

# Research on the Development Strategy of Archival Cultural and Creative Products of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal

Ran Wang, Yuhe Liu, Chang Jin\*

School of Applied Arts and Sciences, Beijing Union University, Beijing, China  
Email: \*45265171@qq.com

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## Abstract

Under the dual impetus of the national cultural digitization strategy and the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt, the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, as a core resource of linear cultural heritage embodying the wisdom of ancient water transport, water conservancy, and commerce, the activation and utilization of its archives have become a key path to inherit canal memories. This paper takes the archival resources in regions along the canal such as Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang as research objects. Based on the core framework of “resource-development-promotion” for cultural and creative product development, it comprehensively adopts literature research and current situation investigation methods to study the practical dilemmas existing in the current development of Grand Canal archival cultural and creative products, such as insufficient supply of archival resources, superficial cultural excavation, single product function, weak brand synergy, and insufficient promotion efficiency. The purpose is to provide a reference for the high-quality development of Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal archival cultural and creative products, and promote the in-depth inheritance of canal culture and the coordinated development of cultural and tourism industries.

## Keywords

Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, Archival Cultural and Creative Products, Resource Activation, Development Strategy, Integration of Culture and Tourism

## 1. Introduction

As a linear cultural heritage treasure that connects the north and south, the Grand

Canal not only carries the civilization codes of thousands of years of grain transport, water conservancy, and commerce, but the archival resources accumulated along its route also serve as original witnesses to the canal's history and as tangible carriers of Chinese civilization. With the deepening implementation of the national cultural digitization strategy and the accelerated development of the Grand Canal cultural belt, the important issue has become how to activate archival resources through innovative approaches and transform static historical relics into perceptible and consumable cultural products, thereby promoting the living transmission of canal culture. Archival cultural and creative products, with their natural advantages of authenticity, cultural value, and practicality, provide an effective solution to this issue. However, in current industry practice, problems such as severe homogenization, insufficient cultural excavation, and inadequate resource integration remain prominent, restricting the deep dissemination of canal culture and the collaborative development of the cultural tourism industry. Based on this, this paper, focusing on the core framework of “resources—development—promotion” and using the archival resources of six provinces (cities) along the canal as research carriers, systematically explores the high-quality development path of Grand Canal archival cultural and creative products, helping the millennial canal culture to revitalize in the new era.

## 2. Research Methods

### Literature Research Method

This study systematically reviews relevant literature and policy documents from January 2020 to December 2025, covering areas such as the development of cultural and creative archival products, the activation of digital heritage, and the construction of cultural tourism brands. The sources include peer-reviewed papers indexed by academic databases such as CNKI and Wanfang, as well as policy texts like the “14th Five-Year Plan for the Development of the National Archival Industry.” The aim is to clarify the current research status, policy orientation, and practical boundaries, providing theoretical support for the framework construction and strategy proposal of the thesis.

### Current Situation Survey Method

The survey focuses on the core cities of six provincial-level administrative regions along the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal: Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang. It concentrates on practical cases, market performance, and policy developments over the past five years from January 2020 to December 2025. Authoritative information is obtained by searching the official websites of provincial (municipal) archives and cultural tourism departments along the Canal, visiting offline sites to observe the actual situation, and using mainstream e-commerce and social media platforms to collect sales and review data. By integrating academic research cases and policy planning requirements, data are systematically collected to ensure the comprehensiveness, authority, and systematic nature of the investigation.

### 3. Conceptual Definition of Cultural and Creative Product Development of the Grand Canal Archives

The concept of cultural and creative products

As an early representative macro-level definition, UNESCO defines cultural and creative products as consumer products that express creative ideas, cultural symbols, and lifestyles (Wang & Qin, 2015). On this basis, some scholars have further refined its core attributes and transformation path, proposing that cultural and creative products are consumer products that center on cultural symbols and creative content that meet people's spiritual needs, creatively integrating cultural connotations into specific physical carriers through design, and forming them in an industrialized manner (Wang & Xiao, 2020). Some scholars have delved deeper into its essence, pointing out that cultural and creative products rely on innovation and creative means to reconstruct or innovate cultural content, ultimately presenting it in tangible product forms, which is an organic integration of "culture," "creativity," and "product" (Li, Yang, & Li, 2024). From the perspective of practical implementation, some scholars define cultural and creative products as those created by combining cultural elements with physical objects using creative thinking (Li & Pei, 2025). This statement is a concrete supplement to the aforementioned theoretical views, clearly presenting the implementation form of cultural and creative products "from concept to physical object".

