

# From the world porcelain capital to a tourist attraction of ecocivilisation

## Analysis of Jingdezhen's masterplan and innovative urban planning strategies

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### **Abstract**

Ceramics are extremely important in Chinese culture. This craft has been present throughout Chinese history since the Palaeolithic era and especially during the Ming and Qing dynasties when Chinese porcelain became popular all over the world. Since the 13th century, Jingdezhen, a city in Jiangxi province, has been considered a main porcelain production site and also the porcelain capital of the world. This article aims to analyse the strategies used in the city that revitalised historic areas using the region's cultural heritage and creative potential as a vector for economic and urban development. The paper studies Jingdezhen's current master plan as it demonstrated the factors that enabled the success of this case. The Jingdezhen City Master Plan follows the premisses of creating an urban space guided by the ceramics, aviation and tourism industries, supported by manufacturing industries such as automobiles, machinery, home appliances, pharmaceuticals and chemicals, and with modern service industries and modern agriculture as new growth poles. This study aims to analyse the case of Jingdezhen to reveal its practicality to be introduced in other similar cities around the world.

### **Keywords**

Jingdezhen; Taoxichuan; Taoyangli; innovative urban planning; ecocivilisation

### **How to cite**

Marcelo Maia, Marcela Marajó, Vitória Murata, Matheus Cintra, Nickolas Garcia, "From the world porcelain capital to a tourist attraction of ecocivilisation: Analysis of Jingdezhen's masterplan and innovative urban planning strategies". In Ian Morley and Hendrik Tieben (eds.), *International Planning History Society Proceedings*, 20<sup>th</sup> IPHS Conference, "The (High Density) Metropolis and Region in Planning History," Hong Kong, 2 - 5 July, 2024, TU Delft Open, 2024.

DOI: 10.7480/iphs.2024.1.7661

## INTRODUCTION: JINGDEZHEN, FROM THE ANCIENT DYNASTIES TO THE CONTEMPORARY INTERVENTIONS

This paper will explore the profound relationship between pottery craftsmanship and the evolution of Chinese civilisation, tracing its development from ancient times to the present era under socialism with Chinese characteristics. It will delve into the history of Jingdezhen ceramics, highlighting key periods of innovation and cultural exchange. The paper will examine contemporary efforts to revitalise the ceramics industry within the context of China's modern development strategies, focusing on urban and regional growth, technological advancements, and the integration of cultural heritage into economic progress. By analysing the Jingdezhen Masterplan, the discussion will provide insights into how urban planning and cultural preservation intersect to foster sustainable development.

The history of porcelain in Chinese civilisation is a testament to refined craftsmanship and technical innovation that has stood the test of time, dating back thousands of years, Chinese ceramics have evolved from simple clay pots to porcelain masterpieces, becoming one of the most precious treasures of Chinese culture and one of the greatest contributions to the history of world art. This art craft in China dates back to the Neolithic period, with evidence of rudimentary pottery dating back to around 20,000 B.C.. Since then, techniques have been refined and perfected, culminating in the creation of porcelain during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. - 220 A.D.). It was during the Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279) Dynasties that Chinese porcelain reached its apogee, introducing mass production and export to the world; Chinese porcelain became not only an art form, but also a valuable commodity and a status symbol. During the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) Dynasties, porcelain production reached new heights of excellence, with the development of coloured glazes, elaborate painting techniques and distinctive shapes, in addition to its aesthetic and commercial importance, porcelain played a crucial role in the transmission of ideas and cultures, via the trade routes of the ancient Silk Road to the seaports of Asia and Europe. Its shapes and patterns influenced ceramic production all around the world, leaving a lasting legacy in the history of global art. Chinese porcelain continues to be valued and appreciated for both its artistic beauty and its historical importance; it is a vivid witness to China's rich cultural heritage.<sup>12</sup>

