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Research on the Revitalization Mechanism of Industrial Heritage: Taking Chongqing Eling Second Factory as an Example

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Abstract: As urban development shifts from incremental expansion to stock renewal, industrial heritage, as a carrier of "urban memory," has become an important avenue for promoting high-quality urban development and enhancing its connotations. Chongqing, as a significant old industrial base in China, possesses a large number of industrial relics in urgent need of transformation, with its revitalization practices being both typical and unique. This study takes the Er'chang Factory in Eling, Chongqing, a typical industrial heritage revitalization project, as a case study and employs grounded theory as a qualitative research method. By collecting raw data from the internet using web crawlers and following a three-level process of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, the data is systematically analyzed and conceptualized, gradually constructing and ultimately refining a theoretical model for industrial heritage revitalization centered on core drivers, value creation, and optimization and quality enhancement. This model provides a template for the revitalization of other industrial heritage sites.

Keywords: Industrial heritage; Revitalization; Grounded theory

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1. Introduction

Industrial heritage serves as a historical witness and cultural carrier of urban industrial development, embodying a unique industrial cultural ethos and constituting an indispensable part of urban culture [1]. Revitalizing industrial heritage not only helps activate its inherent cultural value and economic potential but also transforms it into an important symbol for shaping urban identity and providing core resources and carriers for urban tourism development. In recent years, industrial tourism in China has developed rapidly. Since its inception in 1998, numerous influential industrial tourism products have been launched in various regions. As of 2024, 122 national industrial heritage demonstration bases have been identified nationwide, and the scale of industrial tourism continues to expand. However, alongside this rapid development, issues of low development quality have emerged, primarily manifested in limited market awareness, insufficient social influence, and unmet economic expectations [2]. Specifically, these

issues are reflected in weak public awareness of industrial tourism, a scarcity of influential brands, insufficient attractions and appeal of scenic spots, imprecise and ineffective marketing strategies, and low levels of service professionalism [3]. Therefore, this paper aims to explore sustainable revitalization paths for industrial tourism to promote its continuous development.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of industrial heritage

The definition of industrial tourism originated earlier abroad. In the mid-20th century, some European countries successively entered the "post-industrial era," and industrial tourism, as a "nostalgic landscape," gradually transformed numerous industrial heritage sites in the "Rust Belt" into assets with tourism value. Domestic scholar Wang Baoheng defines industrial tourism as a form of tourism that uses industrial resources as attractions, with enterprises integrating or redeveloping these resources [2]. Other scholars have also provided definitions of industrial heritage: Industrial Heritage refers to industrial cultural relics with historical and other significant values, serving as important witnesses to the development of human industrial civilization and reflecting the processes of technological advancement, economic transformation, and social development. Industrial heritage encompasses a complex value system, including historical, social, and economic values, providing citizens and tourists with unique cultural memories [4]. Internationally, industrial heritage typically refers to "remnants of industrial culture with complex values," while in China, it often refers to sites formed over long-term development, established for more than 30 years, and associated with industrial-related living and social activities [5].

2.2. Research on industrial heritage

Revitalization at home and abroad research on industrial tourism development abroad started relatively early and is more systematic, with specific research situations summarized in **Table 1**. The overall development trajectory has shifted from static preservation to the integration of parks, creative parks, community participation, and digital technologies.

Table 1. Research on industrial tourism revitalization abroad

Development stage	Dominant research theories	Activation pathways	Specific manifestations
1970s–1980s	Heritage Conservation Theory (Authenticity, Integrity) Adaptive Reuse of Buildings	Museum-style Preservation Functional Replacement	Industrial Museums Conversion to Commercial Facilities
1990s	Postmodern Geography / Genius Loci Theory Ecological Planning and Sustainable Development Theory	Themed Parks and Landscape Park Development Regional Integrated Renewal	Ruhr region in Germany; Emphasizing the coupling of transportation, ecology, and history [6]
2000s	"Creative City" Theory Cluster Theory	Creative Industry Parks Flagship Project Driven	Artist Studios Landmark Cultural Institutions
2010s	Ladder of Citizen Participation Theory Resilient City Theory / Circular Economy Theory	Community-Driven Regeneration Green Energy and Circular Utilization	Participation of multiple social entities Green utilization of industrial materials
2020s onward	Digital Theory Inclusivity Concepts	Digital Technology and Immersive Experiences Inclusive and Resilient Planning	Virtual Experiences Alignment with climate and environment