Based on this, the author believes that cultural and creative products are high value-added consumer products created by creative individuals who, relying on their knowledge, skills, and talents, deeply innovate and enhance the value of cultural resources and cultural symbols with the help of modern technological means, and through the development and application of intellectual property. Their forms include various types such as tourist souvenirs, animation and games, and arts and crafts. In order for this fusion form of "cultural creative products" to be transformed from an abstract concept into specific products, a systematic cultural and creative product development process is required as support.

#### **Cultural and creative product development**

The development of cultural and creative products is essentially a systematic process of transforming the core value of these products. It should be based on a clear understanding of the concept of cultural and creative products—using cultural elements as the foundation, and through creative design and modern technological means, transforming cultural resources into products or services that possess cultural connotation, creative value, market value, and practical functionality. From the perspective of practical approaches, the core of this systematic transformation process needs to be constructed around three dimensions: "resources—development—promotion," which can be further broken down into three closely connected key stages. The first is the stage of resource excavation and organization, which is the premise and foundation of development and requires clarifying the carrier form, content characteristics, and distribution of cultural resources. The second is the stage of product development and transformation,

which is the core step in realizing the value of resources. It involves combining modern design concepts and technological means to determine the presentation form, functional attributes, and development path of the product. The effectiveness of this stage is directly reflected in the specific development approach. The third is the stage of market promotion and feedback, which is key to realizing both the cultural and market value of the product. This requires building multiple channels to reach the target audience, and the adaptability, coverage, and synergy of the promotion model will affect the effectiveness of product dissemination. These three stages are closely interlinked, and the actual performance of each stage needs to be verified through targeted research, providing a basis for the formulation of subsequent development strategies.

### **Archival Cultural and Creative Product Development**

Archival cultural and creative products are essentially spiritual consumer products derived from archival resources, mainly presented in a material form (Liu, 2024). The core logic is to extract historical information from archives, build an interactive connection between users and culture through symbolic design, and then give it a completely new form of expression through creative transformation, possessing both the attributes of creative design and cultural communication (Wang & Du, 2026). The “14th Five-Year Plan for the Development of the National Archival Undertaking” (National Archives Administration of the People’s Republic of China, 2021) explicitly proposes “strengthening the development of archival cultural and creative products and exploring industrialization paths.”, It provides policy guidance for the development of this type of product. At present, the forms of archival cultural and creative products mainly center on research and compilation results, as well as replicated and simulated items, specifically covering categories close to daily life such as bookmarks, fridge magnets, phone stands, and cultural T-shirts. Through the content and carriers of the products, the public can establish an emotional connection with themselves, further endowing them with unique emotional value (Yang, 2024), transforming the implicit cultural connotations in archives into perceptible spiritual experiences.

The formation of archival cultural and creative products cannot be separated from a systematic development process—archival cultural and creative product development is based on the full exploration and utilization of archival resources, combined with modern design concepts and cultural creativity, extracting, transforming, and innovating the cultural elements within the archives, ultimately creating products or services that possess cultural connotation, artistic value, and practicality. This process is deeply linked to the core attributes of archival cultural and creative products: on one hand, the development must closely adhere to the authenticity, authority, and cultural depth of the archives, which is not only the core advantage distinguishing archival cultural and creative products from ordinary cultural and creative products but also the fundamental basis for development work; on the other hand, the development process is essentially a process of identifying, refining, and explicitly transforming the hidden cultural value con-

tained in the archives, which not only encourages creative talents to deeply explore the value of archives but also, through the final products, enhances social awareness of archives, strengthens public cultural confidence, and realizes the practical transformation of archival resources from “collection” to “active use.”

