

## RESEARCH ON THE TOURISM REVITALIZATION PATH OF THE KONIGIL PAPER CENTER IN SAMARKAND FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE "BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE"

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### **Abstract**

The "Belt and Road" initiative has provided an important opportunity for the protection of cultural heritage along the routes and cross-border cultural tourism cooperation. The Konigil Paper Mill in Samarkand, as an active carrier of the traditional paper-making techniques of the Central Asian Silk Road, originated from the cultural transmission path of the Silk Road paper-making. This paper adopts the methods of literature research, field investigation, and comparative research to analyze from the historical origin, process characteristics, protection model, and tourism development dimensions. It explores the development advantages and existing problems of the Konigil Paper Mill, and combines the opportunities for cross-border cultural tourism integration under the "Belt and Road" initiative to propose targeted tourism revitalization paths, providing references for the tourism development of Central Asian Silk Road cultural heritage and cross-border cultural cooperation.

**Keywords:** The Belt and Road Initiative; Konigil Paper Center; Cultural Heritage; Tourism Revitalization

### **Annotatsiya**

“Bir kamar, bir yo‘l” tashabbusi yo‘nalishlar bo‘ylab madaniy merosni saqlash va transchegaraviy madaniy turizm hamkorligini rivojlantirish uchun muhim imkoniyat yaratdi. Samarqanddagi Konigil qog‘oz markazi Markaziy Osiyo Ipak yo‘li an‘anaviy qog‘oz tayyorlash texnologiyasining faol tashuvchisi hisoblanadi. Mazkur tadqiqotda adabiyotlar tahlili, dala tadqiqotlari va qiyosiy tahlil usullari qo‘llanildi. Tarixiy kelib chiqish, texnologik xususiyatlar, saqlash modeli va turizm rivoji jihatlarini o‘rganildi. Konigil qog‘oz markazining rivojlanish afzalliklari va mavjud muammolari aniqlanib, “Bir kamar, bir yo‘l” doirasida madaniy turizm integratsiyasi imkoniyatlari asosida turizmni jonlantirish yo‘llari taklif qilindi. Natijalar Markaziy Osiyo Ipak yo‘li madaniy merosi turizmini rivojlantirish va xalqaro hamkorlik uchun amaliy ahamiyatga ega.

**Kalit so‘zlar:** Bir kamar, bir yo‘l tashabbusi; Konigil qog‘oz markazi; madaniy meros; turizmni rivojlantirish.

### **Аннотация**

Инициатива «Один пояс, один путь» создала важные возможности для сохранения культурного наследия вдоль маршрутов и развития трансграничного культурного туризма. Бумажный центр Конирил в Самарканде является носителем традиционных технологий изготовления бумаги Великого шелкового

пути Центральной Азии. В данном исследовании использованы методы анализа литературы, полевых исследований и сравнительного анализа. Рассмотрены историческое происхождение, технологические особенности, модели сохранения и аспекты развития туризма. Определены преимущества развития и существующие проблемы центра Конирил, а также предложены пути активизации туризма с учетом возможностей интеграции культурного туризма в рамках инициативы «Один пояс, один путь». Результаты могут служить основой для развития туризма культурного наследия Шелкового пути в Центральной Азии и расширения международного сотрудничества.

**Ключевые слова:** инициатива «Один пояс, один путь»; бумажный центр Конирил; культурное наследие; развитие туризма.

## INTRODUCTION

Papermaking, as one of the Four Great Inventions of ancient China, spread westward along the Silk Road and profoundly influenced the cultural development process in Central Asia and even Europe. Samarkand, as a key city on the ancient Silk Road, was the core node where Eastern and Western civilizations met. Its Koniril papermaking center preserves the traditional papermaking techniques of Central Asia that have been passed down for thousands of years. Using mulberry bark as the raw material, it inherits the core processes of manual papermaking, and is a typical representative of the Silk Road cultural heritage in Central Asia.

Currently, countries along the "Belt and Road" are increasingly emphasizing the transformation of cultural heritage's tourism value. The development of Silk Road cultural heritage tourism in Central Asia has gradually become a hot topic. (Dayoub B, Yang P, Omran S, Zhang Q, Chen X, Ahmed Noman Alabsi A, et al. 2024)

However, the Koniril Paper Center is constrained by factors such as infrastructure and development concepts, resulting in a relatively low degree of tourism activation. Meanwhile, the traditional paper-making workshops in Mooyu County, Xinjiang, China, have accumulated mature experience in areas such as government support and business model integration. Against this backdrop, through a comparative study of the two, exploring the tourism activation path of the Koniril Paper Center has significant practical significance for promoting the protection of Central Asia's Silk Road cultural heritage and deepening cultural and tourism cooperation between China and Uzbekistan.