Research in China started relatively later compared to abroad, but it has developed rapidly. As shown in **Table 2**, the entire development process has evolved from a top-down approach led by the government to a bottom-up process driven by enterprises.

Table 2. Research on industrial tourism revitalization abroad

Development stage	Dominant research theory	Revitalization path	Typical representative
Early 2000s–2010s	Industrial Archaeology (initial introduction) Adaptive Reuse of Buildings Cultural Industries (concept emerging)	Artist-led spontaneous gathering area Iconic museum renovation [7]	Beijing 798 Art District Tsingtao Beer Museum
Mid-2010s	Industrial Cluster Theory Protected Heritage Site System	Government-led heritage conservation Patriotic education and science popularization bases	Ansteel Museum
Late 2010s–Early 2020s	Cultural and Tourism Integration Theory / Scene Theory Double Urban Repairs (Ecological Restoration, City Betterment)	Industrial tourism complex Transformation of urban public spaces	Zhujiang Beer Factory Renovation
2020s–Present	Cultural Heritage Conservation Theory (deepening) Urban Renewal Theory (replacing large-scale demolition and construction) Digital Transformation Theory Community Building Concept	Micro-regeneration and community integration Deep integration of digital technology Sustainable development practices	Dalian Port Industrial

Compared with foreign countries, the evolution path of industrial heritage revitalization in China exhibits the following distinct characteristics:

(1) Top-down policy-driven approach is evident: From the early construction of cultural and creative parks to recent urban renewal initiatives, the guidance of national and local policies serves as the core driving force;

(2) Transition from "formal imitation" to "exploration of connotations": Initially, there was significant borrowing from the foreign Loft model, but later, efforts began to explore distinctive paths that integrate with local Chinese culture, regional context, and community needs;

(3) "Integration of culture and tourism" as the core engine: The close integration of industrial heritage revitalization with the rapidly developing tourism industry is the key path to achieving economic benefits and sustainable development;

(4) The role of communities is gradually becoming prominent: In recent years, research and practice have shifted from focusing solely on physical space and economic interests to paying attention to social value and community participation.

Western countries tend to emphasize the industrial cultural connotations in heritage conservation, highlighting the intrinsic value of industrial heritage and recognizing the value of the heritage itself, often with dedicated departments responsible for its management. However, in China, the heritagization of industrial relics places greater emphasis on the preservation of buildings and landscapes [8]. The development model of industrial tourism is one of the core themes studied in academia. According to relevant research, industrial tourism development models can be classified based on different criteria. Based on development motives, they can be categorized into

enterprise brand promotion, profit-oriented, and city image shaping models; based on resource attributes, they can be divided into two major categories: industrial heritage and modern industrial models [5].

In recent years, research on industrial tourism development models has shown trends of integration, diversification, and creativity. On one hand, relying solely on sightseeing tours has become insufficient to meet tourist demands, and elements such as interactive experiences, cultural and creative industries, and digital technologies are increasingly being incorporated into industrial tourism development. On the other hand, the integrated development of industrial tourism with other tourism formats has also become an important trend, giving rise to a series of "industrial tourism+" development models, such as composite models like "industrial tourism + popular science education," "industrial tourism + cultural and creative arts," and "industrial tourism + leisure shopping" [9]. In recent years, scholars both domestically and internationally have mostly approached the topic from macro perspectives, such as from the perspective of tourist experiences and interdisciplinary research [10,11]. However, there is relatively insufficient research on experiences from the tourist's perspective, making it difficult to deeply reveal the internal driving forces and logic of industrial tourism development.