It is worth noting that the development of archival cultural and creative products also follows the core framework of “resource—development—promotion,” and the scientific management of resources, the depth of product transformation, and the effectiveness of promotion and communication directly determine the ultimate value realization of the products.

### **The Significance of Developing Cultural and Creative Products from the Grand Canal Archives**

As stated earlier, the core of cultural and creative product development is the organic integration of “culture, creativity, and product,” while the development of archival cultural and creative products relies on the authenticity and authority of archives, transforming implicit cultural values into perceptible and consumable products through a systematic process. Following this logic, as an important large-scale linear cultural heritage in China (Xu & Wang, 2018), The Grand Canal of China has accumulated profound and unique cultural connotations during its long history of excavation and use, and the Grand Canal archives formed based on this World Cultural Heritage site further bear the memories of the canal and highlight the distinctive resources of Chinese civilization (Ge & Huang, 2025). Therefore, developing cultural and creative products based on the Grand Canal archives is not only a practical implementation of archive-based cultural and creative development in the specific field of linear cultural heritage, but also carries irreplaceable special significance for the living inheritance and high-quality development of Grand Canal culture, which is specifically reflected in the following three aspects:

First, it helps promote and inherit Chinese civilization. Archive-inspired cultural and creative products are based on the authenticity of the Grand Canal archives. During the development and design process, they not only artistically present the cultural characteristics and folk customs along the route, but also bring dormant archival resources to life. When T-shirts printed with calligraphy from canal steles or teacups incorporating the lines of the Nanwang Diversion Hub become everyday items, the abstract history of the canal is transformed into tangible daily scenes. This way of combining archival cultural elements with modern design aesthetics not only allows the public to directly experience the charm of the canal’s civilization, but also strengthens cultural identity and motivates people to learn, inherit, and even create within the canal’s cultural context.

Secondly, strengthen social cohesion and cultural consensus. In the digital age of complex information and rampant misinformation, “authenticity” has become a scarce cultural resource. People’s understanding of history is gradually shifting from “hearing stories” to “seeking evidence.” The cultural and creative products based on the Grand Canal archives precisely rely on the authority of the archives, making the history of the canal tangible, perceptible, and credible. When the en-

tire society's understanding of the canal's history is founded on unified and authentic archives, this consensus will become an important source of social cohesion and centripetal force, providing a profound historical foundation for cultural inheritance and urban development.

Third, promote the integration of culture and tourism and regional economic development. Developing creative cultural products based on the Grand Canal archives is a key approach to achieving the goal of "shaping tourism through culture and highlighting culture through tourism." By exploring cultural elements in the archives, such as canal transportation, water conservancy, and commerce, creative cultural products with both cultural significance and market value can be created, injecting high added value into the integration of culture and tourism. At the same time, this process can drive the development of the archival creative industry in cities along the canal, create a large number of high-quality jobs, directly increase residents' income, and realize wealth through culture.

#### **4. Research on the Current Situation of Cultural and Creative Product Development of the Grand Canal Archives**

Based on the core framework of "Resources—Development—Promotion" for the development of cultural and creative products, and combined with the unique attributes of archival cultural and creative products, a systematic survey was conducted on the current development of archival cultural and creative products in the six provincial-level administrative regions of Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang along the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal. The survey focuses on three dimensions: resource distribution, development methods, and promotion models, with the specific situation as follows:

##### **Current Status of Resource Supply in the Grand Canal Archives**

The development of cultural and creative products faces prominent challenges on the supply side of resources, specifically manifested as follows: Although the available archival resources cover core types such as archives of the canal transportation system, water conservancy engineering archives, and commercial and folk customs archives, and the content is diverse, there is insufficient supply of differentiated materials. A large number of scarce archives scattered among the public have not been systematically incorporated into the development material system, causing development to rely only on general symbols. At the same time, the core archives are mostly in paper form and severely deteriorated, leading to incomplete and fragmented information in the available materials, making it difficult to support deep cultural exploration of products. Moreover, the supply of digital materials is not sufficiently compatible and has not formed a unified digital supply platform, limiting the development of new types of products. Additionally, the lack of cross-regional and cross-department coordination mechanisms results in low efficiency in resource integration and acquisition, which not only increases development costs and delays research and development progress but also promotes a "going it alone" pattern across regions, further restricting differentiated

innovation of products and the construction of a unified brand.

