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An artisan depicts a landscape on a porcelain vase.

Porcelain's glory shines on forever

Kilns ignited again as their storied history returns to life before a new generation of admirers. **Deng Zhangyu reports**

In China's porcelain capital of Jingdezhen, ceramics have been woven into the very fabric of the city for centuries. At its core, the Taoyangli historical and cultural district is a beacon of this storied past, a place where kiln fires once blazed through the night, and porcelain was made every day.

In this area of Jingdezhen, in Jiangxi province, can be found the remnants of the Imperial Kiln Factory, the kilns of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, and old workshops used by ceramic artisans, a testament to Jingdezhen's illustrious heritage.

"The Taoyangli district as a whole is an open and living museum," said Weng Yanjun, director of the Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Institute. "When visitors come here they can see what life was like hundreds of years ago: potters living and making porcelain, and traders from all over the country who shipped their goods worldwide."

The institute consists of a ceramic archaeology research institute and a kiln museum built on the site of Ming Dynasty imperial kilns. They were once used to produce the finest blue-and-white ceramics for imperial courts.

The elongated structures of the museum were built using a mix of new and recycled bricks from dismantled kilns. Many of the surrounding buildings and houses were also built using kiln bricks, because the kilns had to be rebuilt every two or three years to maintain their thermal performance.

The museum's collection includes pieces unearthed on the site of the ancient kilns over the past few decades, Weng said. The museum opened in 2021 and quickly became a popular destination in Taoyangli.

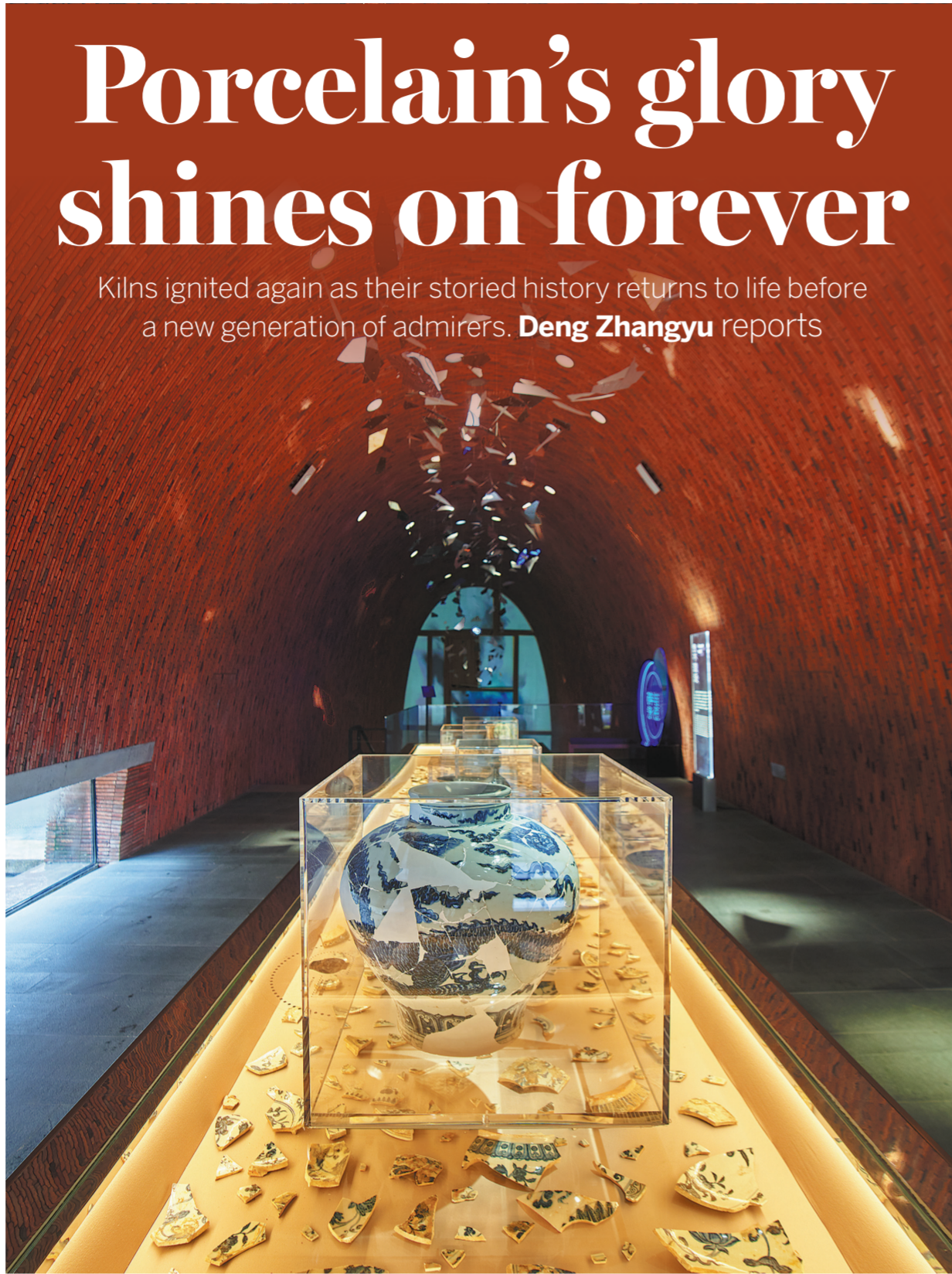
Over the past millennium Jingdezhen has developed a rich history and is a rare example of a Chinese city dedicated exclusively to the ceramics industry, Weng said. Numerous kinds of porcelain products were discovered at the Imperial Kiln Factory, now the kiln museum, and are on display, giving visitors a glimpse into the area's bustling past.

