

A Study of Shortcomings and Optimization Strategies of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt Construction in Huai'an

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Abstract: *The Grand Canal Cultural Belt construction is a significant national strategy. As the "Capital of the Canal", Huai'an serves as a pivotal node in the cultural development of the Grand Canal National Park, bearing an inescapable responsibility to promote the historical and cultural essence of the Grand Canal. However, the current construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt in Huai'an remains exploratory, with notable shortcomings in areas such as comprehensive water environment management, cultural education, brand recognition, and marketing. Drawing on extensive literature and successful experiences from Tokyo Bay's cultural belt development, this paper proposes corresponding optimization strategies to address these issues.*

Keywords: Grand Canal Cultural Belt construction; shortcomings; optimization strategies

INTRODUCTION

The Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, the world's longest artificial waterway, was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2014. As one of the canal's origin cities and a symbolic hub, Huai'an faces urgent responsibilities to advance the protection, inheritance, and utilization of this ancestral legacy. With over a hundred historical and cultural relics—such as the "South Boats and North Horses" stele and the Imperial Dock—Huai'an's canal heritage reflects its glorious past. Entering the high-speed rail era, Huai'an has reemerged as a key economic center in northern Jiangsu. While progress has been made, including the acclaimed Liyunhe Cultural Corridor, gaps persist compared to leading cities like Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Yangzhou. Challenges remain in achieving "high standards, high levels, and high quality" in cultural belt development.

The paper analyzes three core deficiencies in Huai'an's canal cultural belt construction—water

environment governance, cultural education, and branding —while leveraging insights from Tokyo Bay’s cultural belt initiatives to propose actionable strategies.

Shortcomings in the Construction of the Huai’an Grand Canal Cultural Belt

Known as the “Capital of the Canal”, Huai’an possesses significant advantages in constructing the Grand Canal Cultural Belt. It boasts a rich and diverse cultural heritage, including the Qingkou Hub, Qingjiang Sluice, Hongze Lake Dike, and the ruins of the Governor’s Office for Grain Transport. Over two millennia, the canal has nurtured Huai’an, fostering unique cultures such as water transport, hydraulic engineering, and the inclusive Huaiyang culinary culture. Despite the municipal government’s efforts, challenges remain in three key areas: comprehensive water management, cultural education, and cultural branding and marketing.

Insufficient Comprehensive Water Management along the Huai’an Section of the Grand Canal

In order to improve the quality of the Canal’s water environment and the appearance of the shoreline environment, as early as 2016, the Huai’an Municipal Government began to vigorously promote environmental governance. It not only carried out comprehensive management of key water environments such as river slopes, defenses, beaches, and water sources along the Grand Canal, but also deeply implemented the rectification of black and odorous water bodies and the reduction of pollutants entering the river water. It promoted the environmental rectification of highways and waterways along the canal, as well as the treatment of illegal docks and floating crane operation points on the main waterway. As a result, the ecological environment of the Canal in Huai’an has been significantly improved, but there are still some shortcomings. For example, some residents, restaurants, and factories along the Grand Canal still dump garbage and illegally discharge sewage into the canal. There are also chemical enterprises that need to be relocated along the Grand Canal in urban areas, and the water quality of some sections of the canal is still not up to standard. With the development of urban construction and the improvement of sand and gravel sales, excessive clustering of sand mining ships has caused environmental pollution in the Canal. In addition, the water system in the Grand Canal basin is concentrated during the flood season and undergoes significant seasonal changes, leading to channel blockage^[1].

In order to improve the river environment, the Huai’an Municipal Government has also implemented the “river chief system” to effectively carry out the environmental remediation work of the Huai’an section of the Grand Canal. Every river along the Huai’an Grand Canal today has a river chief. If water pollution occurs within the jurisdiction of the river, the river chief will be required to rectify it within a specified period of time. If the rectification is ineffective within the prescribed time limit, the river chiefs will be sued for public interest^[3]. However, because these river chiefs are not experts in environmental protection and lack overall planning and strategic deployment for the comprehensive management of water bodies, many remediation measures only treat the symptoms without addressing the root cause, and inspections become mere formalities. Therefore, how to deal with water pollution along the Grand Canal remains one of the thorny issues that the Huai’an Municipal Government needs

to face in the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt.