## 5. Development Methods of Grand Canal Archive Cultural and Creative Products

By reviewing the mainstream product types of cultural and creative products based on the Grand Canal archives, it is evident that product development has already covered the basic forms, but common shortcomings exist: physical products mostly replicate superficial symbols, lacking cultural connotation and emotional connection; digital products account for a small proportion, have shallow technological empowerment, and are loosely connected with archive content; overall, the products have weak practical functionality, serious homogenization, and lack regional characteristics (see **Table 1** for details).

**Table 1.** Main types of cultural and creative products of the grand canal archives.

City	Practical Cultural and Creative Products	Commemorative Experience Cultural and Creative Products
Beijing	Longxing Good Luck Bookmark Ruler, Source of the Canal Notebook	Tongzhou Canal Eight Views Stamp Collection Booklet, Canal Creative Snacks, Canal Candied Haw, Canal Ice Cream, Grand Canal Mascot IP “Hexi”, Commemorative Stamps, Bookmarks, Prosperity and Good Luck, Peace and Joy Refrigerator Magnets, Grand Canal Puzzle, First Day Covers, Refrigerator Magnet Blind Boxes
Tianjin	Art desk mat, multifunction notebook, smart water cup, pen holder, paperweight, farmer painting canvas bag	“Qiao Taotao” dolls, hand-painted postcards, incense holders, cultural T-shirts, tote bags, folding fans, refrigerator magnets, “Phoenix Dance Nine Heavens Filigree Phoenix Crown,” folding fans, paper cuttings
Hebei	Cangzhou footprints bag, small night light, bookmark	Iron Lion blind box, Grand Canal hundred scenery letter paper, brooch
Shandong	“Ode to Ancient Jeju’ Soft Brush Calligraphy Copybook, ‘Ode to Weishan Lake’ Hard Pen Calligraphy Copybook”	“A String of Canal Sentiments” - Ancient Eight Views Bracelet, Weishan Lake Lotus Leaf Tea Set, Rengcheng Peony Seed Oil, Pyrography, Straw Weaving Products, Cloth Tiger
Jiangsu	Boat-shaped deluxe square notebook	Five Pavilion Magnolia Rhyme Pendant, postcards, fridge magnets, Taihu seven fans, paper art greeting cards, “Boats on the Canal” book
Zhejiang	Portable chopsticks, children’s fan, children’s umbrella, “Rhyme · River” creative scarf	Woodblock prints “Kui Xing Kicking the Dipper”, “Good Luck on Horseback” calendars, “Sudden Wealth”, “Auspicious Beasts”, “God of Learning” fridge magnets, “Silk Gongchen Bridge Carved Female Fan”, Gongchen Bridge LEGO, Hangzhou colored clay sculptures

**Product Case Selection Criteria:** Cases should cover different forms such as physical, digital, and research-derived products, as well as spatial distribution across six provincial-level administrative regions. Priority is given to mainstream market products and official key promoted products from the past five years, which have publicly available sales data or official promotional records, and can reflect the overall development level and common issues of the industry.

**Data Sources:** Physical cases are obtained from field visits and searches on e-commerce platforms; digital cases come from activity information released through official channels and platform sales data; research-derived cases are

sourced from publicly published materials by publishers and recommended bibliographies from archive websites.

### Promotional Model for Cultural and Creative Products of the Grand Canal Archives

The current cultural and creative promotion of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal archives has formed a three-dimensional promotion system of “online, offline, digital, IP, and cross-border”. The mainstream promotion modes are as follows (see **Table 2** for details). It can be seen that the promotion channels have become diversified, but there are problems such as insufficient brand integration, lack of channel coordination, inadequate precision, and shallow integration of technology and culture, resulting in limited social recognition and market competitiveness of the products.

