Crafting Heritage in the Digital Age: The Online Dissemination of Celadon by Contemporary Chinese Artisans

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Abstract

This study examines how young celadon artisans in China utilize digital platforms to negotiate authenticity and visibility in the transmission of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and ethnographic fieldwork in M City, the paper reveals how digital storytelling, visual aesthetics, and curated narratives allow artisans to reinterpret traditional craftsmanship. The findings show that while digitalization democratizes heritage representation, it also introduces platform logics and symbolic pressures. This study highlights how artisans negotiate authenticity, transforming cultural capital across artistic, commercial, and affective domains in response to both state discourse and neoliberal consumer culture.

1. Introduction

Scholars examining creative labor in the digital era have largely focused on power dynamics within emerging industries such as new media and internet labor (Cunningham, 2014; Jia & Zhong, 2018). Shifting attention to the digital turn of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and its artisans, considerations of the relationship between digitalization and authenticity become increasingly salient (Brown, 2005; Hanif, 2023).

Existing research approaches the relationship between digitalization and authenticity in ICH from two main perspectives. First, much of the literature treats digitalization as a process of documentation and preservation—such as inventories or digital archives—highlighting both the empowering and destabilizing impacts on the perceived authenticity of ICH (Pietrobruno, 2013; Zhou et al., 2019). Second, scholars such as Terras (2015) focus on how institutions—archives, museums, and UNESCO—define authenticity through digitization frameworks, often treating it as a fixed attribute rooted in original community contexts or traditional performances. While these studies illuminate the complex role of technology in heritage preservation, they tend to overlook how individual users—particularly artisans— employ digital media to express their personal relationships to ICH. This is a crucial scholarly area, as the essence of ICH lies in the artisan's craftsmanship and their ongoing identity-making practices (Su, 2018).

As an intangible cultural heritage, celadon embodies centuries of craftsmanship and cultural identity. In the context of globalization and digitalization, the transmission of such heritage faces unprecedented challenges, including generational skill gaps and shifting cultural consumption patterns. In response, contemporary celadon artisans are increasingly leveraging digital platforms to share their craft, reframe its cultural significance, and engage wider audiences.

This study argues that when artisans share their craft-making processes and personal narratives online, the notion of authenticity becomes an evolving and negotiated construct.

Through an analysis of social media practices and digital storytelling, this research investigates how celadon artisans actively shape new narratives and epistemologies of heritage in the digital age.

2. Theoretical Framework

Framing artisanal practice through the lens of Bourdieuian cultural capital enables a deeper understanding of how intangible heritage operates not only as tradition but as a dynamic form of symbolic power in the digital age. This chapter is organized into two sections. The first revisits Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and traces its application and extension in the study of craftsmanship and cultural identity. The second section focuses on how digital visibility affects the representation and perception of authenticity in the context of intangible cultural heritage. Together, these sections provide the theoretical foundation for analyzing how celadon artisans in contemporary China reconfigure their cultural capital in the digital sphere.

2.1 Bourdieuian Cultural Capital and Beyond

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital offers a foundational lens for understanding how knowledge, taste, and symbolic practices become embedded in social hierarchies. In his seminal work, Bourdieu (1986/2019) conceptualizes cultural capital in three forms: embodied (long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body), objectified (cultural goods such as books or artworks), and institutionalized (academic credentials and certifications). This framework has proven influential in heritage studies, where scholars have used it to examine how certain traditions gain legitimacy, how aesthetic hierarchies are formed, and how access to cultural knowledge becomes a site of social distinction (Graham, 2002; Rizzo & Throsby, 2006).

Recent scholarship has extended Bourdieu's theory to examine craftsmanship as a form of embodied cultural capital. In traditional artisanal practice, knowledge is not transmitted primarily through texts or institutions, but rather through

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prolonged bodily engagement—through doing, sensing, and repetition (Sennett, 2008). This knowledge is transmitted not through formal education, but through apprenticeship, repetition, and material engagement—a process that prioritizes sensory learning, skillful repetition, and intergenerational transmission (Graham, 2002). Such practices encode not only technical know-how but also deeply embedded cultural memories, aesthetic judgments, and regional belonging. As Tan et al. (2020) show in their empirical study, artisans frequently associate their work with a sense of ancestral continuity and localized identity, highlighting how craftsmanship performs the dual role of skill and self-representation.