Over the last ten years, China has witnessed a remarkable evolution in its development project, especially driven by the “New Silk Road” initiative and the rise of its market-oriented economy. From the economic opening and liberalisation reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping in the 1970s and 1980s to recent efforts to promote innovation and sustainability, China has travelled a path of economic and social transformation. Ceramics has emerged as an important vector in this process. Cities old and new are turning to ceramics as a way of preserving their cultural heritage while boosting economic growth. By investing in research and development, China is modernising its ceramics industry, introducing new techniques and technologies to increase efficiency and product quality which causes the promotion of cultural tourism and an increasing demand for ceramics in urban and rural areas, generating jobs and business opportunities. However, Chinese development also faces significant challenges, such as regional inequality, environmental pollution and social pressures. The Chinese government

aims to achieve a balance between economic growth and sustainability, adopting measures to promote a greener and more inclusive economy.<sup>3</sup>

The integration of culture and innovation reflects the complexity and resilience of China's transformation in recent decades. This can be seen clearly when analysing the Jingdezhen Masterplan, which is a territorial spatial planning focused on the implementation of the new development concept, the implementation of high-efficiency spatial governance, the promotion of well-structured development and the creation of a high quality of life. It is an action program to guide the protection, evolution, utilisation, restoration and guidance of various types of construction of municipal land space; Jingdezhen's Master Plan strictly follows the orientation of socialism with Chinese characteristics adopted in the new era, as established by Xi Jinping's philosophy. Based on this principle, the city is undergoing a significant transformation, aiming to highlight its role as a centre of innovation and heritage of the national ceramic culture. The urban project aims to boost city development while also following the principles of ecocivilisation and establishing Jingdezhen as a key area for the development of national civil-military integration, as to be shown in this article.<sup>4</sup>

Nestled in China's Jiangxi Province, Jingdezhen has a long history of being known as the "Porcelain Capital" of the country and, most of all, of the world. This city has been known for ceramic craftsmanship for over a millennium, garnering praise from all over the world for its exquisite porcelain and ceramics. The history of Jingdezhen's ceramics started in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. - 220 A.C.), but the region did not become a significant porcelain production hub until the Song Dynasty (960 - 1279 A.C.). Its advantageous location, characterised as being nested among copious clay reserves and encircled by thick forests for kilns, contributed to its development into a centre of pottery production. Under royal sponsorship, Jingdezhen's porcelain industry prospered during the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644 A.C.), and, due to the rising demand for imperial ceramics, the Ming emperors ordered official kilns to be built after realising the unique quality of Jingdezhen porcelain; some of the most sought-after ceramics of the time, with their deft craftsmanship, elaborate designs, and vivid glazes, came from these royal kilns. The Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1912 A.C.) saw the height of Jingdezhen's ceramic industry as it emerged as the primary porcelain supplier to the imperial court, the city's kilns produced an astounding variety of porcelain goods for both domestic and foreign markets, ranging from simple tableware to elaborate ornamental pieces.<sup>56</sup>

Even in the face of obstacles like market competition and economic fluctuations, Jingdezhen's ceramic legacy endured until the contemporary period, and the city continues to be a thriving hub for ceramic manufacture today, fusing old methods with new ones. Travellers go to Jingdezhen to see the centuries-old artistry up close, visit its museums and workshops, and maybe even attempt to produce pottery under the guidance of experienced artisans. Jingdezhen's continued celebration as an upholder of ceramic craftsmanship and cultural heritage is evidence of its lasting legacy.

The Masterplan developed for the city of Jingdezhen is a testament to the commitment to strategic urban planning and an understanding of the intrinsic value of its rich cultural and economic heritage: for centuries, pottery and the production/trade of ceramics, including the

famous imperial kilns, have been the main drivers of local development. These activities not only sustained the city's economy but also directly influenced its growth and urban expansion, encouraging the occupation of previously remote areas. The Masterplan is designed to capitalise on this legacy, transforming Jingdezhen into a centre of excellence for the ceramics industry, while promoting sustainable and inclusive urban development by preserving and revitalising the historic ceramic production areas. The plan aims not only to keep the craft tradition alive but also to attract tourists and investors interested in the culture and history of Chinese porcelain. In addition, the Masterplan recognizes the importance of ecocivilisation in promoting sustainable urban development with measures to protect the environment and promote ecological practices. Jingdezhen seeks to balance economic growth with the conservation of natural resources and the quality of life of its inhabitants.