International scholars' research on the traditional paper-making techniques of the Silk Road mainly focuses on two aspects: historical origin and technological influence. In foreign studies, scholars tend to concentrate on the dissemination of traditional paper-making techniques in Central Asia, but there is relatively little research on the development of cultural heritage tourism, and there is a lack of a comparative perspective with paper-making workshops in the "Belt and Road" regions along China's borders.

The reason for this research is Firstly, it fills the research gap. The existing research on Silk Road paper-making cultural heritage has limitations such as "emphasizing history but neglecting development" and "emphasizing a single case but

neglecting cross-border comparisons". This study enriches the research dimensions of Silk Road cultural heritage tourism development through the comparison of two typical paper-making workshops in China and Uzbekistan. Secondly, it responds to practical needs. The Konigil paper-making center has unique cultural value, but its tourism development is lagging behind, facing problems such as aging of the inheritors and monotonous tourist experience. The tourism development experience of the traditional paper-making workshop in Moyu can be used as a reference, and the comparison between the two can provide practical references for the revitalization of the Konigil paper-making center. Thirdly, it serves the construction of people-to-people connectivity under the "Belt and Road Initiative". Paper-making technology, as a landmark achievement of Silk Road civilization exchange, its tourism revitalization and cross-border cooperation can promote cultural identity among the people of China and Uzbekistan, and consolidate the social foundation for bilateral cooperation.

About goals is the "Belt and Road Initiative" perspective, through a comparative study of the Konigil Paper Mill and the traditional paper-making workshops in Moyu, a tourism revitalization path for the Konigil Paper Mill is proposed.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of "activation" originated from the energy level transition phenomenon in quantum physics, specifically referring to the transformation of particles from a stable state to an excited state through energy input. In the 1990s, this term was transplanted across disciplines and became the core metaphor of the theory of cultural heritage activation - by injecting energy, static cultural elements regain the ability to be dynamically passed down (C.X.Chen.2025). The concept of activating cultural heritage differs from the static "museum-style protection", emphasizing the dynamic inheritance and value regeneration of the heritage. At the theoretical level, the "authenticity theory" is the core principle for the development of cultural heritage tourism, which means that tourism activities should respect the historical and cultural connotations of the heritage and the subjectivity of the heritage's inheritor.

The concept of activating cultural heritage originated from the heritage protection trend in the late 20th century. It differs from the static "museum-style protection", emphasizing the dynamic inheritance and value regeneration of heritage. Scholars generally believe that the core of activating cultural heritage tourism is to transform heritage resources into attractive tourism products. For example Ye, J., Qin, Y., & Wu, H. (2024), Xu, L., Zhang, J., & Nie, Z. (2022) and others.

The research on traditional paper-making techniques along the Silk Road can be divided into two categories: the study of technological history and the study of protection and development. The technological history research focuses on the dissemination path of papermaking technology, investigating the time and route by which Chinese papermaking technology was introduced to Central Asia through the Western Regions, and confirming that the raw material selection and pulping methods of the traditional paper-making technique in Samarkand are all related to the Chinese paper-making technique from the Western Regions. For example M.X.He & M.Zhang. (2022), Q.Liu. (2008) and others. The research on tourism development has only

reached the initial stage of infrastructure construction, lacking systematic path planning.

In conclusion, the existing research provides a theoretical foundation and case references for this paper. However, there are still three shortcomings: Firstly, the research perspective is limited, lacking a comparative study between the existing traditional paper-making workshops in Samarkand and those in China; Secondly, there is insufficient practical guidance, lacking a systematic construction of the tourism revitalization path for the Konigil Paper Center; Thirdly, the cooperation dimension is missing, failing to fully combine the specific plans for cross-border cultural tourism cooperation proposed by the "Belt and Road" initiative. This study conducts in-depth discussions to address these shortcomings.

## **METHODOLOGY**

First, the literature research method. By systematically reviewing relevant literature, a theoretical foundation for the research is established. Relevant theoretical literature on the integration of culture and tourism under the "Belt and Road Initiative" and the activation of cultural heritage tourism are collected, clarifying the core elements and path framework of tourism activation; research results on the dissemination history of papermaking technology along the Silk Road, Konigil papermaking process, and the Yumen Shangpi paper-making technique are consulted, and the historical origins and technical characteristics of the two are sorted out; policy-related documents are collected to analyze the policy environment for the development of cultural heritage tourism in the two places. The sources of literature include academic databases, government websites, reports from heritage protection institutions, etc.