While Bourdieu's original theory emphasizes how cultural capital reinforces social stratification through mechanisms like educational attainment or institutional validation, it is less equipped to explain dynamic and fluid expressions of cultural value in the context of modern heritage governance. Particularly in China, ICH artisans are increasingly positioned not only as bearers of traditional knowledge but also as figures of national pride and cultural self-confidence—an orientation shaped by the state's discourse on "civilized citizenship" and the modernization of cultural identity (Maags, 2021).

This evolving socio-political role calls for a rethinking of cultural capital in cross-field terms. Artisans no longer operate solely within closed systems of craft transmission or community lineage. Instead, they now move between educational institutions, cultural policy environments, commercial platforms, and digital publics. In doing so, their symbolic labor takes on new forms and meanings. As such, cultural capital in contemporary heritage contexts must be seen not just as a resource for social distinction, but as a performative and convertible asset—one that is increasingly shaped by visibility, mediation, and the negotiation of identity in multiple spheres.

2.2 Digital Visibility and Authenticity of ICH artisans

The integration of digital platforms into artisans' everyday cultural practice has significantly reshaped how ICH is produced, shared, and recognized. Short video platforms such as Douyin (TikTok), WeChat Video, along with livestreaming and image-based media like Instagram, YouTube, and WeChat, have made it possible for artisans to reach large and diverse audiences in real time. But this expanded visibility brings new tensions around what counts as "authentic" and who gets to define it.

On one level, digital platform have opened up space for artisans to bypass traditional institutions—such as heritage bureaus, museums, or cultural intermediaries—allowing them to present their craft on their own terms (Ge et al., 2024). Through livestreamed workshops and behind-the-scenes footage, artisans increasingly narrate their own process. This often involves translating embodied forms of knowledge into digital content that is both pedagogical and performative. Yi (2023), in her analysis of Douyin videos, describes this as performance, where artisans must navigate between personal expression, cultural expectations, and the demands of algorithmic visibility.

At the same time, the logic of these platforms tends to privilege content that is aesthetically appealing, concise, and easily consumable—what some scholars call platform legibility (Pietrobruno, 2013; Hu, 2023). This dynamic can result in the flattening of complex practices into digestible, repeatable visual motifs. In this sense, authenticity becomes both a brand and a performance, one that is shaped not only by cultural lineage but

by attention economies and platform metrics. Visibility itself thus becomes a form of symbolic capital—one that reshapes the politics of heritage by privileging those who can "perform authenticity" effectively in digital settings (Wang et al., 2024).

This transition also opens up new routes for cross-field capital conversion. Artisans today may operate not only as traditional practitioners but also as educators, influencers, or creative entrepreneurs (Craig et al., 2021). Their embodied cultural capital—once confined to workshops, studios, or local festivals—is now transformed and recontextualized across commercial, artistic, and civic fields. In this way, digital platforms reconfigure not only how authenticity is represented, but also how cultural capital is accumulated, circulated, and converted in contemporary ICH practice.

To sum up, digital visibility does not simply expand audiences for heritage—it fundamentally alters the terrain on which authenticity and value are contested. While these platforms offer powerful tools for self-representation and creative agency, they also impose new structures of control, expectation, and aestheticization. This study takes these complexities as its starting point, examining how celadon artisans in China engage with and adapt to these evolving conditions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Methods

This study adopts an ethnographic methodology to investigate how celadon artisans engage with digital platforms and negotiate authenticity in their cultural expressions. From late August to December 2019, I conducted in-depth fieldwork in the celadon industry of M City, China. I participated in artisanal life, conducted interviews, and collected material and visual data. Throughout the fieldwork, I kept detailed field notes, which allowed me to deeply engage with the everyday environments and lifeworld of the artisans and to better grasp the cultural significance embedded in their narratives.

