

Investigation and Analysis of Cultural and Creative Product Development Categories in Public Libraries: Postprint

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] To propose development approaches for cultural and creative products suitable for public libraries in China. [Method/Process] This study employs an online research analysis method, selecting online stores of cultural and creative products from ten representative foreign public libraries as research subjects, and systematically browsing, analyzing, reviewing, and documenting all included cultural and creative products to analyze the categories of foreign public library cultural and creative products from the perspectives of product material carriers and cultural and creative content. [Results/Conclusion] The development approaches for cultural and creative products of public libraries in China include: taking library collections and historical inheritance as the development theme (library characteristic element extraction, classic collection implication display, library historical culture inheritance), taking literary reading and characteristic culture as the development theme (literary reading theme integration, regional characteristic culture promotion, commemorative festival culture publicity), and taking reader needs and creative services as the development theme (cultivating children's knowledge-seeking, orientation toward different groups, user experience design, distinctive brand building).

Full Text

Investigation and Analysis on the Development Categories of Cultural and Creative Products in Public Libraries

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This paper proposes development ideas for cultural and creative products suitable for public libraries in China. **[Method/Process]** Using network investigation and analysis, we selected ten representative online gift shops of foreign public libraries as research objects, browsing, analyzing, reviewing, and recording all included cultural and creative products. We analyzed the categories of foreign public library cultural and creative products from the perspectives of material carriers and cultural and creative content. **[Result/Conclusion]** Development ideas for Chinese public library cultural and creative products include: taking library collections and historical inheritance as the main development thread (extracting library characteristic elements, showcasing classic collection implications, inheriting library historical culture); taking literary reading and characteristic culture as the main development thread (integrating literary reading themes, promoting regional characteristic culture, publicizing commemorative festival culture); and taking reader needs and creative services as the main development thread (cultivating children's curiosity, targeting different groups, user experience design, and distinctive brand categories).

Keywords: cultural and creative products; public library; development categories; investigation and analysis; development ideas

Classification Number: G250

1. Introduction

Cultural and creative products, abbreviated as creative products, have been interpreted by different institutions and scholars from various perspectives. UNESCO analyzes from the attribute perspective: creative products are consumer goods that express creative ideas, symbols, and lifestyles [1]. The UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) analyzes from the creative industry perspective: industries originating from individual creativity, skills, and talent that have the potential to create wealth and employment through the development and application of intellectual property [2]. Any product or combination of products produced by the cultural and creative industry constitutes a creative product. Wei Pengju analyzes from the final form perspective: creative products contain two interdependent parts—cultural and creative content and hardware carriers [3]. Hao Xin analyzes from the product connotation perspective: creative products are connected with the cultural background of certain ethnic groups and regions, originate from individual talent, inspiration, or wisdom, are produced and marketed through industrialization, and satisfy people's spiritual needs and desires for any tangible or intangible product [4]. Synthesizing these different perspectives, the author identifies three characteristics of creative products: The final form includes both material carriers and cultural and creative content. Cultural and creative content represents designers' cre-

ative display of cultural connotations through wisdom, talent, and skills. The core of creative products lies in the cultural symbols and creative content they embody to meet people's spiritual and cultural needs.

On May 1, 2016, the General Office of the State Council forwarded the "Several Opinions on Promoting the Development of Cultural and Creative Products in Cultural and Cultural Heritage Institutions" issued by the Ministry of Culture and other departments. The "Opinions" encourage libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions to explore collection resources and actively develop cultural and creative products, thereby promoting the inheritance, dissemination, and sharing of excellent cultural resources, achieving the organic unity of cultural value and practical value [5]. To further promote implementation, on January 9, 2017, the Ministry of Culture issued another document providing a phased summary of the "Opinions," identifying 154 cultural and cultural heritage institutions as pilot units for cultural and creative product development, including museums, art galleries, libraries, and cultural centers, and proposing regulations to encourage innovation, bold exploration, experience promotion, financial support, and effectiveness supervision [6].