Deficiencies in Grand Canal Cultural Education

Although Huai'an has significant advantages in the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt and has made remarkable achievements at present, there are still gaps in many aspects compared to the "leading" cities in the construction of the Grand Canal culture, such as Hangzhou, Suzhou, and Yangzhou, especially in terms of Grand Canal cultural education. The author will combine the research on canal culture, the protection of canal material and intangible cultural heritage, the construction of university courses, and the promotion of canal culture in primary and secondary schools and communities to elaborate on the lack of cultural education in the Huai'an Grand Canal.

Insufficient Research Investment

Culture is the soul of a place. For over two thousand years, the Grand Canal has nurtured the people along its banks and created a splendid canal culture. Huai'an, known as the "Capital of Canals", has grown and developed alongside the Grand Canal, forming a unique canal culture that includes canal transportation culture, centrally integrated river engineering culture, open and integrated Huaiyang culture, and intangible cultural heritage such as Huaiju and Chuzhou Ten Opera Drums.

On November 23, 2018, the Huai'an Branch of the Grand Canal Cultural Construction Research Institute was established in Huaiyin Normal University. Relying on the existing scientific research resources of Huaiyin Normal University, the first group of six research centers were established, namely, the Canal History Research Center, the Canal Culture Research Center, the Canal Ecology Research Center, the Canal Economy Research Center, the Canal Legislation Research Center and the Huaiyang Cuisine Cuisine Research Center. However, the current research strength is still relatively weak, and the level of research results needs to be improved. This is mainly reflected in the shortage of full-time researchers in the six major research centers, as well as the lack of communication between research centers and scholars, with each center fighting independently and research forces scattered; Through the unremitting efforts of the research team at Huaiyin Normal University, significant breakthroughs have been made in the fields of canal history and cultural research, and national fund projects have been awarded. However, there are still few breakthroughs in other areas. Since 2009, there have been a considerable number of research achievements on the culture of the Huai'an Canal, but there is a clear problem of "too much quantity and not high quality", and no breakthrough has been achieved in doctoral dissertations.

Inadequate Protection of Cultural Heritage

In the long history of over two thousand years, Huai'an, known as the "capital of canals", has nurtured a long-standing canal culture. According to the investigation of Huai'an cultural and historical experts, there are 74 cultural relics in the Huai'an section of the canal, including 22 material cultural heritage sites, such as the ruins of the Governor's Office of Water Transport, Hexia Ancient Town, the ruins of the ancient end of the mouth, and the ruins of the Banzha customs road, 18 intangible cultural heritage

sites, such as Huai Opera, Xianghuo Opera, Huaiyang Cuisine and Chuzhou Shifan Luogu, as well as some ancient towns and cultural and natural landscapes along the canal.

In terms of cultural heritage protection, Huai'an City has taken the lead in Jiangsu Province in issuing the "Regulations on the Protection of Municipal Cultural Relics", and has established a monitoring platform and heritage archive database for canal heritage sites, implementing full time and full area monitoring of canal heritage, and solidly doing a good job in the protection of intangible cultural heritage of the Huai'an Grand Canal. Although some achievements have been made in the current stage of work, there are still shortcomings, mainly reflected in the lack of unified planning and guidance, and the phenomenon of multi headed management. The interweaving of water conservancy relics and people's living facilities requires further coordination and coordination between people's lives, urban development, and heritage protection. Due to the scattered distribution of cultural heritage in the Huai'an section of the Grand Canal, some cultural relics far away from the city lack protective facilities and are severely damaged due to the lack of dedicated maintenance personnel. Grassroots cadres and the masses have weak awareness of protection, and have failed to effectively protect the canal heritage. Insufficient exploration, research, and labeling of the cultural heritage of the Huai'an section of the Grand Canal; Some newly discovered cultural relics in the Huai'an section of the Grand Canal have not been effectively protected due to insufficient investment in protection funds as they have not yet been included in the scope of national financial subsidies.