Positioning celadon-making as a holistic cultural practice, I considered artisans' life histories, daily labor, and online self-expression as integrated aspects of intangible cultural heritage in the digital age. To protect the privacy of participants, I refer to the city under the pseudonym "M City" and deliberately omit historical and geographic specifics. M City's celadon tradition is part of China's first batch of nationally designated ICH representative works and has been included in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity under the ceramics category.

Three factors explain why M City is an ideal site for examining online cultural transmission. First, unlike other ceramic centers such as Jingdezhen, which have more fluid labor markets, M City's celadon industry remains highly localized. Its artisans often maintain strong ties to regional identity and local citizenship and are more likely to associate their craft with community belonging. Second, the local government has strategically promoted celadon culture and industry as both a regional brand and a national heritage symbol. Many cultural heritage items such as ancient celadon wares and ancient dragon kilns, along with contemporary celadon works, are widely promoted online. Third, due to the technical complexity of celadon production, the craft remains resistant to mechanization. Independent workshops remain the dominant production units. This full-cycle model of artisanal labor makes digital

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communication both selective and potentially reductive, raising concerns about the integrity and authenticity of the heritage practice.

3.2 Interview Sampling and Structure

To capture diverse perspectives, I used purposive sampling to interview 36 celadon artisans, as well as 6 government officials, 3 merchants, 1 celadon laborer, 1 vocational school instructor, and 5 other artisans. Among the 36 artisans, ten held intermediate or senior technical titles and were typically born before 1980. The remaining 26, considered junior or entry-level artisans, were mostly born after 1985 (with two notable exceptions from outside the region). A clear correlation emerged between artisans' economic gains and their institutionalized cultural capital, as those with formal titles generally earned higher incomes.

Younger artisans largely depended on the mentorship and transmission of skills and symbolic resources from senior masters—a dynamic rooted in traditional apprenticeship systems (Wang 2015). Given the long and uncertain trajectory of such transmission, younger artisans increasingly pursued visibility and recognition through other channels, including collaborating with merchants and building personal online portfolios. During my fieldwork, I observed that veteran artisans typically delegated online promotion and sales to local media or distributors. In contrast, junior artisans were far more active in producing and sharing digital content related to their craft. As such, this younger cohort constitutes the core analytical focus of this study.

No.	Name	DOB	Technical Title
1	L	1995	Junior
2	F	1996	None
3	CC	1997	None
4	ZS	1994	None
5	SL	1988	None
6	ZTG	1988	Junior
7	XL	1973	None
8	XY	1962	None
9	MS	Unknown	None
10	LJ	1986	None
11	ZY	1989	Junior
12	TJ	1985	Junior
13	JY	1990s	Junior
14	CX	1996	None
15	ZAM	1985	None
16	DD	1990	Junior
17	ZQ	1994	Junior
18	YP	1975	None
19	SQ	1984	Junior
20	ZL	1987	Junior
21	GL	1989	Junior
22	LL	1989	Junior
23	YM	1985	None
24	JH	Unknown	None
25	HC	1989	Junior
26	QZ	1997	None

Table 1. List of interviewed young artisans

I conducted semi-structured interviews with artisans in both their workshops and homes. They recounted their training experiences, discussed their creative processes and philosophy, reflected on the tension between artistic production and market demand, and shared strategies for enhancing visibility. Due to contextual limitations, interviews were not fully audio recorded; instead, I took detailed real-time notes and documented key observations in my fieldnote.

Following established qualitative research practice (e.g. Strauss and Corbin 1998), the theoretical framework and empirical themes evolved iteratively. Using thematic analysis, I closely examined fieldnotes and research journals, incorporating contextual cues such as changes in tone, gesture, or spatial interaction. I first identified meaningful units—such as references to "adherence to traditional firing techniques" or "adjustments for better visual presentation online." These were then clustered into higher-order themes such as "tradition vs. modernity" or "online-offline dissonance." Finally, by weaving these themes into a narrative structure grounded in the cultural context of the field, I mapped the tensions, strategies, and value systems that shaped artisans' negotiations of digital visibility and authenticity. These themes reflect not only individual experience but also broader dynamics in the transmission and transformation of ICH in contemporary China.