As public cultural institutions, libraries are still in the embryonic stage regarding the theory and practice of cultural and creative product development. Through literature investigation of domestic and foreign creative products, we find that domestic library creative product research is currently at an overview stage focusing on policy analysis, development models, and implementation significance. Discussions on development categories are mentioned in these overview studies:

Mo Xiaoxia points out that library creative products can include collection reproductions, publications, derivative souvenirs, experience-based products, and creative apps [7]. Chen Chang suggests that public libraries should explore local cultural characteristics and collection advantages to create distinctive brand creative products [8]. Tian Li proposes library development projects around creative products, including collection resource development, business model innovation and process software development, publishing services, maker space services, information data mining and analysis services, and creative resource sharing [9].

Foreign library creative product research focuses more on introducing characteristic creative products and practical experiences from library gift shops, including: L. Peet introduces the design characteristics and operational practices of American public library creative products, noting that operations evolved from books and greeting cards to stationery, dolls, and souvenirs, and now incorporate characteristic handicrafts made by local artists and designers [10].

N. H. McDonald introduces the operation status of creative products in U.S. Presidential Libraries and Museums, with popular items including Christmas decorations, porcelain, clothing, jewelry, books, and audio-visual products from the Hoover Library Museum; plants, kitchen knives, decorative art, and men's items named after presidents from the Eisenhower Library Museum; Lincoln autobiographies, Lincoln-themed keychains, magnets, and mugs from the Lincoln

Library Museum; and t-shirts, mugs, water bottles, brooches, glassware, and notecards from the Franklin Library Museum [11]. N. Patch introduces the operation practices of the Toronto Library gift shop, with development categories including mugs, chess sets, notebooks, pencils, prints, and desserts incorporating library and literary elements [12].

Through this literature analysis, we find that neither domestic nor foreign research has conducted in-depth analysis on the categorization and development paths of library creative products. The literature provides insufficient support regarding development categories.

In practice, in 2016, the National Library's creative product online store "Guotu Wangdian" quietly launched on Taobao [13]. As a pioneer in domestic library creative product stores, its products mainly revolve around collection classics, with cartoon character series based on the Qing Dynasty opera character atlas "Qingshang Shengping" being particularly favored by readers. However, domestic library creative products are still in the initial stage regarding development categories, creative integration, marketing promotion, and comprehensive benefits. In contrast, foreign library creative product development practices have long been prevalent, with broad product categories, rich cultural creativity, diverse business methods, and good economic and social benefits. Therefore, the author uses network investigation and analysis to research foreign public library creative products, analyzing material carriers and cultural creativity through website observation to derive reference and inspiration for development categories of Chinese public library creative products.

2. Development of Cultural and Creative Products in Foreign Public Libraries

The author adopts network investigation and analysis, selecting ten representative online gift shops (library gift shops) of foreign public libraries as research objects. All creative products included in these websites were browsed, analyzed, reviewed, and recorded, summarizing the material carrier types and cultural and creative content of each public library's creative products. The investigation period was from May 1 to June 20, 2017.

2.1 Original Website Categories of Public Library Creative Products

This study selected the Library of Congress, New York Public Library, Los Angeles Public Library, San Diego Public Library, Free Library of Philadelphia, British Library, Manchester Library, Calgary Public Library, Queensland State Library, and New South Wales State Library as research objects. The basic information and selection reasons for each public library are introduced below.

The Library of Congress's long history and rich characteristic collections provide fertile ground for creative product development, forming diverse products rich with the library's unique historical and cultural symbols. The New York Public Library store, named "Readers & Writers Shop," covers 1,200 square

feet with complete product varieties. The Los Angeles Public Library store was recommended by LA Weekly as the “BEST GIFT SHOP” [14]. The San Diego Public Library store was selected as the “Best Literary Boutique” by San Diego Magazine for its strong literary knowledge creativity [10]. The Free Library of Philadelphia adheres to the library’s purpose of developing literary education, guiding learning, and stimulating intellectual curiosity, designing exquisite creative products rich in literary elements.

Under the guidance of the British Library’s 2015-2023 development strategy, the British Library (the National Library) shares collection creativity with the public, provides memorable cultural experiences, and expands creative combinations of cultural products and activities [15]. The Manchester Library store continues the city’s innovative style, developing a series of creative products based on the library’s rich collections, with a vision to bridge collection resources with Manchester’s people and the world [16].