3. Research design

3.1. Case introduction

Chongqing Printing Factory No. 2, located in the Yuzhong District, a core area of Chongqing, boasts rich historical and cultural connotations. In 2022, it was rated as a national industrial tourism base. The name "Chongqing Printing Factory No. 2" carries profound historical significance. Once a printing giant in the southwest region, with the implementation and advancement of the national policy of "shifting from secondary to tertiary industries," Factory No. 2 withdrew from the city center and ceased operations and relocated in 2011. However, the story of Factory No. 2 did not end there: Starting from 2015, it attracted investment and established the Factory No. 2 Market brand. In 2016, the film production team of "I Belonged to You" chose it as a filming location, leading to its rapid dissemination. In 2017, the Factory No. 2 Cultural and Creative Park officially opened, and through a series of revitalization measures, it became a model for industrial tourism. Over the seven years since its opening, it has offered more than 80 experiential projects, provided over 2,000 new jobs for the city, generated a total output value exceeding 800 million yuan, achieved tax revenue of nearly 40 million yuan, and attracted a cumulative total of over 25 million visitors. In just a few years of exploration, Factory No. 2 has transformed from a dilapidated factory site into a benchmark for industrial tourism, undoubtedly providing us with a practical reference for exploring paths of industrial revitalization.

3.2. Research methodology

This paper employs grounded theory to study the revitalization paths of industrial heritage. Grounded theory, proposed by Glaser and Strauss, emphasizes decomposing collected or translated textual data, identifying phenomena, conceptualizing them, and then appropriately abstracting, elevating, and synthesizing these concepts into categories and core categories [12].

This paper utilizes web crawling tools to gather information from online platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Weibo, and Douyin, and employs NVivo software to conduct a three-stage coding process.

3.2.1. Open coding

In the open coding stage, through line-by-line analysis of the raw online data, a large number of initial concepts

are extracted, categorized, and named. This paper selects high-frequency and medium-frequency words from the data. Through continuous comparison, similar phenomena are aggregated into higher-level conceptual categories, resulting in 10 conceptual categories that lay the foundation for subsequent axial coding (**Table 3**).

Table 3. Open coding

Coding node (Developmental Code)	Frequency	Representative citations
Artistic and Cultural Landmark / Popular Spot	High-Frequency	A1, A4, A8, A13, A14, A17
High-Quality Photo Spot / Photography Haven	High-Frequency	A1, A4, A8, A9, A10, A11, A15
Industrial-Style Architecture	High-Frequency	A1, A5, A10, A13, A14, A16, A29
Film Location: “I Belonged to You”	High-Frequency	A3, A4, A5, A13, A20, A26, A27, A29
Route Suggestions	Medium-Frequency	A2, A12
Rooftop Access Fee	Medium-Frequency	A3, A12, A20, A21
Times Youth League Same-Style Spot	Medium-Frequency	A7, A12, A13, A31, A32
Cultural and Creative District / Creative Park	Medium-Frequency	A14, A25, A14, A16, A26, A28, A29
Historical Origin: Banknote Printing Plant	Medium-Frequency	A14, A25, A26, A27, A29, A33
Graffiti and Retro Streets	Medium-Frequency	A15, A16, A28

3.2.2. Axial coding

Axial coding involves connecting various independent categories and classifying them based on the logical relationships between different categories. In this step, this paper identifies six axial codes for the industrial tourism business model (**Table 4**).