## JINGDEZHEN: MASTERPLAN AND RELEVANT NEIGHBOURHOODS - TAOXICHUAN AND TAOYANGLI

### JINGDEZHEN MASTERPLAN

Jingdezhen's Masterplan is a comprehensive strategic document that outlines the guidelines for the sustainable development of the city, incorporating both industrial growth and the stimulation of tourism in a carefully planned way in line with China's principles of governance. Based on Chinese sources and a more detailed analysis of the plan, we can better understand how it is being implemented and what its main objectives and strategies are. According to the Jingdezhen Civilisation Network, the city's Masterplan aims to modernise and optimise the region's ceramics industry, drawing on its rich tradition and expertise in the sector to boost innovation and global competitiveness; specific strategies include investments in research and development of new ceramic mass production techniques, as well as the development of public-private partnerships to promote the adoption of clean and sustainable technologies. The plan also provides for the diversification of Jingdezhen's industrial base, encouraging the growth of sectors such as the production of aerospace components, taking advantage of the city's strategic location and its already existing and thriving industrial infrastructure. It also recognizes the potential of tourism as an economic and cultural driver, but also emphasises the importance of developing the sector in a sustainable way while preserving the city's historical and cultural heritage. Strategies include developing tourist routes that highlight historic ceramic production sites, as well as promoting authentic experiences that immerse visitors in the art and culture of porcelain. Since tourism activities can be degrading, the plan also addresses common concerns such as proper waste management, protection of natural areas and managing the flow of visitors to avoid negative impacts on residents' quality of life. As explained in that same document, the Jingdezhen Masterplan promotes integration and cooperation between the different sectors of the local economy, as well as between the government, businesses and the community; the creation of collaboration platforms to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and resources between stakeholders can be given as an example, as well as the establishment of governance mecha-

nisms to ensure public participation in the decision-making process. The plan also emphasises the importance of transparency and accountability in the implementation of planned policies and projects, with a view to ensuring that the benefits of development are equitably distributed among all members of the community.<sup>78</sup>

The development is led by the ceramics, aviation and tourism industries, supported by manufacturing industries such as automobiles, machinery, home appliances, pharmaceuticals and chemicals, and with modern service industries and modern agriculture as new growth poles. It is planned to form an industrial spatial pattern of “one core, two belts and two sectors”. The first core, with the central urban area of Jingdezhen as the main economic growth core, and the two belts, the 206 National Highway Industrial Development Belt and the Yaoli-Yongshan-Hongyan Industrial Development Belt. There are two sections, the northern ecological economic development section and the southern characteristic economic development section. While in the matter of defining the regions zones, the urban and rural areas will follow the spatial structure of “two centres, three axes, two corridors and three districts”. The double centre has Jingdezhen city centre as the main centre and Leping city centre as the sub-center; the three axes are the north-south industrial functional axis relying on the 206 National Highway and the two east-west external connecting functional axes relying on the Hangrui Expressway and Dechang Expressway; as of the second corridor, it is the Jingdezhen-Ehu-Yaoli-Wuyuan tourism development corridor and the Jingdezhen-Yongshan-Hongyan-Dexing urban and rural development corridor. The three zones are the central urban dense area, the southern urban economic development zone and the northern urban economic development zone.<sup>9</sup>