**Table 2.** Promotion model of cultural and creative products of the grand canal archives.

Promotion Model	Main Channels	Typical Case
Online and offline integrated promotion	Social media promotion, e-commerce platform sales, offline experiential stores	“15 Seconds of the Grand Canal’ viral short video, ‘Ping An Xi Le Cup’ live streaming sales, ‘Grand Canal Gifts’, ‘Canal Transport Wharf Theme Store”
Empowering Promotion with Digital Technology	AR/VR immersive experiences, digital collectibles	Wuxi “Ancient Canal Heartbeat” Water VR Journey, “Canal Wonderland” VR Traverse, “5G Grand Canal” Immersive Experience, Xiao Houguan AR Fridge Magnet
IP Development and Brand Promotion	Mascot IP, Series IP	“He Xi”, “Shui Yun’er”
Cross-border co-branding promotion	Brand crossover collaborations and museum tie-ins	“Moutai 1935 · China National Geography” (Celebrating the Grand Canal), Grand Canal Three Star Pile Refrigerator Magnet
Thematic Activity Promotion	Festivals and exhibitions, immersive experience activities	“Canal Plush Supermarket” Yunbo Fair, “Shine! Grand Canal” IP Event

Criteria for selecting product examples: Choose cases with high public attention or official recognition, covering different promotion models and regions, able to comprehensively reflect the current promotion status and core issues; give priority to cases with clear dissemination data or official reports, ensuring representativeness and verifiability.

Data sources: Online and offline integrated promotion cases come from platform searches and field investigations; digital technology-enabled promotion cases come from official event announcements and media reports; IP and cross-industry collaboration cases come from brand cooperation announcements and museum official websites; themed event cases come from official information of festivals and exhibitions and practice cases mentioned in academic research.

## 6. Existing Problems in the Development of Cultural and Creative Products of the Grand Canal Archives

Based on the systematic research in Part Four on resource supply, product devel-

opment, and promotion models, various case studies and data feedback have pointed to clear issues: At the resource supply level, privately held scarce archives have not been systematically incorporated into the development system, paper-based archive information is incomplete, and cross-regional sharing mechanisms are lacking, resulting in products relying only on generic symbols such as “ancient boats” and “canal water patterns,” directly supporting the judgment of “insufficient supply of archive-based cultural and creative resources”; At the product development level, physical products such as canal ancient boat-shaped metal bookmarks and canal water pattern mugs remain at the superficial reproduction of cultural symbols, without exploring deeper connotations behind the archives, such as the canal transport system and water management wisdom, confirming the “superficial cultural excavation”; Digital products such as digital collectibles of canal historical scenes and online exhibitions are loosely connected with the core content of the archives, with technology used only as surface packaging, reflecting “insufficient digital empowerment”; At the promotion model level, IPs such as “He Xi” and “Shui Yun Er” have not been deeply integrated with canal archival culture, and independently launched products along various regions lack a unified brand core, directly reflecting “weak brand collaboration capability,” while different promotion channels lack overall coordination and do not form a closed communication loop, corresponding to the problem of “limited promotional effectiveness.” These concrete case characteristics and common defects provide solid empirical support for the analysis of the following core issues.

#### Insufficient supply of archival cultural and creative resources

The design and production of cultural and creative products based on canal archives cannot be separated from the support of archive resources. However, the current supply status of canal archive resources cannot meet the actual needs of cultural and creative development. Firstly, because a large number of scarce archives scattered among private collections have not been incorporated into the development material system, cultural and creative product development can only rely on common symbols such as “ancient boats” and “canal water patterns,” lacking the support of region-specific materials, making it difficult to achieve differentiated product innovation. Secondly, as the core archives of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal are currently primarily in paper format, they suffer from environmental erosion, leading to incomplete and fragmented information. This prevents designers from extracting precise cultural details, limiting them to surface-level symbol replication and making it difficult to support in-depth cultural exploration in products. Moreover, due to the lack of a unified digital resource supply platform, the conversion rate of digital materials is low, making it impossible to effectively support the development of new products such as digital cultural creations and AR interactions, to some extent restricting product form innovation. Finally, a cross-regional and cross-department resource-sharing mechanism is not well-established, resulting in low efficiency in resource integration and access, increasing the development costs and delaying the R&D process for archive-

based cultural and creative products, while also fostering a “go-it-alone” pattern in various regions, limiting the construction of a unified brand.