Table 4. Axial coding

Axial coding category	Sub-nodes (from open coding)	Description
Core Characteristics and Experience	Literary and artistic check-in spot; High photo-output rate / photography mecca; Industrial-style architecture; Cultural and creative district / cultural and creative park; Trendy new landmark; Highly walkable / suitable for spending an afternoon	Emphasizes the visual appeal, cultural atmosphere, and experiential value of Eling Test Bed 2
Architecture and Style	Industrial-style buildings; Mottled walls; Iron handrails / iron staircases; Graffiti and retro streets; Red industrial-style overpass; Rooftop terraces; Parasitic architecture concept	Highlights the fusion of architectural heritage and modern design
Culture and Activities	Filming location for the movie *I Belonged to You* ; Check-in spot for fans of Teens in Times / TNT / the 18th floor; Star-chasing; Historical origin: (former) banknote printing plant / printing factory; Cultural and historical significance of cultural innovation	Encompasses the cultural empowerment brought by film, celebrity influence, and historical context
Commercial Formats	Cultural and creative stores; Cafés; Restaurants; Art and cultural spaces; Specialty shops; Creative market	Describes the commercial ecosystem and consumption scenarios within the park
Practical Information & Suggestions	Route suggestion: Visit Eling Test Bed 2 first, then Liziba ; Paid rooftop terraces; Free rooftop terraces are also good; Crowded with tourists; Suitable for daytime visits; Can be visited in conjunction with Liziba and Eling Park; Complex roads / difficult to find locations	Provides sightseeing strategies and points of attention
Negative Reviews & Controversies	Low cost-performance of paid rooftop terraces; Severe commercialization / homogenization; Complex roads / difficult to find locations	Reflects user criticisms and areas for improvement

3.2.3. Selective coding

Selective coding refers to the identification of core categories, integrating them with other categories by comprehensively describing the developmental process, and then validating the relationships between them while supplementing categories that have not been fully developed. Through the aforementioned steps, this paper has extracted four key nodes as follows (**Table 5**):

(1) Positioning and Transformation: The Cultural Rebirth of Historical Industrial Relics;
(2) Core Attraction: the Check-in Economy Driven by Ultimate Scenes, and Business Model: a Mixed Commercial Ecosystem Led by Cultural and Creative Industries;
(3) Experience Feedback: Word-of-Mouth Communication and Optimization Suggestions.

Table 5. Selective coding

Core theme	Description	Supporting coding nodes (from axial coding)
The Cultural Renaissance and Regeneration of Industrial Heritage	Eling No. 2 Factory, transitioning from a historical industrial relic (a former mint/printing factory), successfully transformed into a cultural and creative park through the principles of "repairing the old as it was" and "parasitic architecture." It retains its industrial character while integrating modern elements, achieving cultural rejuvenation.	Architecture and Style, Historical Origin, Core Features and Experiences
Scene-Driven Check-in Economy	Centered on visual symbols such as the industrial aesthetic, graffiti, rooftops, and the red footbridge, and leveraging film and celebrity endorsements (e.g., "I Belonged to You" and Teens in Times), it has become a highly "Instagrammable" spot. This drives social media dissemination and offline visitation traffic.	Core Features and Experiences, Culture and Activities, Commercial Formats
Symbiotic Model of Cultural and Creative Mixed Ecology	By combining commercial formats such as cultural and creative shops, cafes, and restaurants, it establishes a mixed commercial ecology that is "shoppable, playable, and consumable." This allows industrial relics and modern small businesses to coexist harmoniously, continuously generating content appeal.	Commercial Formats, Core Features and Experiences, Architecture and Style
Word-of-Mouth Communication and Optimization Challenges	Positive word-of-mouth (e.g., "artistic paradise," "must-visit") supports its reputation. However, users also point out issues like low value-for-money at paid attractions, commercial homogenization, and complex navigation, providing direct feedback for the park's improvement.	Practical Information and Suggestions, Negative Reviews and Controversy, Core Features and Experiences

4. Results and discussion

After three levels of coding, the sustainable development path for industrial tourism has been ultimately refined: transformation and upgrading serve as the core driving force; value creation enhances commercial returns; and addressing challenges promotes quality improvement.

From a systemic perspective, the various elements involved in the revitalization of industrial heritage form complex interactive relationships. These relationships manifest not only as a vertical progression from physical infrastructure to content experience and then to value realization but also as horizontal collaboration among cultural, economic, and social values (**Figure 1**).