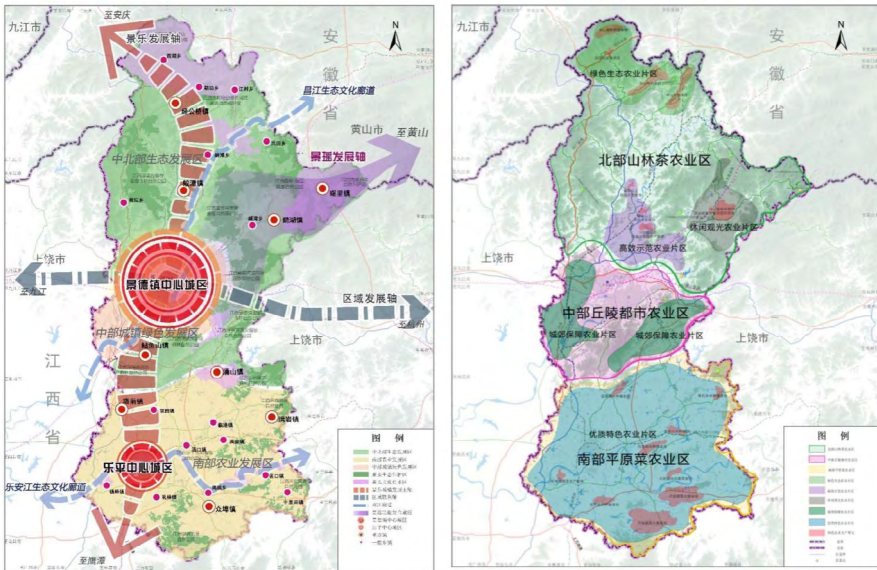


Fig. 1. Jingdezhen's Masterplan. Two centres, three axes, two corridors and three districts. The masterplan focuses on Industrial, Cultural and Ecological Development.

Furthermore, in the near future, Jingdezhen aspires to be recognized as the International Capital of Porcelain, an International Center for Cooperation and Exchange of Ceramic Culture, a Base for Innovation in the Protection of National Ceramic Culture and a World-Famous Cultural Tourism Destination, besides the tourism aspect, it will be a key area for the development of national civil-military integration. The urban planning was set to occur in three phases: short-term (2012-2015), medium-term (2016-2020) and long-term (2021-2030), but, throughout the evolution of the region, this calendar has already adapted itself to the city's reality, being that now it's understood that there was the initial period from 2015 to 2025, which leads to the second phase from 2026 to 2035 and the last one - at least for now - from 2036 to 2050. Therefore, the initial planning wasn't abandoned, only tailored to the speed of Jingdezhen's development as reads below:<sup>10</sup>

- By 2025, Jingdezhen will have set benchmarks with its national pilot zones, moving towards high-quality economic development, enhanced reform and opening-up, leadership in ecological civilisation and progress in social governance. This progress will serve as a replicable model for the development of traditional cultural industries across China.
- Looking ahead to 2035, Jingdezhen aims to build a new humanistic city of national demonstration with global influence as a world centre of ceramic culture. Its economic, social, urban and rural indicators will reach advanced international standards, becoming a model of high-quality development.
- By 2050, Jingdezhen will be a global benchmark for high-quality development, with international cultural exchanges, a robust business environment and enhanced support services. The protection and use of cultural heritage will reach international standards, and the city will stand as a leader in green development and land use efficiency.<sup>11</sup>

Through urban area cultivation, the aim is to fortify and enhance the central region, enhancing its comprehensive functions and industrial competitiveness, this effort aligns with the mandates for constructing the Poyang Lake Ecological Economic Zone, amplifying the central city's leadership within the urban landscape, and accelerating the urbanisation process. By leveraging its capacity for aggregation, influence, and momentum, the plan seeks to optimise the central city's influence. Furthermore, this initiative will facilitate the adjustment and modernization of urban spatial structures, steering clear of inefficient urban sprawl and land overuse. It involves meticulous identification and preservation of strategic ecological, developmental, and industrial spaces within the city boundaries. As for the matter of urban mobility, the masterplan is designed to enhance regional transportation connectivity by improving links between regional transportation facilities and optimising internal city transportation networks, this involves segregating transit, shipments, and urban traffic to enhance operational efficiency; the focus is on promoting eco-friendly transportation methods and constructing key arterial roads to better connect with surrounding areas and, besides that, the urban plan foresees constant investments in research and high education institutions, so that new tailored transportation strategies can be developed to alleviate urban traffic congestion and related issues. In order to accomplish the sustainability aspect of the masterplan, the city is planned to form three major ecological functional zones: the northern mountainous soil and water conservation ecological functional zone, the central ecological urban construction zone, and the southern agricultural ecological zone.