Insufficient core support for product development: absence in the four dimensions of culture, emotion, practicality, and digital

Many canal cultural and creative products on the current market are still in the stage of “shallow reproduction” of cultural symbols, and do not dig deep into the historical stories, scientific wisdom and humanistic spirit behind the archives, such as simply printing pictures of local buildings on T-shirts, mugs, and mouse pads; The shape of the ancient canal ship is made into the same metal bookmark, etc., although these products are “similar”, they lack “charm”. And when designing products, it fails to use archival stories and regional memory as links, that is, it does not consider the emotional needs of consumers, resulting in users finding it difficult to have a sense of identity and belonging, and cannot form long-term consumption stickiness. At the same time, most products are mainly ornamental, functional derivatives are scarce, and practical functions are not designed for the daily scenes of different groups such as students, professionals, and family users, which is difficult to meet the actual practical needs of the public. In addition, among the existing cultural and creative products of the Grand Canal archives, digital products account for a relatively low proportion and remain at the stage of simple storage and superficial presentation of archival digital information, neglecting the potential of archival resources in cross-media storytelling, failing to effectively reproduce the cultural memory of the canal and reconstruct emotional spaces (Zhu, Tan, & Sun, 2025), and unable to meet the consumption demands of the digital age.

The brand synergy of canal archive cultural and creative products is weak, and the support system is lacking.

The competitiveness of Canal Archive cultural and creative products in the market is influenced by factors such as the design of the product itself, the methods and intensity of product promotion, and the professionalization level of the developers. Currently, the products sold in tourist attractions are mostly for viewing purposes and lack functional derivatives of cultural and creative products. For consumers who focus on the practical value of items, purely decorative products are difficult to become their first choice. With the rapid development of archive cultural and creative products, the phenomenon of homogeneity is becoming increasingly prominent. This also weakens the competitiveness of Canal Archive cultural and creative products in the cultural and creative market. Moreover, a single promotion method and insufficient promotion efforts can directly affect the social recognition and influence of Canal Archive cultural and creative products. For example, if different promotion channels lack overall coordination, if the integration of digital technology empowerment and cultural connotation is carelessly done, or if a communication closed loop is not formed; and if promotion does not optimize content and channels according to the characteristics of different audiences, it will lead to inaccurate coverage of target audiences and limited

social awareness of the products. Finally, the professional level of cultural and creative product designers will affect the cultural connotation and technological content of the products. If designers are unable to accurately capture audience preferences, they will not be able to meet the diversified, personalized, and complex cultural demands of the public. When the needs of social work cannot be effectively met, the willingness to purchase will also be significantly reduced.

## **7. Strategies and Recommendations for the Development of Cultural and Creative Products of the Grand Canal Archives**

Through the previous research on the current situation and problem analysis, it is clear that the development of cultural and creative products based on the Grand Canal archives is currently facing a triple dilemma: “insufficient support from resource supply, weak core of product innovation, and limited effectiveness of brand promotion.” These three major issues are interconnected and mutually restrictive—the shortage of resource supply directly limits the cultural depth and form innovation of products, while products lacking core competitiveness and scattered promotion models further weaken market recognition, ultimately forming a developmental bottleneck. Based on the core logic of cultural and creative products of “resources—development—promotion,” and considering the relevance of the problems and the priority of solutions, this paper constructs a complete strategic system with progressive and mutually supportive layers of “resource supply—product development—brand promotion” from three dimensions: “ensuring source resources, building core products, and amplifying market value.” The resource supply system is the premise and foundation for overcoming development bottlenecks, providing high-quality and diversified material support for product development; the product development system is the core carrier for harnessing resource value and achieving cultural transformation, determining the core competitiveness of products; the brand promotion system is the key bridge linking products and the market, achieving the dual realization of cultural and market value. The three are closely linked and synergistically coordinated, jointly promoting the high-quality development of cultural and creative products based on the Grand Canal archives.