Calgary is Canada’s fourth-largest city by population, and its library provides vibrant and diverse public cultural services for urban residents. The library store’s revenue supports library activities, service expansion, and collection optimization [17].

Australia’s Queensland State Library has high-quality and extensive collection resources, serving as a local venue for learning, sharing, communication, cooperation, and creation [18]. The New South Wales State Library is one of Australia’s famous libraries, a center for multicultural gathering and exchange, and a cultural center preserving national development memory [19]. These two representative public libraries emphasize the combination of practicality and culture, richness and diversity, and user creativity and product customization in developing creative products.

Through investigating the creative product stores of these ten public libraries, the original categories of creative products on official websites were recorded as shown in Table 1 .

The creative products sold in foreign public library online stores cover work, study, home, life, clothing, children, and other aspects, with complete varieties and diverse types. The ten selected representative public library creative product stores all adopt self-built website categorization, with inconsistent classification standards and significant crossovers and repetitions between categories. Table 1 shows that websites include categories divided by product function (home, office, service), by material carrier (clothing, jewelry, books), and by cultural and creative content (“library characteristics,” “literary theme gifts,” and “local exquisite items”).

As analyzed previously, creative products are the organic combination of material carriers and cultural and creative content. For example, the “Shakespeare Love Mug” from the Free Library of Philadelphia has a ceramic mug as its material carrier, while its cultural and creative content is the creative pattern combining Shakespeare’s love quotes [20]. Therefore, this paper further ana-

lyzes creative products and summarizes their categories from the perspectives of material carriers and cultural and creative content.

2.2 Material Carrier Categories of Public Library Creative Products

This study browsed and analyzed all creative products in the ten representative public library stores, breaking the original website classifications. Based on further recording, analysis, induction, and clustering of product material carriers, foreign public library creative products are divided into eight categories: “books,” “clothing,” “daily necessities,” “decorations,” “stationery,” “toys,” “reproductions,” and “experience-based” products, as shown in Table 2 .

Table 2 reveals that mainstream carrier categories include “books,” “clothing,” “daily necessities,” “decorations,” “stationery,” and “toys.” Mainstream material carriers include books, t-shirts, socks, tote bags, mugs, badges, notebooks, greeting cards, etc.:

- (1) **Books.** Books incorporate authors’ thoughts, viewpoints, and cultural wisdom. Foreign public library stores still retain the tradition of selling books. Themes include local culture, daily life, history and geography, biographies, and children’s books, as well as library publications introducing the library’s history, development, architecture, and characteristics. Signed books by authors and books introducing local culture also occupy a certain proportion.
- (2) **Clothing.** Developing creative products with clothing as the carrier is also mainstream. Besides meeting warmth and decoration needs, clothing satisfies people’s spiritual needs with unique cultural styles. Carriers include t-shirts, scarves, silk scarves, ties, socks, etc. Foreign libraries organically integrate unique cultural creativity with practical carriers, including wallets printed with library card patterns and socks themed on “The Little Prince.”
- (3) **Daily Necessities.** These mainly include household items (mugs, tote bags, umbrellas, kitchenware, candles) and electronic products (mobile power banks, headphones, USB drives). These are common necessities with characteristics of low value, fast updates, portability, and practicality, representing an important development channel. For example, the Library of Congress’s Franklin Creative Chair Ladder switches between “a chair for sitting and reading” and “a ladder for climbing to get books” through folding and unfolding.
- (4) **Decorations.** These mainly include jewelry (necklaces, bracelets, earrings) and accessories (desktop decorations, badges, magnets, keychains). Such products satisfy people’s aesthetic and cultural needs, featuring portability, beauty, and easy display. The New York Public Library creatively reproduces library-specific items as exquisite decorations, such as badges 仿制 from library date stamps, cards, and borrowing cards, and miniature desktop seat decorations 仿制 from library reading room chairs.