Fig. 2. Taoxichuan Masterplan 2018. Developed by David Chipperfield Architects. The masterplan includes a Hotel, a Theatre and an Academy of Music. The interior of the Hyatt Place Jingdezhen Taoxichuan Hotel was designed by AIM Architecture.

## 2.2 TAOXICHUAN CERAMIC ART AVENUE

Taoxichuan Ceramic Art Avenue is situated in the central area of Jingdezhen East City, which is a project that integrates tourism, business and culture and aims to protect and utilise the industrial heritage of the porcelain production history of the site<sup>12</sup>. The avenue's masterplan was developed by David Chipperfield Architects in 2018. The main goal of the project was to create a lively and public place within the urban fabric, while managing to preserve the old ceramic factories. The main facilities of Taoxichuan consists of a Grand Theatre, an Academy of Music and a Hotel Complex. All of these buildings reuse structures that are part of the industrial heritage of the area or materials that refer to it. The Grand Theatre is a new construction, but its main material are bricks that refer to the traditional materiality of the historic industrial buildings. The Academy of Music is located in two former ceramic factories that date from the middle of the 20th century. And, at last, the Hotel Complex reused a former dormitory from the 1960's as one of its apartment buildings. Besides the three main structures, new functions were also included in the project, such as porcelain shops, a ceramics market, a museum and a campus for the performing arts with colleges and performance venues<sup>13</sup>.

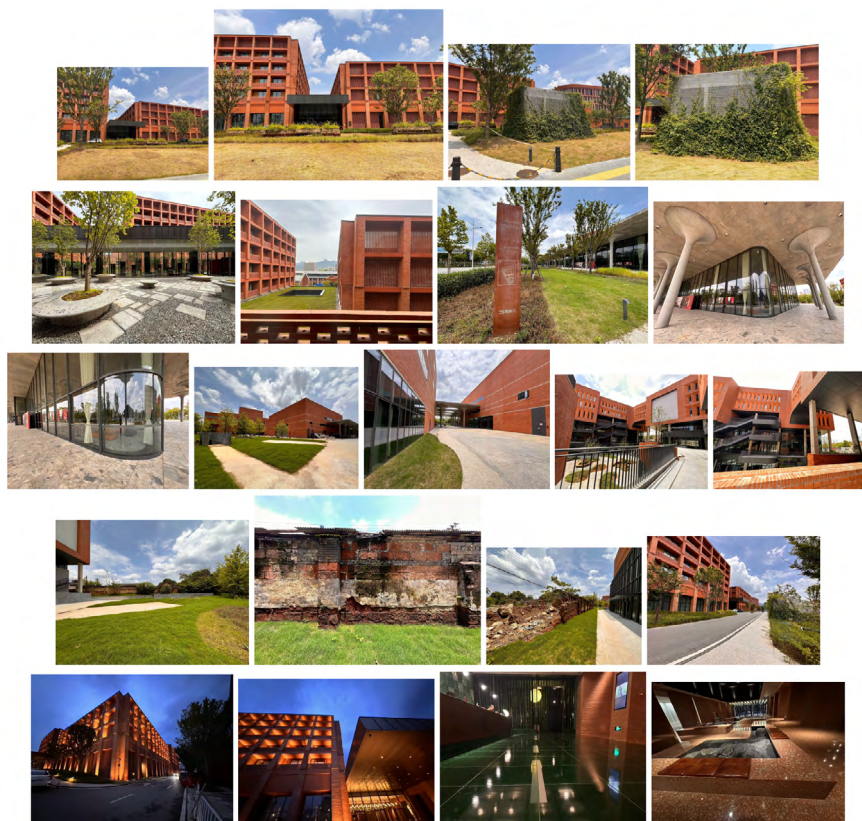


Fig. 3. Photos of Taoxichuan Area taken by author Natacha Rena during her research visit to Jingdezhen in June 2023.