Second, the field investigation method. To obtain first-hand data, on-site investigations were conducted at the Konigil paper-making center and the traditional paper-making workshops in Xinjiang's Muoyu County. The investigation contents included: the current situation of craftsmanship inheritance: visiting paper-making inheritors in both places, recording the details of raw material acquisition, process flow, tool usage, etc., and understanding the difficulties and demands of skill inheritance; the current situation of tourism development: conducting on-site inspections of the tourism infrastructure and tourism products of the workshops, as well as the visitor flow and guest source structure; interviews with stakeholders: conducting interviews with local cultural tourism department staff, workshop operators, and community residents to obtain their attitudes and suggestions towards tourism development.

It is worth noting that in July and August of 2025, the author conducted a 20-day field investigation at the Konigil Paper Mill and its surrounding area. Through participatory observation and semi-structured interviews, he collected first-hand data. During this period, he interviewed 2 local artisans and 25 tourists, obtaining core information such as the operational status of the paper mill, cultural inheritance, and the problems and opportunities faced by tourism development. He personally experienced the cultural atmosphere and tourism environment, laying a solid foundation for subsequent research. In 1996, with the strong support and advocacy of

UNESCO, the Konigil Paper Mill came into being. Located by the Siab River, it not only restored the paper-making process but also made bold innovations in cultural integration.

From the perspective of tourism products, the current tourism products of the paper mill are relatively monotonous, mainly consisting of static displays and simple hands-on experiences, lacking depth and innovation. The field investigation found that the average duration of existing experience projects is only about 15 minutes, and the average stay time of tourists is generally less than 1 hour. The secondary consumption rate is only 15%. In terms of display content, the exploration of the historical evolution of papermaking, cultural dissemination, and the deep connections with the "Belt and Road" initiative is insufficient. Only 12% of the display content involves themes related to Chinese-Ukrainian cultural exchanges (based on the statistics of on-site display content), failing to integrate the paper-making culture with cultural exchanges, trade interactions, and other contents along the "Belt and Road" routes, unable to meet the needs of tourists for in-depth cultural experiences. In terms of experience projects, there is a lack of interactivity and entertainment value. 65% of young tourists responded that the existing experience projects are "too traditional and lack appeal", making it difficult to attract young tourists and family tourists, and limiting the duration of tourists' stay and consumption willingness.

Third, the comparative research method. The comparative research method is the core research method of this paper. Through a combination of horizontal and vertical comparisons, the similarities and differences between the two are explored. Horizontal comparison analyzes the commonalities and differences of the paper-making workshops in the two places; vertical comparison then sorts out the development history of the two, exploring the driving factors and evolution patterns in different development stages. Through comparison, the successful experience of the traditional paper-making workshop in Muoyu is summarized, the development advantages and existing problems of the Konigil paper-making center are identified, and the basis for proposing the tourism activation path is provided.

Fourth, the SWOT analysis method. Based on the comparative research, the SWOT analysis method is used to conduct a systematic assessment of the tourism development conditions of the Konigil paper-making center. Strengths include the location advantage of the Silk Road node area and the uniqueness of the craftsmanship culture; Weaknesses include weak infrastructure, single tourism products, and aging inheritors; Opportunities include the "Belt and Road" cultural tourism cooperation opportunities and the rise of the Central Asian tourism market; Threats include competition from similar cultural heritage in the surrounding areas and environmental constraints. Through SWOT matrix analysis, the core direction for tourism activation of the Konigil paper-making center is clarified.

## **ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

Through field investigations, the textual data were sorted and analyzed. A comparison was made between the Konigil Paper Mill in Samarkand and the

Sanyipaper Industrial Park in Yutian County, Xinjiang. The following table can present this comparison:

**Table 1. Comparative Analysis<sup>1</sup>**

Comparison dimension	Samarkand Konigil Paper Mill	Sangpi Paper Industrial Park in Moyu County, Hetian, Xinjiang, China
<b>Technological renaissance</b>	In 1998, the Meros Paper Mill was revived, with its core technology tracing back to the papermaking techniques of the Tang Dynasty.	Relying on the development of Tang Dynasty papermaking in the Central Plains, the papermaking technique has been passed on without interruption.
<b>The price of a ticket</b>	15,000 soms	free
<b>Paper price/one</b>	Around 100,000 soms	Around 25,000 soms
<b>Geographic information</b>	north latitude 39.6542, east longitude 66.9597, located in the suburbs of Samarkand	North latitude 37.3145, east longitude 79.7092, located on the edge of the Hotan oasis,
<b>Type of organization</b>	corporate operation	Family workshop-industrial park
<b>Government support</b>	no direct government support	National Intangible Cultural Heritage-Government Support
<b>Propagation mode</b>	Short Video-Study Tour (Online and Offline Combined)	Short Video-Study Tour (Online and Offline Combined)
<b>Industrial model</b>	independent paper industry	integration of the whole industry chain
<b>Market positioning</b>	High-end cultural products	Popular Cultural Products, Intangible Cultural Heritage Experience

