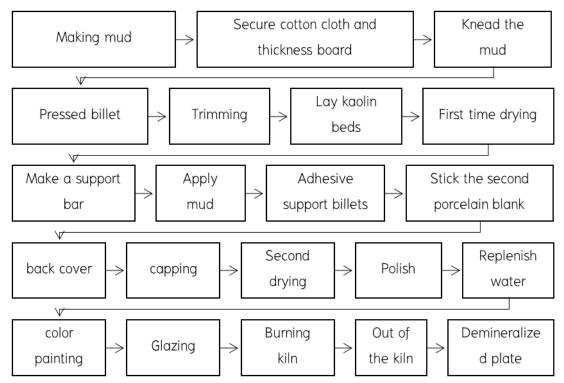


Fig.6 21 processes for vertical porcelain panel

(source: Created by researchers, 2023)

# 2.2.2 Artistic characteristics and forms of porcelain panels

The development of porcelain art has gone through thousands of years, and it still attracts the world's attention with its unique charm. As an important part of traditional Chinese culture, porcelain panel art contains rich historical and cultural values. Judging from the characteristic forms, porcelain panel painting is mainly divided into two categories: underglaze

color and overglaze color, which each show the inner beauty of ceramics with a different appearance.

The overglaze is painted on a porcelain panel that has already been fired. After painting is completed, it needs to be fired again at a low temperature of 800–1000 degrees. Overglaze focuses on the level and variation of colors, and can express various artistic styles more freely. With its vivid colors and dynamic lines, it reflects the artist's creativity and the spirit of the times. The main forms are: blue and white colored porcelain, pastel porcelain (Figure 7), antique porcelain, etc.



Fig.7 Pastel porcelain panel

(source: Created by researchers, 2023)

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Underglaze color is an artistic creation using paint directly on a molded blank. The pattern is carefully drawn on the porcelain blank, then covered with a clear layer of white glaze or other clear glaze. This layer of glaze not only protects the painting, but also adds depth and dimension to the work of art. After firing at a high temperature in a kiln, underglaze colored porcelain can be obtained. The main styles include blue and white, multicolor, red in the glaze, and colored glazes

(Figure 8). Painting techniques include different techniques such as partitioning, cover dyeing, baking, and topping. The temperature should generally be kept above 1,300°C.



**Fig.8** Color Glazed Porcelain Panel Painting (source: Shot by researchers, 2023)

Porcelain panel making and porcelain panel painting have been interdependent and inseparable since ancient times. Their collision and fusion in Laoyatan has gradually made them an overall activity integrating craftsmanship and art. It is an externalization of the artist's inner world, a reflection of culture and the spirit of the times, and has gradually formed porcelain panel art belonging to Laoyatan.

The workshops and crafts at Laoyatan demonstrate the community's respect and protection for traditional crafts, while also showing an open attitude towards artistic innovation. As a result, it has become a dynamic and lifestyle place for art practice. It is reflected in the construction of community culture and the bits and pieces of everyday life. Every piece of porcelain is a testament to the rich cultural life of Laoyatan.

#### 2.3 Inheritance model of porcelain panels in the Laoyatan Community

Traditional porcelain making techniques in Jingdezhen have been passed down in the past. They are mainly divided into two types: mentor and apprenticeship inheritance and family inheritance. The Laoyatan porcelain panel making process and the inheritance method of porcelain panel painting also come from this.

#### 2.3.1 Succession of mentors and apprentices

At Laoyatan, a master takes up to two apprentices at a time. They usually recommend apprentices through acquaintances. Apprentices start with chores. They don't pay a salary for the first year; they only include Chinese food. After a year, the apprentice began to be able to do tasks such as pressing billets, repairing billets, and hydrating. In the second year, the master will pay the apprentice a basic salary, ranging from 100 to 500, as a small amount of compensation. In the third year, the apprentice can handle all the processes. Once the master receives the order, he will let the apprentice make porcelain panels and distribute them to the apprentice at a commission of 1–2 yuan per block. Just like that, the apprentice is considered to have completed his studies. He can stay in the master's workshop and continue to work alone; the master won't stop him.

In the porcelain industry in Jingdezhen, family inheritance is a traditional method of transmission that continues to this day, and is still the main channel. Historically, the vast majority of ceramic producers were in the domestic handicraft industry. Their porcelain making techniques were taught by husband and wife, father and son, while researching, producing, making at home, and learning at home (Yang et al., 2022).

The family heritage model made of Laoyatan porcelain panels is quite typical. In Laoyatan, the workshop owners keep their skills secret from the outside world, but due to population and capital restrictions, there are no gender restrictions, and the division of labor is not very detailed. A family member is often familiar with the many processes in porcelain panel production and plays various roles, so there are often scenes of families working together in family workshops. However, in order to protect their own interests, some family workshops only pass on technology to their wives and sons, not others.