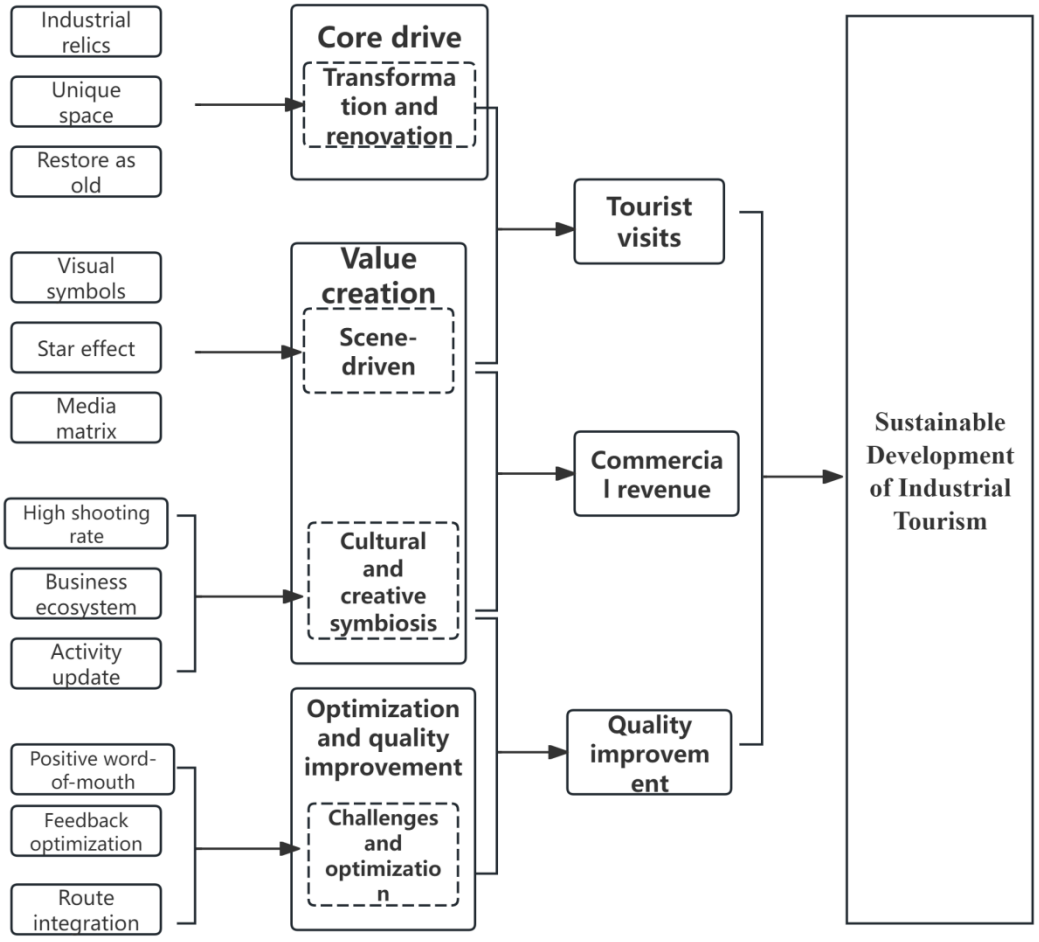

Figure 1. Revitalization path for industrial heritage.

4.1. Core driver

The core driving force behind the revitalization of industrial heritage is rooted in the profound process of cultural rebirth and transformation. This process begins with the rediscovery and value reconstruction of historical industrial relics. Factories, warehouses, and equipment that once carried the memories of industrial production are endowed with new cultural connotations while preserving their material authenticity.

4.2. Value creation

At the level of value creation, the revitalization of industrial heritage has formed an innovative model driven by dual forces. On one hand, the check-in economy driven by scenes transforms industrial aesthetic elements into highly recognizable cultural symbols by constructing a complete visual symbol system. From mottled walls to iron staircases, from red footbridges to preserved equipment relics, these elements collectively form a unique spatial narrative. On the other hand, the construction of a mixed cultural and creative ecosystem creates a multi-tiered business combination, where core cultural and creative businesses and supporting commercial services mutually promote each other, creating a rich and in-depth consumption experience. The success of this dual-drive model lies in the synergistic effect in spatial production, where different functions, time periods, and groups of people form organic interactions within the space of industrial heritage.