3.3 Digital Dissemination Practices

During the fieldwork, I found that most celadon artisans in M City relied on WeChat for their digital communication. Originally developed as a messaging app, WeChat has since evolved into an integrated platform encompassing social media posts, public accounts, livestreaming, online stores, and payment services. According to interviews with local officials and merchants, each group played a different but complementary role in promoting celadon online: the former published cultural stories and artisan features via WeChat public accounts, while the latter focused on product-oriented narratives and online sales via Taobao and its livestreaming sub-platform. Importantly, these dissemination practices were not externally imposed; artisans were often involved—sometimes actively—in shaping the content. As a result, a multi-actor system of collaborative digital storytelling emerged, targeting not only tourists and consumers but also cultural outsiders and heritage enthusiasts. In addition, as a WeChat contact of several artisans, I observed their frequent personal sharing of celadon-related content, including photos, short videos, and reflections. These posts reached a mixed audience of friends, family, local officials, potential clients, and occasionally researchers like me.

Based on these observations, I collected a dataset comprising 59 official WeChat articles profiling young celadon artisans and documented one Taobao livestream session in 2019. Besides, I archived artisans' self-generated posts from their WeChat Moments from 2019-2020. I conducted thematic coding of these materials to analyze how each platform constructed its discourse. For example, I categorized themes in public articles (e.g., heritage transmission, innovation, artisan stories), examined narrative tactics in livestreams (e.g., product uniqueness, artisan personality, usage scenarios), and classified themes in personal posts (e.g., daily routines, craft demonstrations, material aesthetics). Through this multi-level coding, I explored the discursive logic and communicative intentions behind each platform and examined how digital dissemination mediates artisans' pursuit of visibility and the preservation of authenticity.

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4. Findings

4.1 Symbolizing Traditional Craftsmanship through Storytelling in WeChat Articles

Celadon craftsmanship in M City has received sustained attention from local government initiatives. Since 2018, a series of official WeChat articles has profiled emerging artisans, constructing a narrative of cultural succession that aligns with state heritage discourse. With the active support of the artisans themselves, this media storytelling co-produces a culturally valorized identity of the next generation craftsperson.

In a series of "Rising Artisan" features published by M City's official WeChat account, young celadon artisans are consistently introduced using a standardized textual formula: "Born in... Apprenticed under... Graduated from... Awarded... Style characterized by...". This fixed structure constructs a coherent genealogy of craftsmanship by linking family heritage, master-apprentice lineage, formal training, and institutional recognition. Such narrative coherence operates as a mechanism of institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986/2019), where the artisan's background and credentials legitimize their authenticity and authority in traditional craft. In this way, artisans are symbolically positioned as "rightful inheritors" of tradition, and their cultural capital becomes both visible and bureaucratically convertible (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993).

The following section analyzes the WeChat article reporting artisan ZS alongside his interview narratives, to illustrate how local governments and artisans collaboratively construct symbolic representations of traditional craftsmanship. At the same time, it reveals how artisans, in face-to-face interactions, may complicate or contest this singular symbolic production. Through this dual lens, I observe how the institutional portrayal of heritage intersects with everyday expressions of selfhood—highlighting tensions between platform legibility and lived experience (Hu, 2023).

The article opens with a photo of ZS carving patterns on a plain ceramic and intersperses 11 photos of ZS's celadon works throughout the text (see Figure 1):

乳浊釉青瓷是▇▇窑青瓷的典型特征之一。今年在"▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇"故宫特展中展出的833件（组）▇▇青瓷文物中，有很多属于南宋文物，釉水呈失透性乳浊釉，表面散发着如玉般的光泽，令人大饱眼福。在▇▇青瓷界，说起乳浊釉青瓷，很多人都会想到▇▇▇▇。走进这个90后小伙的工作室，手捧其作品细心观察，会发现其创作的器物有强烈的玉质感，油润光滑，让人爱不释手。

Figure 1. Illustration of the historical context of ZS's celadon works, sourced from M City's official publication[1].

