

Research on Strategies for the Integrated Development of Culture and Tourism in Hezhou City under the Background of High-Quality Tourism Development

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Abstract: In the context of the new era, the development of the tourism industry is in a crucial strategic opportunity period, and the integration of culture and tourism is a new trend in tourism development. By deeply exploring cultural connotations, shaping travel with culture, and highlighting culture through travel, continuous efforts are made to promote high-quality tourism development. Hezhou City possesses abundant total tourism resources, with rich cultural connotations. The city actively promotes in-depth integration of culture and tourism across various fields, dimensions, and the entire value chain to propel high-quality development in culture and tourism. However, challenges such as insufficient exploration of cultural connotations in tourism products and a single product typology persist. Using Hezhou City as an example, this article, based on a review of cultural tourism resources, analyzes the problems in the development of integrated culture and tourism, and explores suitable paths for the integrated development of culture and tourism in Hezhou City.

Keywords: high-quality tourism development; culture and tourism integration; Hezhou; pathways

Introduction: In the new era, China has entered a new stage of development, and the demand for tourism has shifted from "whether there is" to "how good it is."^[1] People now have higher expectations for the quality of tourism products, and the tourism industry urgently needs transformation and upgrading. There is a profound and mutual relationship between culture and tourism, where culture is the soul of tourism, serving as a direct incentive for tourism motivation. The development of tourism products requires a deep excavation of cultural connotations. Tourism, on the other hand, is an essential carrier of culture, driving the development and dissemination of culture. The integration of the two is not a simple addition but a deep fusion of interactive elements and resources. The "14th Five-Year Plan for Cultural and Tourism Development" proposes to cultivate new formats of integrated culture and tourism, expanding new spaces for cultural and tourism development, guiding the direction for the deep integration and development of culture and tourism.

Hezhou City, located at the junction of Hunan, Guangdong, and Guangxi provinces, boasts abundant natural ecological, historical, and ethnic cultural resources.^[2] It has been honored with titles such as "China's Excellent Tourism City," "World Longevity City," and the first "Comprehensive Longevity City in China." Building on its advantageous resources, Hezhou City, through strategic planning, continuously stimulates the vitality of the integrated culture and tourism, emphasizes the creation of cultural and tourism brands, innovates marketing methods, and promotes in-depth integration across various fields, dimensions, and the entire value chain.^[3] The goal is to fully establish itself as a cultural tourism city. This article takes Hezhou's integrated culture and tourism as a starting point for research, proposing corresponding strategies for the high-quality development of culture and tourism. It aims to inject new vitality into the economic development of Hezhou City and provide new opportunities. Additionally, it hopes to serve as a reference for the integrated development of culture and tourism in other regions.

1. Analysis of the Current Status of Integrated Development of Culture and Tourism in Hezhou City

1.1 Basic Overview of Hezhou City

Hezhou City is located at the junction of Hunan, Guangdong, and Guangxi provinces, with a

subtropical monsoon climate, abundant sunshine, ample rainfall, numerous rivers, and a forest coverage rate of 72.65%. The ecological environment is excellent, and the climate is pleasant. Known as ancient "Cangwu," Hezhou has a history of over 2000 years and served as a crucial transportation hub connecting the Central Plains and Lingnan during the Qin and Han dynasties. Over the centuries and through changes in dynasties, Hezhou has preserved a cultural heritage spanning millennia. The city is home to ethnic minorities such as the Zhuang and Yao, with the local Tuyao community being the most distinctive among the 12 branches of the Yao ethnic group, known for its unique ethnic clothing, customs, and production methods. Hezhou has been honored with titles such as the first "Comprehensive Longevity City" in China, "China's Excellent Tourism City," "World Longevity City," and "China's Longevity Food Capital."

In the 1990s, Hezhou's tourism industry gradually took off, becoming a preferred destination for overseas Chinese from regions such as Singapore, who visited the city for its picturesque landscapes featured in Hong Kong dramas. In recent years, Hezhou has deeply integrated into Guangxi's cultural and tourism development pattern of building a world tourist destination and a cultural tourism strong zone. The city has actively promoted the development of the health and cultural tourism industry clusters. In 2022, Hezhou allocated 18 million yuan to incentivize the development of the rural tourism market and enhance the quality of tourism products. According to statistics, in 2022, Hezhou received a total of 31.95 million visitors, achieving tourism consumption of 39.3 billion yuan.