Weak Brand Recognition and Marketing

The cultural resources of Huai'an Canal are abundant, and the cultural industry started early, but there are problems such as small scale, weak strength, and low level. The pace of developing cultural and creative industries with the help of the cultural heritage resources of the Grand Canal is relatively slow, mainly reflected in the following aspects: the proportion of auxiliary services in the cultural and creative industries is large, the technological content of creative products is low, the cultural connotation is insufficient, and the core advantages need to be further improved. The lack of top-level design planning and innovation in the tourism development of cultural heritage along the canal has led to a relatively single form of tourism development and utilization today. Lack of stunning and attractive tourist landscapes and tourism products with Huai'an characteristics. The cultural heritage of the Huai'an section of the Grand Canal has not been fully utilized, resulting in the formation of a string like effect.

The insufficient brand marketing is related to the low enthusiasm of social forces to participate and the shortcomings in cultural inheritance, mainly reflected in: the cultural inheritance atmosphere of the Huai'an section of the Grand Canal is not strong enough, such as intangible cultural heritage such as the Ten Fan Gong and Drum, Nanzha Folk Song, and Hongze Lake Fishing Drum, as well as traditional operas such as Huai Opera and Huaihai Opera, which have weak appeal to young people, low public attention and participation, and insufficient in-depth exploration of the stories of the Grand Canal. The inheritance form of canal culture is single, and the enthusiasm of social forces and private capital

participation is not high, without forming a good trend of three-dimensional and comprehensive inheritance. Due to changes in the times and environment, many traditional skills based on agricultural civilization have fallen into a dilemma of shrinking or even disappearing. The lack of propaganda platforms for the Grand Canal culture, with only four specialized museums and a lack of comprehensive museums, hinders the effectiveness of the dissemination of Grand Canal culture due to the unscientific, unsystematic, and non-standard interpretation of canal culture^[2].

Countermeasures to Accelerate the Construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt

The Beijing Hangzhou Grand Canal, which has undergone a thousand years of vicissitudes, has ushered in a new opportunity for a century of development under President's advocacy of "protecting, inheriting, and utilizing the Grand Canal well." Huai'an, known as the "Capital of the Grand Canal", should seize the national strategic opportunity of the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt in the "post-World Heritage" era, deeply grasp the connotation requirements of the cultural belt construction of the Huai'an section of the Grand Canal being at the forefront of the country, adhere to a high starting point and high positioning, enhance systematic thinking, focus on major protection, avoid major development, and scientifically promote the high-quality development of the cultural belt of the Huai'an section of the Grand Canal. Examining the construction process of the Tokyo Bay Cultural Belt and learning from its beneficial experiences and successful practices will undoubtedly provide important insights for promoting the construction of the Huai'an Grand Canal Cultural Belt with high standards, high levels, and high tastes.

Lessons from Tokyo Bay's Water Management

As is well known, Japan's rapid economic growth in the 1970s led to environmental degradation, particularly frequent occurrences of red tides. In order to improve the environment, the Japanese central government first established a think tank group, namely the "Tokyo Bay Port Association Promotion Agreement", and all plans related to the construction of the Tokyo Bay Cultural Belt were coordinated and implemented by the think tank. In terms of comprehensive seawater management, the think tank group proposed to incorporate environmental management into the scope of administrative management. With the changes in major environmental issues, a series of environmental countermeasures and supporting measures were introduced from 1970 to 1996.

Based on the actual situation of the construction of the Huai'an Grand Canal Cultural Belt and the successful experience of the construction of the Tokyo Bay Cultural Belt, the author proposes the following suggestions for the comprehensive management of water bodies in the region:

(1) Establish a think tank. Led by the Huai'an Municipal Government, a specialized management agency for the Grand Canal will be established to maintain the long-term and coordinated construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt, and firmly rely on and adhere to the plan.