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[1] The inscribed text highlights that opacified glaze celadon, a quintessential craft in M City's ceramic heritage, flourished most notably during the Southern Song Dynasty. ZS,

The historical framing of opacified-glaze celadon (ruzhuoyou), paired with the curated visual display of ZS's works, reinforces his symbolic alignment with traditional craftsmanship and perceived artisanal authenticity. These images construct a carefully orchestrated narrative of technical mastery, aesthetic continuity, and embodied heritage, communicating a ritualized, temporally anchored authenticity that resonates with state discourses of heritage continuity. This emphasis on traditional craftsmanship was also vividly expressed in my conversation with ZS. He spoke candidly about the challenges he encountered in mastering the opacified celadon glaze: traveling to museums across the country to study historical ceramics, experimenting with chemical formulas, enduring repeated kiln failures, and meticulously adjusting firing temperatures. These experiences reflect what Bourdieu (1986/2019) describes as embodied cultural capital—a form of knowledge inscribed in the body through sustained, situated practice rather than formal schooling. ZS's narration signals more than a reproduction of state-approved heritage; it reveals an internally recognized, experiential authenticity grounded in affect, resilience, and tactile experimentation. This aligns with what Su (2018) terms subjective authenticity—a perspective that centers the artisan's self-perception of cultural meaning and integrity. ZS does not claim legitimacy solely through lineage or institutional validation; instead, he constructs it through reflexive engagement with materials, memory, and failure.

The article proceeds to introduce ZS's family background and his initial motivations for entering the celadon industry, though these narratives diverge significantly from ZS's own account:

> ZS is a native of S Town, a place regarded as the cradle of celadon in M City. His grandparents once worked at a state-owned porcelain factory, and from a young age, ZS was deeply immersed in ceramic culture. In 2010, he enrolled in the ceramics program at M City's vocational school, formally embarking on the path of celadon making. After graduation, he worked in a factory during the day while studying celadon design at night. In 2014, at just 20 years old, he founded his own workshop, becoming one of the earliest among his peers to do so. (sourced from M City's official publication)

By emphasizing his birthplace (S Town), familial heritage (grandparents' ceramic experience), and formal credentials (vocational training), the article strategically highlights the institutionalized and objectified dimensions of ZS's cultural capital. These elements signal to readers—and particularly to cultural authorities and consumers—that ZS's authority in the celadon field is rooted in authentic and legitimate sources. As scholars have shown, the valorization of institutional markers is a common practice in state-managed ICH narratives to legitimize heritage representatives (Zhu, 2015). However, in our interview, ZS offered a contrasting account of his early life and motivations. He explained that both of his parents were illiterate farmers who could offer no material or symbolic support for his interest in ceramics. His path into celadon was shaped less by inherited cultural capital than by a personal passion and the need to secure a livelihood. This suggests a form of embodied cultural capital that is self-cultivated, rooted in practice rather than pedigree. As Bourdieu and Johnson (1993) notes, such capital accrues over time through disciplined effort, even in the absence of formal recognition. In ZS's case, his claim that he is

specializing in this technique, has established a notable reputation within the regional celadon community.

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"not good at speaking" with customers and "doesn't know how to sound refined" reflects a form of habitus shaped by rural upbringing, now at odds with the discursive expectations of the cultural marketplace. Therefore, cooperated dealers have repeatedly advised him to avoid speaking too candidly about his background or motivations, warning that such honesty might undermine the symbolic aura they work to construct. In this way, the state and the market co-produce a coherent image of the "silent artisan"—devoted, modest, and authentic—a figure that resonates with consumer expectations of cultural purity and draws in loyal buyers (Farrelly et al. 2019).