"I grew up here and I've seen how the district has been restored to its former state," Weng said.

The restoration of Taoyangli began more than 10 years ago when the late Ming Dynasty Xujia Kiln was repaired. It is the largest wood-fired kiln still in existence and was used to produce household porcelain.

In 2012 Yu Xilai, former Party secretary of the Jingdezhen Jianguo Porcelain Factory, received a call asking him to help repair the Xujia Kiln, which had been abandoned years earlier.

Yu began working at the kiln when



The Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Museum at the Taoyangli historical and cultural district in Jiangxi province displays porcelain antiques unearthed at imperial kilns. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

he was 20, following in his father's footsteps. In those days the kiln was used by the Jingdezhen Jianguo Porcelain Factory to produce ceramics for export.

Yu, 68, said that when he saw the crumbling bricks and walls of the old kiln he was determined to do everything he could to restore it.

"Many former artisans were really excited when they heard about the restoration plan for the kiln. They volunteered to come back and help out. A lot of them were quite old then, some even in their 80s."

Reviving this huge kiln, 17 meters long and five meters high, was no simple task.

Those involved searched for wooden beams from other dismantled or abandoned workshops, eager to be faithful to the kiln's original appearance. Nearly 150,000 bricks were used, and it took the artisans three months to piece together the arched surface brick by brick.

The wooden planks used to carry firewood to the kiln were re-created from memory. In 2016 the project



A bird's-eye view of the Taoyangli historical and cultural district at the heart of Jingdezhen.

was completed, and the Xujia Kiln was once again fired up after years of inactivity.

"We need six months to prepare for a successful firing, which can produce more than 10,000 pieces," Yu said. "Many people are eager to collect ceramics made in a wood-fired kiln."

To help contemporary audiences appreciate ceramics, he has invited experienced inheritors of the intangible cultural heritage to display

their skills at a workshop next to the Xujia Kiln. Each inheritor has a couple of young apprentices who learn from them as they work.

"Porcelain-making techniques were traditionally passed down within families," Yu said. "Here we have many families with three generations of porcelain makers, and I am the third generation in my family. However, to ensure the long-term survival of the craft we must break away from tradition and pass these skills on to young people."

Xu Ling, 58, one of the artisans Yu invited to demonstrate their techniques in Taoyangli, sits at a workbench engrossed in carving patterns into the porcelain bowls and is unfazed by the crowd gathered around her, even as they take pictures and laud her skill.

"Whenever they ask questions, I answer them, one by one. Children are particularly interested, and it's wonderful if my explanations spark their interest in making porcelain."

In recent years Xu has taken on apprentices to ensure the skills are



An artisan uses a knife to trim the clay surface and edges of a vessel.

passed down. Two of them, in their 20s, work beside her, demonstrating the steps in the porcelain-making process.

Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Taoyangli a year ago and encouraged the inheritors to pursue their artisanship with dedication and devote themselves to passing down their craft and to innovating.

The principle of protection first and like-for-like renovation has been followed in protecting Taoyangli, he said, facilitating a mutually reinforcing interaction between ceramic cultural protection and development of the cultural and tourism industry.

Xu recalls working at a ceramics factory in the area when she was in her 20s. Present-day Taoyangli brings back scenes harking back to the last century.

In the distance the towering chimney of the ceramics factory where she worked retains its original appearance. The workshop in which Xu demonstrates porcelain-making skills has been restored to its former glory, with each brick, beam and pillar reflecting its original state.

The Xujia Kiln, which represents the ancient kiln clusters of the Ming and Qing dynasties, is surrounded by more than 100 narrow alleys. Lined with brick-paved pathways, these alleys are flanked by porcelain workshops made out of kiln bricks. For centuries, generations of artisans thrived here, passing down their craft through the ages.

"The names of these alleyways have remained unchanged for hundreds of years," Xu said.

In 2016 the restoration of the Taoyangli historical and cultural district began. Liu Zili, president of the Jingdezhen Ceramic Culture Tourism Group, in charge of the project, said preservation and keeping things in their original condition were given top priority.

On the basis of respecting and preserving residential buildings and the historical settings of different eras, the approach adopted was to juxtapose the old with the new to return the neighborhood to life, creating a new cultural destination in the process.

Walking through Taoyangli, visitors find that advertisements and slogans from the past have been preserved. On the roads, workers meticulously fill the gaps between the stones with soil using small knives, to allow moss to grow between the bricks as it did in the past.