- (5) **Stationery.** Stationery business seems more aligned with libraries' unique temperament. Foreign public library stores sell stationery including pens, notepads, desk lamps, pencil cases, bookmarks, globes, etc., with library greeting cards occupying a large proportion. Card themes generally feature library characteristics, regional landscapes, and literary themes.
- (6) **Toys.** Foreign public libraries develop creative products for children using toys as carriers to cultivate reading habits, intellectual exploration abilities, and love for libraries. For example, the Library of Congress's children's tote bag [22] features a pattern of a little girl happily holding several books with the slogan "L is for library," derived from 1960s American children's alphabet flashcards where "L" represents "Library."
- (7) **Reproductions.** Foreign public libraries create derivative reproductions from boutique collections using high-quality materials and paper. For example, the Library of Congress produces high-definition reproductions of famous document manuscripts, ancient maps, and old photos, including the U.S. Declaration of Independence and Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" materials. The British Library produces exquisite prints from collection resources, such as Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland" manuscripts, British royal art works, historical maps, and natural scenery.
- (8) **Experience-Based Products.** These 主要指 user participation projects such as weaving, embroidery, pottery, fabric arts, and creative DIY projects. For example, the San Diego Public Library held a succulent plant pot-making activity during Mother's Day [23], providing materials, tools, and guidance for readers to experience hands-on creativity and personalized customization. Additionally, the Queensland State Library recently held activities for readers to participate in creative product making, including "washi" necklace making, Japanese gift wrapping, hand-bound notebooks, and potted plants [24]. User participation makes products unique and demonstrates creative charm.

2.3 Cultural and Creative Categories of Public Library Creative Products Based on material carrier classification, this study further recorded, analyzed, induced, and clustered the cultural and creative content of creative products, dividing foreign public library creative products into four categories by cultural and creative content: "library characteristic elements," "literary reading themes," "local cultural symbols," and "characteristic creative styles," as shown in Table 3 .

These items from daily work, study, and life are endowed with unique cultural creativity by libraries:

- (1) **Integration of Library Characteristic Elements.** This refers to designing library brand names, logos, architectural features, and other elements into creative patterns that perfectly integrate with daily necessities. This manifests in two aspects: Finding creative sources from library

characteristics, such as baseball caps printed with “Library of Congress established in 1800,” t-shirts themed on the Thomas Jefferson building, and tote bags with creative patterns of Los Angeles Public Library branch maps. Discovering creative sources from library-specific items (catalog card boxes, date stamps, carts, borrowing cards, reading seats). These products embody library characteristics and reflect unique cultural and creative value.

- (2) **Finding Creative Inspiration in Books, Literature, and Reading.** Libraries seek inspiration and extract creativity from classic literary works, writers, and reading promotion: Extracting cultural creativity from literary writers and classic works, such as the British Library’s pillows designed with British bestseller covers, umbrellas made from Sherlock Holmes series, tote bags with banned book titles, and postcards with Jane Austen quotes. Creative integration of product carriers with literary content. The San Diego Public Library has an exquisite tote bag with splendid flower patterns called “John Keats Splendor Tote Bag” [25]. John Keats was a 19th-century British Romantic poet, and the designer combined the bright star from his representative work “Bright Star” with splendid flowers, expressing Keats’ brief, brilliant, and romantic life. Using reading promotion as a creative source, such as Los Angeles Public Library’s mugs with the proverb “A book lover never goes to bed alone” and tote bags with Jane Austen’s reading quotes, reflecting reading culture’s charm.
- (3) **Cultural Creativity Based on Local Characteristic Cultural Symbols.** Foreign public libraries explore creative sources from their cities’ regional characteristics: Seeking creativity from regional culture, such as Los Angeles Public Library developing products with California characteristics, including landscape albums, pens and mugs with the California state flag (Bear Flag), and crystal balls featuring California grizzly bears. Integrating local designers’ artistic creativity. Queensland State Library provides tote bags, scarves, ties, and tea sets designed by local artists, with patterns from local plants, scenery, and kangaroos, including designer information for collection and commemorative value.
- (4) **Characteristic Creative Style Products.** These include: Libraries combining their development history to form brand-characteristic creative products, such as the New York Public Library’s marble lion bookends [26], which embody historical sentiment. Thematic series products, such as the Library of Congress’s Thomas Jefferson series and the British Library’s Russian Revolution 100th anniversary series [28], including revolutionary biographies, Soviet soldier-patterned tote bags, Soviet art pillows, and anti-alcohol posters, with historical value and commemorative significance.