1.2 Analysis of Conditions for the Integrated Development of Culture and Tourism in Hezhou City

1.2.1 Policy Support for Culture and Tourism Integration

The 20th National Congress explicitly advocates promoting the deep integration of culture and tourism by shaping travel with culture and vice versa. In 2022, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and other departments jointly issued the "Notice on the Construction of National Demonstration Zones for the Integrated Development of Cultural and Tourism Industries," aiming to promote the deep integration of culture and tourism through the creation of demonstration zones. Guangxi actively responded to the national policy, vigorously promoting the integrated development of culture and tourism. In 2022, the Guangxi Department of Culture and Tourism issued the "Three-Year Action Plan (2022-2024) for the Cultivation of New Formats and Expansion of New Consumption in the 'Culture + Tourism' Industry in Guangxi," driving the development of related industries and tourism in a broader and deeper manner and promoting the high-quality development of new cultural tourism formats. The Hezhou municipal government attaches great importance to the quality of cultural and tourism integration development, taking proactive measures to enhance the level of integrated culture and tourism development and allocating special funds for cultural development. In 2020, the Hezhou municipal government, in collaboration with the regional Department of Culture and Tourism, organized the 2020 Cultural and Tourism Industry Demonstration Zone Promotion Conference, placing the development of health and cultural tourism industry clusters at the forefront. Simultaneously, it signed contracts with enterprises from other regions for multiple cultural and tourism industry projects, with a total amount reaching 13.744 billion yuan.

1.2.2 Rich Cultural and Touristic Resources

Hezhou City boasts a wealth of cultural and touristic resources, including ancient towns, mountains, rivers, canyons, wetlands, and hot springs. As a comprehensive longevity city, Hezhou has a favorable natural ecological environment with magnificent mountains, lush forests, abundant flora and fauna, flowing rivers, and an elegant environment. According to statistics, Hezhou has one 5A-level scenic spot, thirteen 4A-level scenic spots, and, as of July 2022, the Huangyao Ancient Town scenic area officially received the national AAAA-level tourist attraction rating. In addition to natural resources, Hezhou has rich cultural resources, particularly unique ethnic cultures. The city has two Chinese historic and cultural towns, nine Chinese historic and cultural villages, and 32 Chinese traditional villages. It also boasts four nationally key protected cultural relics. Among them, Huangyao Ancient Town is recognized as a national historic and cultural town, while Xiushui Village in Chaodong Town, Fuchuan County, is a national historic and cultural village. Hezhou has a total of 92 intangible cultural heritage items, including four, such as the Yao drum dance, Yao butterfly song, Yao Panwang Festival, and Yao clothing, incorporated into the national-level intangible cultural heritage list.^[4] With 29 local dialects, Hezhou is renowned as a natural language museum. The city has abundant natural resources, historical monuments, ethnic customs, and cultural landscapes, providing a solid foundation for the integrated development of culture and tourism.

1.2.3 Obvious Transportation Location Advantages

Hezhou City is situated at the junction of three provinces, neighboring Huaiji County and Lianxian County in Guangdong Province to the east, connecting with Jiangyong County and Jianghua County in Hunan Province to the north, and bordering Guilin City to the west. The economic circle it covers is extensive, and it is located on the "Guangzhou-Guilin" golden tourist route, ensuring a plentiful source of visitors. The Hezhou municipal government attaches great importance to the development of tourism transportation, accelerating the construction of the core transportation pattern of "7 expressways, 6 railways, 5 stations, 4 loops, 3 networks, 2 rivers, and 1 airport." The transportation and logistics sector has taken a big step into a new era. In 2017, the Maoling (Xiang-Gui border) to Hezhou Expressway was completed and opened to traffic, opening the "Xiaohe Ancient Road" in the new era. In 2020, Hezhou achieved "highway access for every county," significantly shortening the time and space distance between Hezhou and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the surrounding cities in Guangxi.