In the final section of the article, ZS is further portrayed as a devoted disciple of traditional craftsmanship and culture:

> In 2017, he relocated his workshop to the quiet village of H, retreating from distractions to focus entirely on reviving traditional celadon techniques. […] "M City's celadon tradition goes back centuries," he said over tea. "I don't think we can surpass the ancients, but we can study them to build a strong foundation. Only then can we preserve and promote this heritage." In our conversations, he often spoke about learning from ancient masters and creating from a traditional foundation. ZS gives the impression of a faithful disciple. Only by adhering to the path of tradition can his celadon works fully embody the essence of M City's signature style—smooth, gentle, and elegant. (sourced from M City's official publication)

This stylized narrative transforms ZS's technical discipline into a form of cultural devotion, symbolically positioning him as a moral guardian of heritage. Such portrayals reflect a broader logic of authenticity in heritage discourse, wherein withdrawal from modernity and emphasis on ancestral continuity are cast as signs of legitimacy (Silverman, 2015). This narrative move turns tradition into a kind of faith, where heritage work is framed not just as skillful labor, but as ethical commitment to cultural preservation. However, in interviews, ZS revealed that his professional title evaluation setbacks and financial strain forced him to move from the high-rent core district: "I've been in this field since 2010, nine years now, and I still haven't even become a junior artisan [...] You need to secure credentials and manage relationships; otherwise, even excellent craftsmanship means nothing." This contradiction exemplifies institutionalized credentials (e.g., professional titles) may mediate the value of embodied cultural capital (craftsmanship), while disguised as a form of traditional culture.

What emerges here is a process of biographical standardization and symbolic simplification. Individual experiences are repackaged to conform to the institutional template of the "authentic artisan." Yet digital platforms and new consumer cultures offer younger artisans more varied opportunities for self-representation than their older counterparts. Rather than passively accepting the media's symbolic framing, these artisans often deploy different narrative strategies depending on the audience. Among peers and colleagues, they discuss their material constraints, their production risks, and the ongoing challenges of making a living. In contrast, when engaging with customers or government officials, they adopt curated, heritage-aligned personas that enhance the symbolic value of their work. Thus, the same intangible heritage manifests pluralistic authenticities across different audiences and spaces, challenging essentialist narratives of cultural preservation.

4.2 Showcasing Liveable Celadon Artistry through Visual Narration

Beyond state-mediated narratives on WeChat articles, young celadon artisans have begun curating their own identities through self-representational visual content shared as WeChat Moments. One illustrative case is a WeChat post (see Figure 2) shared by artisan QZ, the daughter of a municipally recognized celadon master：

Figure 2. Artisan Photo: Record of Recent Handicrafts.

Unlike her father, who strictly adheres to traditional forms, QZ frequently carves unconventional motifs into her celadon works—incorporating personal aesthetic experimentation into inherited craft practices. This approach might be perceived as deviating from orthodox celadon aesthetics, yet her WeChat Moments frequently showcase close-up photos of her carving process and celadon dishes filled with homemade food, set against the backdrop of her family's dragon kiln. Such imagery reframes celadon not as a static heritage artifact but as a "living craft"—an embodied, sensory, and situated practice. Rather than reproducing a fixed tradition, QZ's digital storytelling reflects what Giaccardi (2012) calls participatory heritage—where individual actors reinterpret the meanings of cultural forms within fluid digital environments. In doing so, she does not merely "visualize" celadon practice—it transforms craftsmanship into a site of symbolic negotiation. Through repeated acts of sharing, she cultivates a media-visible identity as a young, reflexive artisan whose creative labor bridges tradition and individuality.

This form of liveable narration was also common in interviews with other artisans. When asked about the distinctions between celadon work and other occupations, artisan ZL recounted:

> Sometimes I go to bed, then come up with a shape and immediately run downstairs to wheel throw it. Because if you wait too long, the idea slips away. I live on the second floor—very convenient. I throw it, wash my hands, go back to bed. Next morning I look at it and laugh — "so silly!" Or sometimes I think — "this is actually good!" (Interview with ZL)

Rather than foregrounding technical complexity or commercial strategies, ZL naturalizes the creative process as part of daily living. The way he narrates celadon-making as an extension of his bodily rhythm and emotional impulses de-emphasizes the

