

Cultural Revival of the Grand Canal and Regional Economic Prosperity

---- Historical Perspective on Business Revolution

Yang Yang^{1,a}, Yiang Sun¹, Yaning Liu¹, Haopeng Ma¹, Yuejun Cui^{2,*}

¹Beijing Wuzi University, Beijing 101149, China;

²China Foreign Affairs University, Beijing 100091, China.

^aalexxyang1988@163.com

Abstract

To revive the culture of the Grand Canal and thus investigate effect of regional prosperity, this paper firstly illustrates its origination and growth based on the connection of history and reality. Based on the logic of commercial and the clues of transportation method, this paper sorts out the emergence and evolution of the commercial culture along the Grand Canal from three aspects: germination of commerce and rise of commercial context, the change of commercial relations and commercial culture, the formation of commercial towns and commercial circles. Therefore, the rejuvenation of Grand Canal culture consists of two dimensions: inheritance and development. On the one hand, persisting green development and to reproduce the ability of the canal to connect the north and south and the Huize line. On the one hand, carry forward the excellent traditional culture and strengthen the practical significance of cultural confidence. Only by rekindling the soul of the canal, restarting the water of the canal, and reappearing the picture of the canal can we promote the rejuvenation of the Grand Canal culture and the prosperity of the regional economy.

Keywords

Grand Canal Culture Revival, Grain Transportation, Commercial Vicissitude, Regional Economic Prosperity.

1. Introduction

The Grand Canal, which is implanted among three parts of Chinese most advanced areas, Beijing, Hangzhou, and Zhejiang, appeared total length of nearly 3,200 kilometers traced back to Sui and Tang Dynasties. The longest and largest canal of the world stand for the wisdom of the Chinese ancient people with the twists and turns river. From the Spring and Autumn to the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Grand Canal exists for more than two thousand years, she originated in Yuhang district, stop in Zhuojun district, intersect with the Yellow River and the Yangtze River, is recognized as magnificent poem on the land of China. In 2014, the Grand Canal was officially listed as a World Heritage Site. This paper collecting the formation and development resources of the commercial culture of the Grand Canal, tries to make an exploration for the historical study of the revival of the Grand Canal culture through the commercial revolution.

2. The Origination of the Commercial Culture of the Grand Canal

The Grand Canal culture was formed in water transportation in the ancient societies. This form of transporting grain and regulating materials through shipping, known as "grain transport", was an important economic measure to ensure the material needs of various places in ancient

society. As the product of autocratic in ancient China, grain transport was a social activity with strong political characteristics since its emergence. Based on river basins, "grain transport" covered a wide range of fields. Transportation, regional development, social stability, and agricultural economic development, etc. were inseparable from the construction of "grain transport", whether it was for military purposes to compete for resources or economic purposes to allocate materials. From the pre-Qin Dynasty to the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589), with the communication and development of politics and economy between the North and the south, even though there existed many scattered rivers, they gradually failed to meet the needs of social development. This provided conditions to the opening of the Grand Canal in Sui Dynasty and provided the foundation for the formation of the Grand Canal culture.

The opening of the Grand Canal in the Sui Dynasty integrated the scattered distribution of the river, balanced the regional advantages of the North and South, strengthened the political and economic exchanges around the region, and promoted the rise of towns along the canal. With the convenience of waterway and the increase of population, the need for goods communication was increasing day by day. Many merchants and goods gathered along the canal for exchange, forming the embryonic form of commodity economy.

In the Ming Dynasty, economic progress brought about a change in perception. The value concept represented by profit-seeking flourished during that period, and the impact on grain transport was particularly prominent. Due to the lucrative profits, the transporters took advantage of the transfer to engage in social commercial activities. In terms of rules, the Ming government relaxed the number of duty-free goods which transporters could carry with to subsidize their livelihood and the shortage price. However, the "profit-oriented" nature of transporters intensified their involvement in commercial activities, which caused a certain degree of loss of fairness and efficiency in transport transactions and affected the normal operation of transport and commercial activities. By the Qing Dynasty, the government improved the grain transfer system. However, the unprecedented development of commodity economy requires the government and the market to break through the old state of conformism. The imperial court was forced to release more space to the circulation of commodities to comply with the demands of the people. As the social and commercial atmosphere became stronger, the rulers of the Qing Dynasty gradually relaxed the allowance of land incident. In addition, the daily supplies such as salt, grain, and coal carried by the returning vessels were mostly sold by the transporters, which made the returning vessels become merchant ships in real terms. At that time, the Qing government did not impose strict restrictions on the southbound transport because it had relatively little impact on grain transportation. With the relaxation of grain transport restriction, the openness of commodity economy was further enhanced, both in the north and in the south.