Build a “digital and collaborative” archival resource supply system

To address the issue of supply of archival resources, one could first consider launching a special campaign for collecting scarce private archives. By combining donation incentives, cooperative custody, and paid acquisitions, distinctive resources such as private shipping journals, records of craftsmanship, and niche folk archives can be systematically collected to establish a “Scarce Archives Resource Library,” supplementing differentiated material supply and providing foundational support for product differentiation and innovation. At the same time, by partnering with archival management departments and professional technical institutions, paper archives can be high-precision scanned, subjected to OCR recognition, and image restoration according to national standards, repairing missing

information and integrating fragmented materials to form a “High-Quality Archive Resource Package” directly suitable for cultural and creative design needs, thereby improving both the quality and efficiency of resource supply.

To ensure that Grand Canal archival resources are fully utilized, a unified digital resource supply platform for Grand Canal archives in cultural and creative industries could be established. Digitized archives would be categorized and uploaded, an authorization mechanism would be set up, enabling fast retrieval, downloading, and sharing of materials. At the same time, in collaboration with the archives department and technical institutions, three-dimensional laser scanning, high-precision scanning, and other technologies are used to digitally collect archives related to ancient ships, docksite remains, hydraulic engineering drawings of the Grand Canal, restoring their material textures and structural details, and building a visualized digital resource library of Grand Canal archives to provide high-precision material support for cultural and creative design (Li, 2025).

Regarding the lack of cross-stakeholder collaboration in the use of Grand Canal archival resources, a multi-stakeholder collaborative development mechanism can be constructed. This would involve forming a collaborative alliance among “archival departments, cultural tourism institutions, universities, and enterprises,” breaking down inter-regional and inter-departmental barriers, regularly organizing resource matching meetings, and establishing a mechanism for sharing archival materials and mutual recognition of outcomes, thereby reducing the cost of resource integration and forming a coordinated development framework.

Build a four-dimensional product development system of “culture, emotion, practicality, and digital”

As one of the carriers of culture, the design of archival cultural and creative products should not be blind, but should be combined with actual needs and choose more novel creative points (Qi, 2022). While connecting with traditional culture, appropriately incorporate some regional cultural content (Ma, 2019). This involves developing exclusive product lines tailored to the archival features of different regions, enhancing the recognition of regional culture. At the same time, “archive story carriers” are embedded in the products. To break away from the superficial pattern of “symbolic pasting,” and shift towards “artistic conception translation” and “cultural narrative,” allowing the product to become a carrier of the cultural artistic conception of the canal (Luo, 2026). For example, QR codes can be added to cultural and creative products, which can be scanned to listen to audio stories adapted from archives or watch micro-videos of historical scenes. A “Canal Memory Series” is developed for local residents, and a “Research and Exploration Series” for tourists, precisely targeting the emotional needs of different groups. Each product carries a story, warmth, and a core spirit.

In addition, the philosophy of Wang Gen’s “daily use is the Way” can be incorporated into creative products related to the Grand Canal. By focusing on the everyday behaviors and household chores of the public, and carefully capturing various needs in daily life, this requires that Grand Canal creative products focus on

diverse living scenarios in their design and develop products with specialized functions: for the student group, launch “Canal Study Toolkits”; for office workers, design a “Canal Element Office Series”; for families, create a “Canal Home Series” to promote the integration of creative products into the daily lives of ordinary people, accurately addressing the most basic and core daily needs of the public, effectively solving practical problems in life, and truly achieving the core goal of serving the people through the products (You & Yang, 2019). Finally, when designing core cultural and creative products, digital form innovation should also be promoted, breaking through the mere digital storage concept of archival information, and focusing on its cross-media narrative potential. By leveraging technologies such as AR/VR and digital mapping, “archival revitalization” products can be created to realize the reproduction of canal cultural memory and the reconstruction of emotional spaces, allowing digital cultural and creative products to move from “visible” to “perceptible”.