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economic dimension of his labor. Such life-integrated storytelling turns the artisan from a producer into a cultural agent whose authenticity derives from sincerity and spontaneity. This echoes Bourdieu's notion of embodied cultural capital—knowledge and skill rooted not in credentialing but in lived practice (Bourdieu 1986/2019). Digital platforms like WeChat thus serve as mediums where artisans selectively present themselves not merely as heritage bearers, but as authentic selves embedded in everyday life. As studies show, visual representations on social media can function as mechanisms for cultural capital accumulation, especially when artisans mobilize personal narratives to enhance visibility (Giaccardi, 2012). While state platforms may frame celadon as a symbolic product of civilizational continuity, self-authored digital content allows artisans to humanize and recontextualize their craft.

Though some artisans also share brief 30-second videos of their daily routines on WeChat video channels—highlighting moments like glazing, kiln loading, or interaction with animals—such content was peripheral to this study and is thus not analyzed in depth here. Nonetheless, it points to an emerging trend: a move away from monumentality and toward lived, affective engagements with craft.

4.3 Visualizing Modern-life-integrated Celadon Products through Videography

In contrast to the narratives promoted by senior artisans and official media channels, younger celadon practitioners tend to emphasize the convergence of traditional heritage values and contemporary lifestyle aesthetics. Through digital storytelling, they redefine the meaning of authenticity while simultaneously challenging the enduring stereotype of artisans as ascetic figures detached from modern life. One example is a 29-second video posted by a young artisan to her personal WeChat Moments, showing the new function of her celadon works (see Figure 3):

Figure 3. Artisan Video: Iced Americano & Celadon Cups.

The video presents a carefully staged coffee-making sequence. The video opens with a celadon teacup placed on a celadon tray, into which coffee beans are added and gently shaken with the lid. In the following shots, the beans are ground, hot water is poured, and a glass pitcher with ice is prepared. The final sequence shows the artisan pouring filtered iced Americano into a rotating celadon teacup, completing a transformation from raw material to refined beverage experience.

Rather than focusing on the technical or historical aspects of celadon-making, the video emphasizes the integration of the artifact into an elegant, everyday modern ritual. The smooth transitions, controlled color palette, and emphasis on touch and temperature construct a tactile aesthetics that bridges heritage and lifestyle. As Su (2018) has argued, subjective authenticity arises when artisans define the cultural value of their work through personal experience and relevance, rather than institutional framing. In this case, celadon's authenticity is no longer confined to its traditional use in tea rituals or religious contexts—it gains new legitimacy as an object of sensory pleasure.

A similar strategy is evident in Figure 4, a 31-second video produced by a celadon workshop and disseminated via the corporate WeChat channel and a young artisan's WeChat Moment:
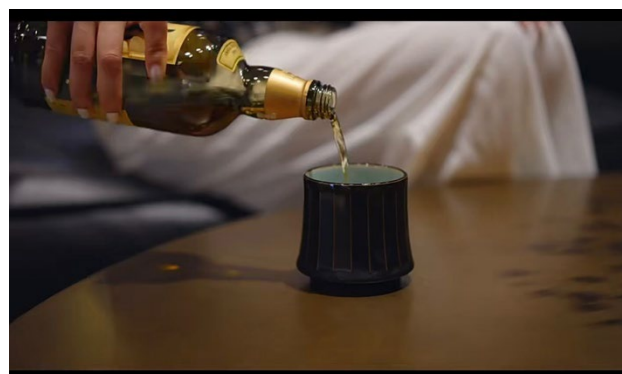

Figure 4. Artisan Video: Whiskey & Celadon Cups.

The video is accompanied by poetic captioning — "Able to withstand the winds of time, and to savor moments of solitude. Grateful for the encounter, a toast to the present" — and tagged with phrases such as "M City Celadon" and "Life needs softness." Unlike traditional craft documentation, this video adopts cinematic aesthetics and narrative stylization to frame celadon as both an object of emotional depth and a marker of personal lifestyle.