(2) The Huai'an Municipal Government should further improve the system and strictly enforce the law, and establish a complete and effective policy system, including strict emission standards and total control measures, pollutant discharge permit system, pollution control evaluation and assessment system, sewage treatment information disclosure system, ecological environment damage compensation and accountability system, etc. It is necessary to build a professional law enforcement team, vigorously improve the level of law enforcement, and comprehensively promote the continuous improvement of water environment.

(3) Government decision-making is certainly important, but public participation and public supervision are equally important. To prevent and control water pollution and protect the water environment, it is not only necessary for government departments to govern, but also for the active response and participation of the public. We should increase publicity efforts and raise citizens' awareness of water conservation and environmental protection.

Lessons from Tokyo Bay's Cultural Education

Considering the actual situation of the Grand Canal in Huai'an City and the development strategy of Tokyo Bay Education in Japan, the following aspects are worth learning from:

(1) By comprehensively analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of the development strategies of canal culture and education at home and abroad, and carefully analyzing the current development status of canal culture and education in Huai'an, a comprehensive plan for canal culture and education in Huai'an City has been formulated. Based on the different regional characteristics along the Huai'an Canal, specific canal culture and education features with regional characteristics have been developed, and multiple measures have been taken to promote the construction of canal culture and education in Huai'an and strengthen its unique canal culture.

(2) Produce a Huai'an Canal Encyclopedia picture book with both illustrations and text, promote and popularize it in the basic education stage, and incorporate the popularization of canal culture knowledge into the development plan of Huai'an basic education. Strengthen the training of the teacher team, the setting of higher education professional courses, and scientific research. At the same time, the government should increase investment in canal culture, education, and scientific research to ensure the funding of educational and research institutions at all levels, in order to achieve sustainable development.

(3) Pay attention to the promotion of canal culture knowledge in various communities, carry out various forms of publicity activities, formulate community canal education plans, establish canal websites, forums, etc., actively promote the participation of community residents, improve the overall level of canal knowledge in society, and enable the whole city to pay attention to and participate in the cultural and economic development of the canal.

Lessons from Tokyo Bay's Branding and Marketing

The popularity and brand marketing of the construction of the Tokyo Bay Cultural Belt have been very successful. For example, Odaiba has become a famous tourist destination in Tokyo and is widely welcomed by young people around the world. In light of the insufficient brand marketing efforts in the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt in Huai'an City, the following can be referenced:

(1) In terms of external publicity, emphasis should be placed on adopting a combination of all media and self media promotion methods to continuously promote the achievements and distinctive tourism products of the Huai'an Canal Cultural Belt construction. In specific operations, the promotion effect can be expanded through the use of the internet, social media, mobile apps, etc.

(2) Connect the cultural and tourism resources of Huai'an and establish the cultural and tourism brand of "water understands my heart, nature Huai'an". Create tourism routes across four continents, including water transport culture, hydraulic technology, food experience, and beautiful countryside, and hold tourism festivals such as food festivals and tourism festivals.

(3) Vigorously develop the canal cultural industry. With high cultural and technological content, low energy consumption, and minimal pollution, it is very suitable for inheriting the cultural genes of the Grand Canal and benefiting the cultural heritage of the Grand Canal. For example, building a distinctive canal ecological park, promoting the development of canal characteristic towns, accelerating the pace of cultural and creative construction of the Huai'an Canal, promoting the development of Huai'an Canal culture related film, entertainment, animation and creative industries, vigorously producing and promoting Huai'an Canal cultural and creative tourism products, and ultimately forming a canal cultural industry chain with Huai'an characteristics.

4) Red tourism resources are the golden signboard of Huai'an's tourism culture. Canal cultural tourism can be fully integrated and packaged with red tourism, forming a tourism route that combines cultural history and natural scenery, and jointly developed and promoted^[2].

CONCLUSION

Seizing the historic opportunity of Grand Canal Cultural Belt construction, Huai'an must prioritize water governance, cultural education, and branding. By adopting Tokyo Bay's best practices, Huai'an can elevate itself into a premier destination for canal heritage, showcasing its unique blend of water transport history, engineering marvels, and Jianghuai cultural charm.

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