The two have formed a complete tourism product chain of "visiting - experiencing - cultural creation". Tourists can visit the paper-making process exhibition hall, participate in the making of jute paper, and purchase jute paper cultural products, etc. The tourism products of Konigil Paper Center mainly consist of a single visit, and tourists can only watch the process of making artificial paper, lacking interactive experience projects and cultural products. The tourism appeal is relatively weak, and the tourists are mostly transit tourists with short stays.

The Muray Workshop takes advantage of the development opportunities of the overall tourism in Xinjiang, and has improved infrastructure such as the tourist reception center, parking lot, and tourist toilets. Its customer base covers local Xinjiang and surrounding provinces. Konigil Paper Center is located in the suburbs of Samarkand, with inconvenient transportation and lacking supporting tourism facilities. The customers are mainly international backpackers, local students, and cultural researchers, with short stays and a relatively small market size and higher product prices.

Based on the above comparative research analysis and field investigation, we will conduct a SWOT analysis, as shown in the table below:

<sup>1</sup> Author's Work

**Table 2.SWOT Analysis<sup>1</sup>**

Analysis dimension	Concrete content
strengths (S)	Konigil papermaking, a living heritage of the Silk Road papermaking techniques in Central Asia, is deeply intertwined with Islamic culture, making it highly appealing to both cultural enthusiasts and Silk Road tourists. Moreover, Samarkand, a popular Central Asian tourist destination, attracts a large number of international visitors annually. The Konigil papermaking center can leverage Samarkand's tourism market to attract more visitors.
weaknesses (W)	Inadequate infrastructure: The absence of tourist reception centers and other supporting facilities, coupled with poor transportation access, fails to meet visitors' basic needs. Limited tourism offerings: Predominantly sightseeing-focused, the lack of interactive and immersive experiences results in short visitor stays and low conversion rates. Weak cultural transmission: The employment-based system restricts the spread of traditional skills, while younger generations show low acceptance of these crafts.
opportunities (O)	1. "Belt and Road" cultural and tourism cooperation opportunities: China and Uzbekistan are increasingly close in cultural and tourism cooperation under the "Belt and Road" framework, which provides the possibility for the Konigil Papermaking Center to introduce China's development experience, capital, and technology; 2. Rise of the Central Asian tourism market: With the improvement of infrastructure in Central Asia, the demand for cross-border tourism continues to grow, and Silk Road cultural heritage tourism has become a new growth point; 3. Enhanced awareness of intangible cultural heritage protection: The Uzbek government is increasingly emphasizing the protection and development of cultural heritage, and has introduced a number of policies for the integration of culture and tourism, providing policy support for the development of the Konigil Papermaking Center.
threats (T)	Competition from similar heritage sites: Samarkand boasts renowned cultural landmarks like the Timurid Mausoleum and Registan Square, while the Konigil Paper Mill Center remains relatively obscure, facing competition from other cultural heritage sites for visitors.

Based on the results of comparative research and SWOT analysis, combined with the tourism integration opportunities brought by the "Belt and Road Initiative", a tourism revitalization path for the Konigil Paper Mill Center is proposed from four dimensions: cross-border linkage, infrastructure improvement, and brand building.

Firstly, establish the "China-Uzbekistan Silk Road Paper Culture Tourism Belt". Relying on the "Belt and Road Initiative", strengthen cross-border cooperation with the traditional paper-making workshops in Yiyu County, Xinjiang. One is to jointly create a tourism route, including the Konigil Paper Mill Center and the Yiyu Sapan Paper-making Workshop, and incorporate them into the "Cross-border Silk Road Paper Culture Tourism Route" to attract cultural study tourists; two is to conduct exchanges and visits among the inheritors, inviting the inheritors from Yiyu to Konigil to impart

<sup>1</sup> Author's Work

skills for inheritance and tourism development experience, and organizing the inheritors from Konigil to Yiyu to learn about the development of cultural products and business operation models; three is to jointly build a cross-border intangible cultural heritage exhibition platform, taking advantage of the China-Uzbekistan Cultural Exchange Year and International Tourism Expo, and jointly hold the Silk Road Paper Craft Exhibition to enhance the international reputation of the Konigil Paper Mill Center.