During the last years, Taoxichuan became an appealing place for the youth and their business, registering over 18.000 young people, 2.902 new businesses and 1.049 small or micro-sized enterprises. It generates about 10.000 thousand yuan per day through e-commerce and live-streaming and provides employment for over 100.000 people. It also became an attractive spot for craftsman and art design scholars, receiving, since its opening in 2016, approximately 200 artisans and designers from all over the world to hold lectures, academic reports and solo exhibitions. The objective behind the efforts to attract these artists and scholars to Taoxichuan is to promote cultural exchanges, but it also brings a lot of vitality to the place. Besides the buildings quoted earlier, Taoxichuan Ceramic Art Avenue also houses the Ceramic Industry Museum, the Ceramic Art Avenue Art Gallery, the Taoxichuan Ceramic Academy, Yi Creative Space and Taoxichuan Art Center and all of them are located in historical sites and represent the heritage transformation and improvement of the cultural industry that happened in the area<sup>14</sup>.





Fig. 4. Picture of a Regional Map of Taoyangli Imperial Kiln Scenic Area, made by the author Natacha Rena, during a research visit to Jingdezhen in June 2023.

The Taoxichuan project has been awarded more than 80 times in global, national and provincial levels including the 2017 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Protection Innovation Award. It has also been listed as a national cultural industry demonstration park by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism<sup>15</sup>. The recognition that Taoxichuan Ceramic Art Avenue received shows how great of an example the project is, regarding the integration of urban development and preservation of cultural heritage. The site successfully combines traditional craft, cultural industry and technology, renewing the urban space while still maintaining the local heritage and history. And the transformation of the area into an attractive spot for artists, scholars and new business generates millions in revenue, contributing to the economic and industrial development of Jingdezhen.