Liu said: "Through meticulous restoration each building, every piece of porcelain and every detail is set to narrate its own chapter of history, wrapping the entire district in the rich memories of the porcelain capital."

Traditional medicine catches interest of the young

By ZHAO RUINAN

In July there was a long line in the outpatient hall of Jiangxi Provincial Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine in the city of Nanchang. Many of the patients, including a lot of young people, were coming for *sanfutie*.

Sanfutie, a TCM treatment, is administered during *sanfu*, the hottest days of summer. The process involves placing small, square herbal plasters or bandages on various areas of the back and neck.

"*Sanfutie* is usually applied in cycles of three years, requiring continuous application over this period to achieve better results," said Xu Maolin, 31, who tried *sanfutie* for the first time last year and is now in her second year of treatment.

The *sanfu* period refers to the hottest days based on the Chinese lunar calendar. This year it occurred from July 15 to Aug 14. According to traditional Chinese medicine theory, *sanfu* days are an excellent time for preserving health and healing diseases.

"I've had allergic rhinitis since I was little," Xu said. "Last year, on a colleague's recommendation, I tried *sanfutie* treatment for the first time and my rhinitis improved a lot."

Techniques such as massage and acupuncture are becoming increasingly popular among young people.



A medical worker gives health suggestions to a young patient in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, on Aug 8. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Health-related spending ranked third on the list of consumer preferences among those aged 18 to 35 last year, a report published by China Media Group in May said. A report on Gen Z's spending on nutrition in 2022 indicated that young people are actively engaging in health-conscious consumer behavior. Urban residents are said to be spending on average more than 1,000 yuan (\$140) a year on health and wellness, with the 18 to 35 age group accounting for 83.7 percent of the total.

Zhou Yunxian, 86, former chief physician at the Institute of Acupuncture and Moxibustion Hospital of the China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences in Beijing, said she has observed the growing numbers of younger people seeking TCM treatment in recent years.

"TCM is highly effective in treating diseases, especially in relieving symptoms such as pain. Nowadays young people are under a lot of pressure, and unhealthy habits such as staying up late and prolonged sitting at work often make them feel physically uncomfortable."

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Street dance sheds bad-boy image to become a big hit

By CHEN NAN

Fan Xiaoyu's parents used to worry that their teenage son was turning into a delinquent. Rather than being engrossed in school work he was obsessed with street dance and spent a lot of time dancing in baggy, flashy outfits.

Now, the 34-year-old runs G-Steps Dance Studio, one of the largest dance instruction companies in the country, which has more than 30 outlets in Beijing and has trained more than 150,000 people.

In China's bustling cities a vibrant street dance culture is emerging, particularly among young professionals seeking an escape from their demanding work lives.

For many, the day begins with the grind of a typical office: emails to answer, reports to generate and endless meetings to attend, and these workers often spend long hours in front of screens.

Fan was no exception. In 2013 he started working at an internet

company in Beijing, having moved from Baoshan, Yunnan province, to the capital to study business administration at college.

After the company shifted to a new building, he discovered a spacious yoga room with mirrors lining the walls that the company had prepared for its employees.

"When I saw the room I instantly associated it with a space for dancing. Then I started dancing in front of the mirrors, and soon like-minded people came and we danced together."

In four years Fan gathered together about 500 of the internet company employees to take part in the informal dance groups. The company, which has about 10,000 employees, gave Fan its backing and recruited more dance teachers to give classes every day after work.

One of the teachers was Wang Xiao, also from Yunnan and who had learned to dance as a child.

"I can still recall the first class," said Wang, now an experienced G-Steps instructor. "I taught those who had

never received dance training. They found it hard and followed my moves reluctantly."

"I thought that they may not return to my class, but to my surprise more people came."

In 2017 Fan opened his first dance studio near Beijing's 798 Art Zone. His workmates and bosses were skeptical but Fan was determined.

"I wanted to open the dance studio because I never stopped loving dance. It's my greatest passion. With the experience of teaching my former colleagues to dance, I wanted to introduce the joy of dancing to more people."

Fan named his dance studio G-Steps, after a dance club he started when he was a high school student. He described the venture as "rediscovering and returning to what I love".

Drawing inspiration from the likes of Michael Jackson, whose unique dance style fused pop, funk, soul and hip-hop, as well as from K-pop groups, Fan started dancing as a teenager



Street dance students practice at a G-Steps store in Beijing in August last year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

because it "made me feel cool".

With diverse movements and rhythmic music, dance intrigues many people.

Young Chinese people have taken to a number of dance styles such as contemporary, Chinese folk, and classic Chinese dance, but street dance is the most enjoyable one for amateurs and beginners, Fan said.

"Street dance is easier than other dance forms such as ballet and classic Chinese dance to learn, makes individuals overcome their fears and builds confidence. It also promotes mindfulness and helps people stay mentally focused."

When language fails to convey meaning, people can communicate through their bodies, Fan said.