3. The Evolution of the Commercial Culture of the Grand Canal

In the middle and later period feudal societies, the social functions carried by the transport became more and more extensive, and the transportation function of grain was upgraded to a social regulator of materials controlled by rulers, playing an extensive role in regulating society. On Basis, Grain Transport objectively accelerated the immersion of commercial atmosphere, promoted the circulation of commodities, stimulated urban development and the upgrading of agricultural products, and provided the material basis for the establishment of commercial relations. The long history of feudal society and the tortuous growth of ancient commercial thought did not prevent the development of grain transportation, but rather provided the conditions for the change of commercial culture, with the circulation of commodities as the main line, running through the north-south route like a river to communicate with each other.

Table 1: An Overview of the Development of Commercial Culture based on Canal Transport in Various Periods

Dynasties	Commercial development based on Canal transport
Sui	The canal was opened to promote the economic development of the North and South, bringing together merchants and goods
Tang	Frequent business travel in the JiangHuai Region
Song	Private business booms
Ming	Commercial transactions are widespread, involving the transfer of north-south goods by canal transport participants
Qing	Institutionalization of canal transport entrainment, return vessels legally carry north and South goods, prosperity of commodity economy

As the scope of the transportation expanded, the economic model of self-sufficiency was subtly shifting to a commodity economy. The change of thoughts accelerated the flow of the Grand Canal, the scale of commerce expanded more and more, and the commercial system continued to be relaxed and improved (see Table 1 for details). In terms of social relations, the grain transport was directly linked to merchants since it got involved in the circulation of goods. As the network of goods circulation was established and expanded, the commercial relations hidden behind the commodities were also gradually taking shape.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, commercial activities became more and more popular, and the phenomenon of illegal cargoes attached to the transporters was repeatedly prohibited, and cargo transactions became more and more frequent. On the one hand, the transport officials in charge of the grain transport made use of merchants' "gifts" to solicit transporters, carry cargoes and evade taxes, and on the other hand, they encouraged and allowed transporters to solicit cargoes, forming a unique solicitation and sale pattern at that time. With the deepening of trade activities, more and more goods were handed over to the transporters, and more and more kinds of goods were transported and sold. The transporters escorted the transportation, meanwhile they had to undertake the purchase and sale of goods. They are not only responsible for the diffusion and docking of trading outlets, but guarantee the smooth completion of commodity trade, becoming "middlemen" in the true sense of the word. With the relaxation of governmental decrees in the Ming and Qing dynasties, the act of "buying along the road" for private profit to a certain extent undermined the normality of the transport at that time but enriched the commercial relationship and commodity sales network based on that and accelerated the further deepening of the commodity economy.

In addition, with the deepening of commodity circulation and the expansion of influence, the transport gradually built up the connection between merchants, craftsmen, and farmers. In ancient times, most of the areas along the transport were economically affluent and rich in commodities, so the need for many commodities was solved by the transport. The existence of canals and shipping made it possible to distribute commodities on a larger scale. More and more farmers and craftsmen began to make a living by supplying their products to merchants, contracting for sale, which in turn flowed to other transshipment merchants and consumers through transporters. As the role of the canal bridge deepened, a gradually expanding network of commercial relations was formed. The Qing government protected the merchants superficially, but in fact, it achieved the purpose of transporting the grain and realized the integration of the interests of the transporters and the merchants, further improving the commercial relationship network based on the canal.

4. The Formation of the Grand Canal Commercial Culture

With the opening and repair of several sections of the canal, the improvement of transport conditions, the relaxation of the canal system, the idea of commodity economy and commercial atmosphere gradually extended to the canal line, and many commercial towns emerged. The development of water and land transportation objectively promoted economic exchanges, stimulated the growth and prosperity of commercial towns along the transportation routes, subjectively attracted merchants and farmers to come and get a share, deepening the aggregation effect of towns along the routes. On the one hand, the circulation and turnover rate of commodities was significantly higher in the towns along the route; on the other hand, the construction of the canal was a policy signal of commercial prosperity itself.

Although the canal was designed for the purpose of transporting goods, merchant ships, civilian ships, and government and private passengers could all travel from south to north by the canal, which greatly promoted the development of trade along the river. During the Qin and Han dynasties, most of the economically developed towns were concentrated in the Yellow River basin, partly because the Yellow River basin was more affluent, and partly because of the frequent canal activities in the Yellow River basin. During the Tang and Song dynasties, the canals became the main channel of communication between the north and the south because of the unblocked canals and the economic prosperity of Jiangnan. Therefore, canal boats also became the main carrier for the exchange of goods in the canals. Wherever the canal was extended, a new commercial vitality would be ushered in. Because of this, in the Tang Dynasty, several commercial capitals emerged in places with frequent transport activities, such as Hangzhou, which is the throat of the canal, and then Bianzhou, Luoyang, Jiangling, Guangzhou, etc., all benefited from the commercial prosperity of the canal. The Yongji canal also promoted the rise of a few towns during the prosperous period of canal transportation in the Tang Dynasty. The water transportation centers of the north and south sections of Yongji Canal, Weizhou and Beizhou had become prosperous metropolises in the north like Bian and other towns, as the history says: "Weijun and Qinghe, the God would be helpless". Driven by the active transport activities, handicraft industry also made great progress. By the Northern Song Dynasty, the water system covered by the Grand Canal had become quite large, with the Yellow River, Cai River and Guangji River in the north, communicating with the Bian River, Huainan River, and Jiangnan Canal in the south. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the rapid development of the canal not only met the needs of political, military, and economic, but promoted the development of the private economy, especially the rise of many towns triggered by the canal.