#### 2.3.2 Family heritage

From ancient times to the present, people in the industry have set industry regulations for industry techniques in order to survive. From the process of porcelain panel craftsmanship to how to pass it on, it is not easy to learn the craftsmanship of porcelain panel making.

Today, these inheritance models are still used, yet there are very few young people who can learn this technique, and the skill is likely to be lost from generation to generation.

Objective 3. Laoyatan Porcelain panel Art Ecological Chain – Cultural Revival and Reconstruction.

"Jingdezhen Ceramic Records" records: Every household invested in pottery (Wang, 2021) means that ceramics breed various industries and drive the prosperity and development of related auxiliary industries. The close connection between the main industry and the side industry makes Jingdezhen a A ceramic art city with "one-stop" production, sales and service. A high-quality ceramic industry chain has been formed.

As cultural experience became a major part of the tourism economy, Laoyatan began to transform from a production center to an experience center, attracting artists, artists, and ceramic enthusiasts from all over the country to create. Their arrival promoted changes in the Laoyatan community and workshop pattern, spawned the Laoyatan Porcelain Panel Art Community, spawned a one–stop service for Laoyatan, integrating porcelain panel production, porcelain panel art, raw materials, porcelain panel packaging, sales, transportation, catering, lodging, and research services, forming an Laoyatan porcelain panel art ecological chain.

The formation of the Laoyatan porcelain panel art ecological chain is an practice of cultural diversity in contemporary Chinese communities (Guo, 2016), and is an extremely inclusive expression of Laoyatan. Laoyatan is no longer a single traditional porcelain panel making community. She integrates various industries, establishes an industrial ecological order, and also integrates various cultures to create a new cultural complex. She has tradition, modernity, craftsmanship, art, life, and spirit. The author believes that the Laoyatan porcelain panel art ecological chain revives and reconstructs traditional culture, and promoted the advent of the post–agricultural era in Jingdezhen.

#### Conclusion

Through in-depth investigation and analysis, this research came up with the following main findings and conclusions:

1. This research thoroughly explores the surrounding environment and internal structure of the Lao YaTan community, including its geographical location, transportation, commercial and residential area configuration. Research was also carried out on craftsmen, auxiliary industries, etc., and the research found that the porcelain panel art industry in Laoyatan benefits from its unique geographical location, and that surrounding educational resources and commercial facilities provide a convenient production and living environment for crafters in the community. Craftsmen play an important role in building community culture, are inheritors of skills, and active participants in community economic and cultural activities.

- 2. This research is based on field research, data collection and theoretical research, and research on the history and current state of Laoyatan porcelain panel art. The development history of porcelain panels and the production process and forms of porcelain panels were revealed, and academic materials were improved and supplemented. Furthermore, the inheritance model of porcelain panel art was analyzed to help inherit and protect the porcelain panel art culture of Laoyatan in Jingdezhen, and provide theoretical references and guidance for subsequent cultural management.
- 3 . This research conducted an in-depth analysis of the geographical and cultural development of the Laoyatan community, introduced the formation and role of the Laoyatan porcelain panel art ecological chain system, demonstrated the strength and charm of the porcelain panel art in the Laoyatan community, and revealed the functionality and modernity of the porcelain panel art ecological chain, which is a reflection of cultural revival. The formation of an ecological chain helps maintain and develop porcelain panel art, enhances the cohesion of community residents, provides rich content for cultural tourism, and provides a good reference for cultural protection and research in craft communities.

# Suggestions

General suggestions:

- 1. Consider interdisciplinary collaboration with art anthropologists and cultural management scientists to explore the cultural, artistic and academic value of porcelain panel art in greater depth.
- 2. Compare the differences and differences between the porcelain panel art culture of the Laoyatan community and the culture of other regions, and learn more about the new development model of exchange to promote cultural inheritance and protection.
- 3. Investigate the cultural resources of porcelain panel art in the Laoyatan community, as well as the economic value of tourism, encourage and guide diversified economic activities within the community, and research the impact of porcelain panel art on local cultural tourism and cultural and creative industries.

Suggestions for further research:

1. Collaborate with local communities or educational institutions to set up porcelain panel art research activities. Let more people participate in learning, experiencing, researching, displaying, and inheriting the porcelain panel process to promote sustainable development.

- 2. Collaborate with art institutions to hold porcelain panel art exhibitions. Establish cooperative relationships, promote cultural and artistic exchanges, enhance the economic value of porcelain panels through porcelain panel art, and raise the popularity of Laoyatan porcelain panel art.
- 3. Consider adding cultural and creative industries to the porcelain panel art ecological chain to improve quality and adapt to social development. Or research how to incorporate modern technology and innovative ideas into traditional porcelain panel production, such as the use of new materials and the integration of modern design concepts, to enhance the modern value and market competitiveness of traditional art.

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