1.3 Current Status of Integrated Development of Culture and Tourism in Hezhou City

The integration of Xiangxiang culture, Lingnan culture, Yao culture, and Hakka culture has endowed Hezhou with unique advantages for the integrated development of culture and tourism. The city has comprehensively integrated its cultural and touristic resources, excavated its historical heritage, and multidimensionally built high-quality cultural and tourism experience zones. It is making full efforts to establish itself as a cultural tourism city, achieving leaps in the development of cultural and touristic projects, performances, festivals, and sports events. The Huangyao Ancient Town Tourism and Cultural Industrial Zone promotes the development of the cultural tourism industry based on the principles of "harmonious coexistence of scenery and city, mutual promotion of culture and tourism, and a fusion of mountains and rivers." It has been honored with the title of a district-level "Cultural Industry Demonstration Park." In 2020, Huangyao Ancient Town launched the large-scale performance event "In Search of Roots - Huangyao," showcasing the regional culture of Huangyao and the culture of surnames, promoting the deep integration of culture and tourism in Hezhou. Chashan Village in Chashan Town, Fuchuan, actively explores the development model of "food + ancient village + internet," creating the brand "The First Village of the Xiaohe Ancient Road Entering Guangxi." During the 2023 Spring Festival holiday, the city accumulated a total of 1.3012 million tourists, a year-on-year increase of 51.65%, with tourism revenue reaching 852 million yuan, a year-on-year increase of 48.37%.

Hezhou City actively develops cultural and touristic products. The Qilin Zun, unearthed in Hezhou and a national first-class cultural relic, features a combination of three animals and is a national art treasure that combines Central Plains culture with Lingnan culture. Hezhou has launched a stuffed toy based on the Qilin Zun prototype. Additionally, it has created WeChat dynamic emojis based on the prototype of "Qilin Bao." Furthermore, creative playing cards showcase Hezhou's humanistic historical resources under different themes, such as "Longevity Cards," "Ancient Architecture Cards," and "Cultural Cards," printing iconic scenic spots and buildings in Hezhou on the playing cards to promote tourism and culture.

Ethnic minority cultures contribute to the integrated development of culture and tourism in Hezhou City. The city has delved into the cultural connotations of the Yao ethnic group, strengthening the development of contiguous "Tu Yao" featured villages for high-quality all-area tourism. This initiative has driven the "Tu Yao" people to develop ethnic handicrafts such as bamboo weaving and Yao embroidery, transforming ecological and cultural resources into economic sources. Li Sufang, an embroidery artist, has created the "Yao Ethnic Clothing and Embroidery Heritage Base," integrating cultural creativity, tourism, and the inheritance of Yao embroidery skills. Visitors can not only tour the Yao ethnic clothing heritage base but also learn traditional Yao embroidery and experience Yao customs such as pounding glutinous rice cakes and Yao weddings, immersing themselves in the rich cultural and folk customs of the Yao ethnic group.

Festival activities are also a highlight of the integrated culture and tourism in Hezhou. During the San Yue San Zhuang ethnic song fair, Huangyao Ancient Town organizes a variety of colorful folk activities, such as lusheng performances and bronze drum dances, attracting numerous tourists to visit and enjoy. During the festival, guides dressed in ethnic minority costumes dance bamboo pole dances with tourists, celebrating the festival joyfully. The Panwang Festival is a significant event for the Yao people to worship their ancestors. Fuchuan Yao Autonomous County holds the Panwang Festival ritual every year, where Yao compatriots attend in festive costumes, showcasing unique programs such as

embroidery ballads, wooden lion dances, lusheng and drum dances, and dragon dances, jointly celebrating the Panwang Festival. The implementation of festival activities is conducive to the inheritance and promotion of ethnic minority cultures, enhancing cultural confidence, and promoting the deep integration of culture and tourism.