Grain transport was an important factor in promoting the economic development and commercial prosperity of ancient towns. Especially in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, with the expansion and deepening of the layout of the canal, commercialized towns became more and more closely connected with the commodity economy. The canals and the Yangtze River were like arteries running through the earth, and what flowed in the arteries was not only the blood of the feudal dynasty, "canal food", but also the blood of the commercial economy, "commodities". Although the canal ships were not merchant ships, the canal soldiers were not merchants, and the canal food was also not a commodity, but in the late feudal society, the canal transport did not just represent a transport activity of feudal canal food, the local goods carried by the transport vessels sold along the way were also belonged to the commercial economy.

In addition, many towns along the route became places for canal boats to sell and exchange commodities. Under the premise of guaranteeing the transport period, the canal boats would not travel too fast, which made it possible for commerce to develop along the way. Merchants, transporters, and residents exchanged goods and commodities with canal boats. The boats, towns and water subdivisions just formed a mutual market and trading relationship. During

the Ming and Qing dynasties, the transporters' participation in commercial activities also played an active role in the development of commercial towns along the canal to a certain extent. With the smooth flow of the river, the commodity economy not only had large-scale trading activities in the cities, but also penetrated the countryside, stimulating farmers to produce and commercialize large quantities of agricultural and sideline products, and commercial culture was pushed to a wider space. This was the bonus brought by convenient transportation conditions. At the end of feudalism, the commodity economy was active everywhere, and trade in towns and bazaars flourished. The handicraft industry further developed and grew at that time, and the flow of products into the market made the commerce in towns more prosperous. Attracted by the canal, the radius of the commodity trading chain expanded, and producers and commodities gathered from the countryside to the cities, building commercial towns around the Grand Canal route and forming the unique Grand Canal Commercial Culture Circle. The formation of the commercial town circle benefited from the smooth flow of the canal and deepened the economic impact of the transport in the expanding scope of the commercial circle, which advanced the development of the transport.

5. Conclusion

The opening of the Grand Canal was of great significance to the transformation of Chinese commerce. China's grain transport lasted for more than 2,000 years, beginning in the Qin and Han dynasties, and ending in the late Qing dynasty, and always shared with the feudal dynasty. From the sprouting of commodity economy to the construction of commercial relations, from the rise of commercial towns to the formation of commercial culture circle, the canal and commodities were the blood flowing in the Grand Canal, penetrating the Yangtze River, converging the Yellow River, and connecting the north and south, "transporting" the new commercial thoughts of the old society to all corners. The grain transport made the commercial culture of the feudal society mature and made the freight passage more and more convenient. The development of the commodity economy led to the rapid rise of towns and regions along the canals, which made a feeding-back phenomenon. In the late feudal period, the central government was weak, and the traditional "anti-business" culture came to an end, leaving room for the emergence of commercial power in the Ming and Qing dynasties. The rapid expansion of merchants' power allowed the problem of transporting grain to be solved. From then on, the sea transport of grain, which evaded government supervision, became the main means of communication between the north and the south. The emergence and development of grain transportation promoted the circulation of commodities and goods in feudal society, drove the economic prosperity of the regions along the canals, and reconstructed the commercial pattern of the feudal period, which combined form, system, and culture. The interaction between the transport and feudal commercial culture eventually advanced and carried the changes of Chinese commerce.

With the popularization of industry, technology and information technology, the transportation and information transfer methods have undergone radical changes. The character "运"(transport) of the canal is no longer playing the functional role of the past, but the character "河"(canal) is still there, connecting the flow of water from north to south. The history of the canal and the changes in commercial culture carried by the canal are still alive and well. The revival of canal culture and canal economic thought needs to be based on the new era, rational development and utilization of natural and human resources, and in-depth exploration of the inheritance of canal culture and sustainable development of canal economy; moreover, it needs to look back at history, deeply understand the impact of canal transportation on the change of commercial culture and clarify the formation process of canal culture and canal economic thought. This is an inescapable part of China's ancient commercial and economic thought, which

is of profound research value, whether based on tracing the origin of the revival of canal culture or the realistic reference of the change of commercial culture.

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