The video opens with a long shot of a solitary figure walking through a clean, modern hallway, followed by close-ups of the artisan's hand brushing across a shelf of whiskey bottles and celadon cups. The camera then captures a slow-motion sequence of whiskey being poured over ice into a celadon cup, as the figure sits at a table, browsing an iPad, surrounded by celadon ware. The final black screen bears the line: "A vessel for you. Half a tael of gentleness." Through mood lighting, ambient music, and mise-en-scène, the video reimagines celadon not only as heritage material, but as a vessel of affect—of interiority, solitude, and middle-class elegance. This visual composition is more than a product demonstration—it is a narrative performance of lifestyle identity. As Velthuis (2007) argues in his analysis of contemporary art markets, the value of cultural objects cannot be reduced to material labor or

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functionality; instead, it is symbolically constructed through narratives, aesthetic codes, and the performative contexts in which they are displayed. In this sense, celadon in the video does not simply function as a utilitarian vessel—it is staged within a visual grammar that encodes solitude, softness, and gratitude as part of a desirable lifestyle. The video thereby repositions the celadon cup as a bearer of emotional and cultural capital, whose worth is inseparable from the affective scenes and social meanings it activates.

Both videos reveal a shift in how celadon's authenticity is redefined in relation to consumer lifestyles. The artisan positions celadon as an aesthetic enhancement to everyday rituals—elevating a cup of coffee into a symbol of cultivated taste and sensory refinement. This transformation reflects what Zukin and Maguire (2004) term aesthetic legitimacy: the process through which cultural goods gain value by aligning with dominant ideals of beauty, minimalism, and sophistication associated with urban middle-class identity. Importantly, this form of curated lifestyle representation does not simply reflect artisan subjectivity; it also participates in a broader neoliberal logic where tradition is repurposed for individualized consumption. As Ong (2006) argues, neoliberal economies often reconfigure cultural labor into flexible, marketable experiences that reinforce self-branding and emotional entrepreneurship. In this framing, celadon becomes less a transmitter of collective memory and more a medium for expressing personal taste, resilience, and modern calm. The video thus performs a form of neoliberal authenticity—grounded not in lineage but in affective value, lifestyle branding, and symbolic capital optimized for digital visibility.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The study contributes to the ongoing discourse on intangible heritage preservation in the digital era, calling for a balance between visibility and authenticity in heritage transmission. On one hand, platforms like WeChat allow young celadon artisans to express subjective authenticity by embedding heritage practices into modern lifestyles. Through short videos, lifestyle curation, and visual narration, artisans reinterpret celadon as a lived aesthetic rather than a static tradition. In doing so, they accumulate symbolic capital not only from institutional endorsement but from algorithmic visibility and affective resonance with digital audiences.

Nonetheless, the findings also reveal structural tensions. Government and media narratives often standardize artisanal biographies to fit state-sanctioned images of the "authentic artisan," privileging lineage, discipline, and moral devotion. This homogenizing tendency risks obscuring the diversity of lived experience and undervaluing self-generated cultural capital that does not align with bureaucratic forms. Moreover, the logics of platform legibility—favoring concise, visually appealing, and emotionally resonant content—can flatten complex practices into marketable tropes, introducing commodification pressures and excluding less digitally fluent artisans. Conceptually, this study expands Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital by showing how artisans in the digital era convert embodied knowledge into platform-based symbolic value. It proposes a more fluid understanding of cultural capital that accounts for cross-field conversion between craft, commerce, and digital storytelling. It also contributes to heritage studies by bridging state-centered and subject-centered views of authenticity, emphasizing the negotiation between institutional legibility and personal narratives.

While digital tools democratize participation and narrative agency, they also reinforce new hierarchies rooted in visibility, platform logic, and algorithmic reward. The rise of "neoliberal authenticity," where heritage is curated for lifestyle branding, may erode collective memory and reinforce symbolic exclusion. Policymakers and heritage institutions must therefore attend not only to the preservation of techniques, but also to the infrastructures of digital mediation that shape whose authenticity is recognized, circulated, and valued in the digital age.

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