3. Development of Cultural and Creative Products in Chinese Public Libraries

Based on the above investigation, systematic 梳理, and summary, we believe Chinese public libraries should focus on three main threads: library collections and historical inheritance, literary reading and characteristic culture, and reader needs and creative services.

3.1 Taking Library Collections and Historical Inheritance as the Main Thread Public libraries should develop creative products based on their image, logos, architecture, collections, and historical inheritance, achieving layered development from brand element extraction to classic collection implication showcasing to historical inheritance.

3.1.1 Extraction of Library Brand Elements This reflects library image characteristics, with creative sources from library names, logos, architecture, slogans, or characteristic items (borrowing cards, carts, card boxes). Material carriers are items closely related to daily study, work, and life, reflecting cultural, aesthetic, and practical qualities. Three categories: (1) Learning supplies integrating library creative symbols, such as pencils with library names, bookmarks with slogans, and notebooks with architectural patterns. (2) Daily necessities 融合 library themes, such as t-shirts, mugs, and towels with library elements. (3) Developing library-characteristic creative derivatives from proprietary items like catalog card boxes, book carts, and ladders, which constitute unique cultural symbols.

3.1.2 Showcase of Classic Collection Implications Characteristic classic collections refer to unique collection resource systems with specific themes, including ancient books, manuscripts, photos, maps, paintings, and period-specific literature. Developing creative products based on precious collection materials promotes library publicity, realizes valuable materials' worth, and enhances public understanding of traditional Chinese culture: (1) Produce precious collection prints or reproductions using high-quality paper and printing. (2) Compile library publications with characteristic collection themes. (3) Develop series creative derivatives from boutique collections, making ancient texts, images, and stories more accessible.

3.1.3 Inheritance of Library Historical Culture Many Chinese public libraries have unique historical development trajectories. Nanjing Library, located in the ancient capital of six dynasties, originated as the Jiangnan Library founded in 1907 (the 33rd year of Guangxu). Libraries can find creative sources in representative events, figures, and cultural stories during their development, creating products with cultural, artistic, educational, and practical value that showcase history and promote excellent culture.

3.2 Taking Literary Reading and Characteristic Culture as the Main Thread “Books are for use.” This thread requires libraries to focus creative product development on literary works and reading promotion, mining work connotations, writers’ stories, and guiding public reading while also focusing on regional characteristic culture and commemorative themes.

3.2.1 Integration of Literary Reading Themes As institutions collecting, organizing, and preserving book materials, libraries’ basic function is supporting reading, learning, and reference. Chinese public libraries can mine creative sources from reading promotion, literary writers, and work content: (1) Reading publicity-themed products integrating slogans like “Reading achieves dreams, knowledge illuminates life” and famous quotes onto bags, mugs, water bottles, scarves, and keychains. (2) Products rendered with literary writers and representative works, such as notebooks, tote bags, decorations, and badges. (3) Mixed elements of reading and diverse culture, such as reading 小黄鸭 toys and comics mixed with Bacon’s reading quotes.

3.2.2 Promotion of Regional Characteristic Culture Regional culture is marked by natural environment, urban landscape, and customs, reflecting unique lifestyles, ideas, and aesthetic tastes. Public libraries have the function of inheriting local culture: (1) Explore creative symbols from local characteristic culture, such as dialect culture, temple fair culture, landscapes, and grassland scenery. (2) Develop creative products from local characteristic literature, mining historical figures, backgrounds, geography, and events. (3) Cooperate with local designers to develop products reflecting local artistic styles.

3.2.3 Publicity of Commemorative Exhibition Culture Foreign public libraries develop special creative products for commemorations, festivals, and exhibitions, creating special experiences. The San Diego Public Library’s Mother’s Day customized potted plants and the British Library’s 150th anniversary of “Alice in Wonderland” 专属台灯 are examples. Chinese libraries can: (1) Develop festival-themed products for traditional holidays and cultural festivals like World Book Day (April 23). (2) Combine library thematic activities and commemorative exhibitions to develop supporting creative products.