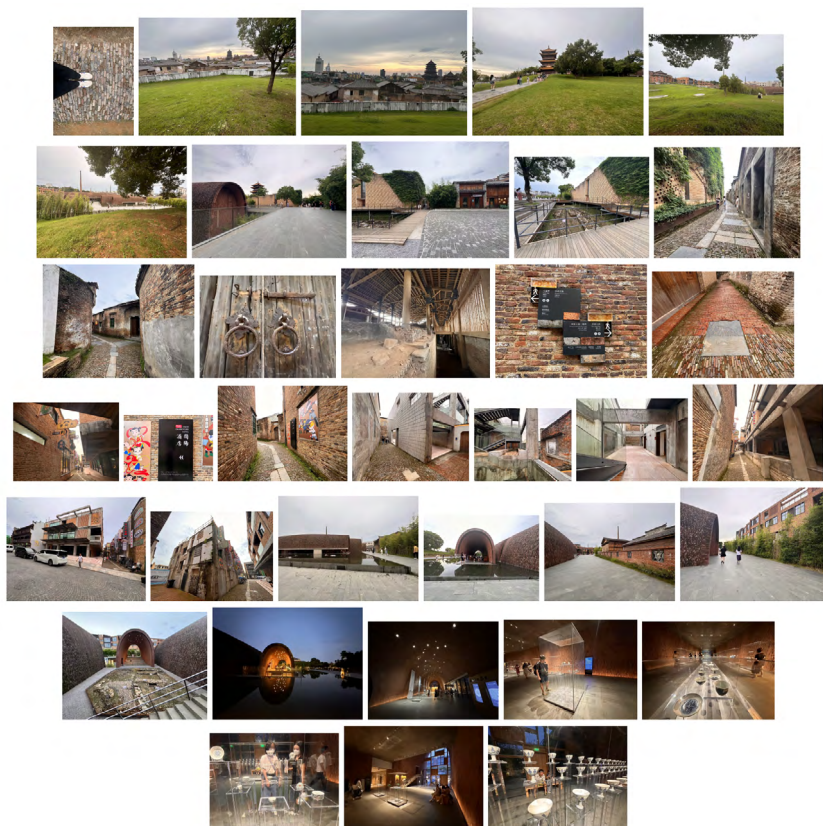


Fig. 5. Photos of Taoyangli Imperial Kiln Scenic Area taken by author Natacha Rena during her research visit to Jingdezhen in June 2023. The Kiln Museum was developed by Studio Zhu Pei.

### 2.3 TAOYANGLI IMPERIAL KILN SCENIC AREA

Taoyangli Imperial Kiln Scenic Area is located near the Changjiang River, in the core of the old city of Jingdezhen and where the urban heritage of the city is concentrated. Being the home of many relevant attractions, like the Imperial Kiln Factory site, the Imperial Kiln Museum, traditional folk houses, porcelain shops and other relics that are linked to the ceramic industry history, the site is classified as a national 4A-level scenic spot<sup>16</sup>. This classification refers to the Chinese 5A rating system for tourist attractions that evaluate the quality level of them based on criteria like tourism traffic, tourism safety, hygiene, tourism shopping and other. And the grading varies between AAAAA (5A) and A (1A), being the higher the number, the better<sup>17</sup>. Taoyangli is also considered a National Night Cultural Tourism Consumption Agglomeration Zones (NNCTCAZ), which are areas used as models for the development of tourist spots with a high level of quality, integrating strategies to leverage the growth of culture industry while also focusing on the potential for night time consumption and economic development<sup>18</sup>.



Fig. 6. Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Museum. Developed by Studio Zhu Pei. The project integrates history and innovation with nature.

One of the most significant buildings located in the Taoyangli area is definitely the Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Museum. The museum focuses on Imperial Kiln artefacts and is adjacent to the Imperial Kiln Ruins of Ming Dynasty. The project, developed by the Chinese based Studio Zhu Pei between 2016 and 2017, aims to bring together the local culture roots, the revolutionary thinking of the porcelain industry and innovative ideas. The most prevalent and visible material in the building is traditional brick, referring to the old brick kilns that are so present in Jingdezhen's memory. Not only the history of the site was taken into consideration, natural conditions of the site were also carefully studied and natural lighting and ventilation were prioritised. The intertwining of the old and the new with nature made the museum a very interesting and unique place to visit, contributing to attracting tourists and bringing vitality to its surroundings.<sup>19</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that it is possible to conciliate ecocivilisation with the economic and industrial development of regions by adopting integrated strategies of cultural preservation and technological innovation. The Jingdezhen Master Plan serves as a practical example, showing how revitalising the ceramics industry can boost urban and regional growth while promoting environmental sustainability. Furthermore, the masterplan which is the object of this study comes to show that it is possible to develop the city's industrial field while also following a sustainability plan in order to create and maintain an ecocivilisation. By investing in clean technologies and promoting cultural and eco tourism, Jingdezhen balances its rich historical legacy with the demands of a modern, sustainable and high-quality economy.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is part of one research that received a grant from a public Brazilian research agency (CNPq N° 26/2021 - *Apoio à Pesquisa Científica, Tecnológica e de Inovação*). The name of this research for post doctorate abroad is Construction of territorial development indicators involving Large Infrastructure and Transnational Integration Projects (GPIIT).

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR(S)

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Figure 1 Jingdezhen Municipal Natural Resources and Planning Bureau, 2022. **Figure 2:** David Chipperfield Architects, "Ceramic Art Avenue Taoxichuan", 2022.

Figure 3 Natacha Rena, 2023.

Figure 4 Natacha Rena, 2023.

Figure 5 Natacha Rena, 2023.

Figure 6 Studio Zhu Pei, Website, n.d.

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