Implement the “branding, collaboration, precision, empowerment” promotion strategy

The more a tourism cultural and creative IP has “local characteristics,” the more it can attract tourists. For example, a “Boonie Bears” IP from Fantawild generates over 2 billion in total revenue in a year. In Disney parks’ revenue, 30% comes from IP-related cultural and creative products, 30% from tickets, and 30% from hotels (Wu, Ma, & Hong, 2021). The cities along the Grand Canal have various unique cultural heritages and historical traditions, and the preserved archival resources have strong regional characteristics. Therefore, when designing archival cultural and creative products, a unified “Grand Canal Archival Cultural and Creative” core brand should be created, with exclusive brand logos and visual systems designed; coordinated with the regions along the route to build a “unified brand, regional characteristics” pattern, deeply integrating IP images with archival culture to enhance brand recognition and cohesion.

To address the issues of fragmented channels and weak promotion, it is necessary to build a three-dimensional promotion system of “mechanism coordination, channel linkage, and technology empowerment”: First, establish a collaborative mechanism for promoting cultural and creative products based on the Grand Canal archives. Cultural and tourism departments from provinces (and cities) along the canal should take the lead in forming a promotion leadership team, coordinating online and offline channel resources, developing unified annual promotion themes, and integrating cultural and creative promotion into local cultural and tourism development plans. This effort should link scenic spots, museums, schools, and other scenarios for regular promotion to create cross-regional synergy (Liu, Xia, & Yi, 2021); Second, build a collaborative “online-offline” communication loop. Online, integrate platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin, launching series like “Archive Cultural and Creative Unboxing” and “Canal Story Popular Science” to widely generate interest; offline, upgrade experience spaces such as “Canal Transport Terminal Theme Stores,” setting up archive culture exhibition

areas and product interaction zones to enhance immersive experiences; Finally, promote deep integration between digital technology and culture by embedding core brand information in digital scenarios like VR experiences and AR interactions, transforming communication from “one-way output” to “immersive interaction,” further strengthening brand memory and communication effectiveness.

Optimize promotion plans for different audiences: for the younger demographic, focus on short videos and live streaming promotions on Douyin and Xiaohongshu; for study tour groups, cooperate with schools and educational institutions to carry out “Campus In” activities; for cultural tourism consumers, set up cultural and creative product counters at canal scenic spots and on cruise ships to achieve scenario-based precise reach. At the same time, establish a joint R&D team of “archival experts, designers, and market analysts” to enhance the cultural connotation and market adaptability of products; increase investment in innovative R&D, set up a special fund for digital cultural creativity, and support technologies such as AR/VR; establish a market feedback mechanism to continuously optimize products and promotion strategies through consumer surveys and sales data analysis.

## 8. Conclusion

The archival resources of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal possess irreplaceable cultural value, and the development of cultural and creative products is an important path to achieve the living inheritance of canal culture and to empower industries. At present, the development process still faces issues such as a weak resource support system for cultural and creative development, a lack of product innovation, and limited market promotion. These problems need to be addressed by building an archival resource supply system that is “digital, collaborative, and distinctive,” creating a product system that is “cultural, emotional, practical, and digital,” and implementing a promotion strategy that is “branded, collaborative, precise, and empowering.” It should be noted that due to objective limitations in regional coverage, research design, and data support, the strategic recommendations proposed in this study serve as directional guidance, and their specific implementation needs to be flexibly adjusted according to the actual conditions of the regions along the route. In the future, the development of cultural and creative products based on the archives of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal should adhere to the principle of “culture as the core, creativity as the soul, and market-oriented,” promoting a deep integration of canal culture with modern life, allowing the millennium-old memories of the canal to shine with new vitality in the new era, and contributing to the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt and the high-quality development of the cultural and tourism industry.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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