3.3 Taking Reader Needs and Creative Services as the Main Thread Library services center on readers, and creative product development should also be based on reader needs and creative services.

3.3.1 Cultivating Children’s Interest and Curiosity Public libraries have always provided children’s services around interests, comprehensive development, and knowledge needs. Foreign libraries develop child-oriented products cultivating love for libraries, literary preferences, and exploration abilities: (1) Themes of loving libraries, children’s literature, and anime characters. (2) Integration of knowledge elements and children’s toys. (3) Products stimulating

children's exploration and curiosity, such as freely combinable toys and space exploration products.

3.3.2 Targeting Different User Groups Universal equality and user-centeredness are core library service principles. Creative product development should also target different groups: (1) For women: intellectual and fashionable products like poetic tote bags, local-style jewelry, and library-characteristic decorations. (2) For men: mature and stable-themed products like inspirational quote bags, literary-themed ties, and local landscape watches. (3) For students: stationery with motivational themes and modernized traditional supplies. (4) For seniors: urban memory-themed products and literary mugs.

3.3.3 User Experience Creative Design User participation projects like weaving, embroidery, pottery, fabric arts, and creative DIY integrate personal creativity: (1) Magnetic paper-cutting using new materials to solve traditional problems. (2) Handmade dolls guiding children through customization. (3) Thread-bound book making, rubbing, handmade plants, customized accessories, and personalized chocolates. (4) Customizing library card covers with readers' favorite images.

3.3.4 Creating Distinctive Star Products Foreign libraries have star-brand products like NYPL's marble lion bookends. Chinese museum brands also offer lessons: the Palace Museum's "Palace Cat" series and Suzhou Museum's matcha-flavored cookies shaped like the Yue Kiln secret-color lotus bowl. Star products should: Select culturally recognizable subjects that resonate emotionally. Endow products with profound cultural connotations. Use background stories for promotion. Apply modern technology for creative expression. Collect reader feedback. Build intellectual property protection systems.

4. Conclusion

This analysis summarizes four characteristics of library creative products: Cultural subject: what culture the product embodies (library culture, reading culture, local culture). Creative method: how the culture is presented (direct, metaphorical, integrated). Carrier quality: the type and quality of material carriers, emphasizing practicality and quality. Creative sentiment: displaying creative sentiment through product slogans to inspire recognition. These aspects are integrated and complementary. Public libraries should develop suitable products based on actual conditions, emphasizing the combination of culture, artistry, and practicality, while cooperating with creative industries, local designers, media, social forces, and readers to promote continuous R&D, improvement, and promotion.

Due to time and energy limitations, this paper only analyzed online creative products from ten representative foreign public libraries, excluding some libraries without online operations. Future research should expand the scope,

include more library types, draw on museum and cultural industry experiences, and conduct field investigations and interviews for more insights.

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Author Contributions:

Wang Yi: Network investigation summary, development category analysis.

Ke Ping: Research framework guidance.

Investigation and Analysis on the Development Categories of Cultural and Creative Products in Public Libraries

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Abstract: [Purpose/significance] This paper puts forward suitable devel-

opment ideas of cultural and creative products for Chinese public libraries. [Method/process] By methods of network investigation, this article selects ten representative gift shops of public library in foreign countries as the research objects. Then, it browses, analyzes, reviews and records all of the cultural and creative products included in the website, and analyzes the categories of cultural and creative products of foreign public libraries from the viewpoint of product carrier type and content. [Result/conclusion] This paper provides new methods to develop cultural and creative products of Chinese public library: taking library collection and historical inheritance as developing route (extract library characteristic element; show the implication of classic collection; inherit library history culture), taking literature reading and characteristic culture as developing route (merge the theme of reading literature; enrich regional characteristic culture; memorize the culture of the festival), taking user requirements and creative service as developing route (cultivate the curiosity of young children; customize the suitable products for different groups; invite user experience design; create distinctive brand cultural and creative products).

Keywords: cultural and creative products; public library; development categories; investigation and analysis; development ideas

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.