Secondly, enrich the tourism product system. Promote the innovation of cultural and creative products, combining the Islamic cultural elements of Central Asia, develop religious cultural creative products such as Sapan paper, decorative paintings, notebooks, etc., and introduce Chinese cultural design concepts to enhance the product value; three is to expand the study tour market, cooperate with schools in Central Asia and neighboring countries, and launch Silk Road Paper Culture Study Tours, creating an "Intangible Cultural Heritage Study Base".

In response to the problem of weak infrastructure, strive for the financial support of the Uzbekistan government, improve infrastructure construction such as transportation, tourist reception centers, and tourist toilets; strengthen digital construction, build an online display platform, and use VR technology to showcase the paper-making process, attracting remote tourists.

Thirdly, clarify the brand positioning of the Konigil Paper Mill Center and enhance market competitiveness. Firstly, explore the brand cultural connotation, highlighting its historical value as "the living witness of the transmission of Chinese papermaking technology", and create the brand image of "the Living Fossil of the Silk Road Papermaking in Central Asia"; secondly, strengthen international marketing and promotion, cooperate with well-known tourist attractions in Samarkand, conduct joint marketing, and use social media, travel bloggers' visits, etc., to expand brand influence; thirdly, formulate brand standards, standardize the inheritance of paper-making techniques and the tourism service process, and improve the quality of tourist experience.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The papermaking centers of Samarkand Konigil and China's Xinjiang Moyu County share the same origin in the cultural transmission of papermaking along the Silk Road, possessing homology in historical origins and core techniques. At the same time, due to regional cultural differences, they exhibit unique characteristics in craftsmanship details and cultural connotations. The Konigil Papermaking Center possesses unique cultural characteristics and geographical advantages, but faces challenges such as weak infrastructure, single product offerings, and insufficient inheritance efforts. It needs to seize the opportunities presented by the Belt and Road Initiative to revitalize tourism through cross-border collaboration, business model upgrades, infrastructure improvements, and brand building. The value of this study lies in providing a concrete path for the tourism development of Central Asian Silk Road cultural heritage from a comparative perspective, while also offering a case reference for cross-border cultural heritage cooperation among countries around the Belt and



Road, which helps promote mutual understanding and the integrated development of culture and tourism among countries along the route.

Based on the above discussion, regarding the activation path proposed for the Samarkand Papermaking Center, on the one hand, it involves cultural narrative reconstruction: telling the story of "the origin of paper along the Silk Road" to promote cultural mutual learning. In terms of visualizing the historical context, establishing a "Museum of Papermaking Transmission" is a key measure. The museum will display numerous replicas of cultural relics, such as paper molds from the Tang Dynasty, featuring exquisite textures and unique production techniques, allowing visitors to directly experience the superb level of ancient Chinese papermaking technology. The ancient paper books from Samarkand, these books carry historical and cultural information from Central Asia and are important witnesses to the dissemination and development of papermaking technology in the region. These documents provide a detailed account of the process and impact of the westward transmission of papermaking technology from a historical perspective, offering visitors a window to gain a deeper understanding of history.

Developing thematic guided tours can guide visitors to systematically understand the dissemination process of papermaking technology. At the origin node of Chinese papermaking technology, through multimedia displays, physical models, etc., the background of the invention, development process, and profound influence of papermaking technology on Chinese culture are introduced; at the transmission path node in Central Asia, using maps, animations, etc., the transmission routes and important stations of papermaking technology in Central Asia, as well as the process of integration with local culture, are displayed; at the Konigil restoration practice node, visitors can visit the workshop of the papermaking center, watch the craftsmen produce paper on-site, participate in the papermaking experience activities, and feel the charm of traditional skills.

On the other hand, the experience scenarios are upgraded: creating multi-dimensional immersive consumption spaces. The upgrade of the experience scenarios is the core part of the tourism revitalization at the Konigil Paper Center in Samarkand. By constructing multi-dimensional immersive consumption spaces, it can meet the increasingly diverse tourism needs of tourists and enhance their tourism experience and satisfaction.

High-end customization and festival marketing are important means to improve the quality and influence of tourism products. We launched the "Paper Art Master Workshop", inviting Chinese and Uzbek intangible cultural heritage inheritors to jointly teach, providing private customization services for tourists. Tourists can customize special mulberry bark paper for wedding invitations according to their own needs. Its unique texture and cultural connotation can add a touch of romance and solemnity to the wedding; enterprises can customize cultural-themed gift boxes, combining the cultural elements of the enterprise with paper art, to create cultural products with enterprise characteristics. These can be used as gifts or promotional

materials for the enterprise, not only showcasing the cultural image of the enterprise but also spreading traditional paper art culture.

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