4.3. Optimization and quality improvement

In the process of value realization, a feedback adjustment mechanism plays a balancing role. Word-of-mouth communication continuously amplifies the project's visibility and reputation through network effects, while users' spontaneous content creation further enriches the cultural connotations of the space. Meanwhile, through systematic data collection and analysis, operators can promptly identify issues and make targeted adjustments. This dynamic optimization is particularly evident in the control of commercialization levels, ensuring economic benefits while preventing the erosion of cultural quality by excessive commercialization and avoiding the weakening of project uniqueness by homogeneous competition.

5. Conclusion and outlook

5.1. Summary

Based on the grounded theory research method, this study systematically coded and analyzed a large amount of primary and secondary qualitative data, deeply analyzing the revitalization case of Eling No.2 Factory as a representative of industrial heritage, and thereby constructing an industrial heritage revitalization path model that includes "core driving force–value creation–value transformation–feedback adjustment–sustainable development goals." This model clearly reveals the internal logic and dynamic process of the transformation of industrial heritage from silent industrial relics to vibrant cultural and tourism landmarks. The study finds that successful revitalization of industrial heritage is not simply a matter of spatial transformation or commercial implantation but a complex, multi-element synergistic process of "cultural rebirth."

5.2. Suggestions for improvement

Although the revitalization path identified by this study through grounded theory has strong explanatory power, it also exposes several deep-seated issues and challenges prevalent in current industrial heritage revitalization practices that urgently require attention and improvement as outlined:

(1) The risk of scene homogenization and superficial cultural connotations. This study finds that driven by the "check-in economy," many industrial heritage projects rely too heavily on the creation of visual symbols and social media dissemination, falling into the misconception of "designing for taking photos";

(2) The challenge of commercial imbalance and weakened community identity. The coding process of grounded theory clearly shows that user feedback contains a high volume of criticism regarding "excessive commercialization" and "low cost-effectiveness of paid items";

(3) The emergence of path dependency and innovation fatigue. The current success paths of many projects are highly dependent on the initial model of "film and television IP + internet celebrity check-ins." However, film and television popularity fades, and internet celebrity effects are cyclical. Data-based analysis suggests that we should delve deeper into business content, innovate technological applications, and explore rich experience models. For example, utilizing technology (such as AR/VR to restore industrial scenes), deepening educational functions (such as industrial research and study), and developing the nighttime economy are key to maintaining long-term vitality by constructing a diversified attraction system.

5.3. Future outlook

Based on the above research findings and reflections on issues, this paper proposes the following outlook for

future development and in-depth research.

At the practical level, the leaders of industrial heritage revitalization should transcend the basic thinking of "spatial transformation" and "business filling" and shift towards "cultural deep cultivation" and "ecological operation." For instance:

(1) Deepen cultural narratives, excavate and tell unique local industrial stories, and integrate cultural connotations throughout the entire process of landscape design, business experience, and product development;

(2) Construct an inclusive governance model that encourages the participation of multiple stakeholders, including local communities, cultural and creative workers, and tourists, in design and operation to enhance social identity;

(3) Promote technological empowerment and business innovation, actively use digital technologies to enhance interactive experiences, and encourage original design and cross-border cooperation to cultivate culturally consumption brands with lasting vitality.

Subsequent research can further advance in the following areas: comparative studies of multiple cases; conducting quantitative empirical tests to verify and measure the causal relationships between the various elements proposed in this study through large-sample data. Future revitalization of industrial heritage must seek a more delicate balance between cultural depth, commercial scale, and social warmth to truly achieve an eternal rebirth from industrial "ruins" to urban "treasure troves" amidst the tides of the times.

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