2. Problems in the Integrated Development of Culture and Tourism in Hezhou City

2.1 Insufficient Exploration of Distinctive Culture, Low Depth of Cultural-Tourism Integration

Hezhou City possesses abundant historical and folk cultural resources. However, in the process of tourism development, there is a lack of exploration of the cultural connotations of tourism products. The only 5A-level scenic spot in Hezhou, Huangyao Ancient Town, represents traditional Hakka culture, preserving Hakka tulou (earthen buildings), ancestral halls, and more. However, the tourism products in the area are characterized by a single type, primarily static cultural displays, with insufficient in-depth exploration of Hakka culture, resulting in a weak cultural experience for visitors. Traditional village tourism faces a similar issue of cultural underdevelopment. Traditional culture forms the core of these villages, yet tourist products in villages like Xiushui Zhaoyuan Village in Fuchuan and Chashan Village in Chaoshan lack the exploration of traditional culture and nostalgic experiences, remaining focused on sightseeing tours. Although Hezhou is a concentrated settlement of the Yao ethnic group, which has developed a profound and vibrant ethnic culture over many years, efforts in the development of Yao ethnic cultural tourism products during the process of promoting cultural-tourism integration have been limited. The integration of nationally recognized intangible cultural heritage resources, such as the Yao butterfly song and Yao drum dance, with tourism projects is relatively low.

2.2 Extension Needed in the Cultural-Tourism Industry Chain, Weak Industry Radiation and Drive

With the continuous deepening of the structural reform on the supply side in the cultural and tourism fields, promoting high-quality development through the entire industry chain has become a new trend. The integration of culture and tourism in Hezhou is still in its early stages. Due to insufficient deep exploration of cultural resources, the integration of culture and tourism lacks depth, and the industrial radiation effect is not significant. Firstly, the tourism industry operates in a single form, lacking linkage between various attractions and industries. Representative and well-known scenic spots, such as Huangyao Ancient Town, have not played a significant driving role.^[5] While Huangyao Ancient Town is highly renowned, improvements are needed in areas such as cultural and creative products, distinctive catering, and experiential projects. The incomplete tourism industrial chain, coupled with low integration with downstream agriculture and handicraft industries, fails to fully leverage the radiation effect of the cultural tourism industry, thereby unable to drive the development of surrounding industries. Secondly, the cultural tourism industry has a limited driving effect on intangible cultural heritage industries. Despite Hezhou having four national-level intangible cultural heritage items, tourists to Hezhou are generally not well-informed about them. The innovative integration of tourism and intangible cultural heritage is low, failing to transform the cultural value of intangible heritage into economic value through tourism development. Local residents have low participation rates, and a systematic, chain-based, and industrialized development concept has not been established. The industry still lingers at a superficial level of sightseeing tourism, without exploring the intrinsic cultural resources and values.^[6]

2.3 Low Social Visibility, Weak Influence of Cultural-Tourism Brand

A strong cultural-tourism brand can enhance tourism influence, shape a positive tourism image, and promote industrial optimization and upgrading. Hezhou has successfully built a tourism brand image based on the advantage of being the "World Longevity City" with the slogan "Ecological Hezhou, Longevity Resort." However, the cultural-tourism brand image is not prominent, and its national visibility is relatively low. The most competitive scenic spots in Hezhou, mainly Huangyao Ancient Town and Gupo Mountain, have a limited number of well-established and fully equipped star-rated scenic areas. The overall visibility of these scenic spots is generally low, and the promotional efforts are insufficient. While the government highly values the development of distinctive cultural tourism resources, there is insufficient investment in brand construction. Hezhou urgently needs to comprehensively review its cultural tourism resources, enhance cultural connotations, create influential and distinctive cultural-tourism brands, and further promote high-quality development through

cultural-tourism integration.

3. Strategies for the Integrated Development of Culture and Tourism in Hezhou City

3.1 In-Depth Exploration of Distinctive Culture to Promote Cultural-Tourism Integration

In the process of tourism product development, Hezhou City should delve into the cultural connotations of ethnic minorities. By utilizing the cultural elements of minority festivals, traditional attire, culinary traditions, etc., the city can undergo a cultural-themed transformation of tourist attractions. This involves enhancing the "diversity" of new quality scenes, expanding experiential projects, increasing participatory experiences, and creating tourism products with rich ethnic characteristics. In the development of traditional villages, preserving local architectural features, restoring original village culture, and incorporating cultural elements into the construction of tourism landscapes will improve tourism service functions. Specialized, situational, and experiential transformations of residential buildings should be carried out. Additionally, the exploration of Yao traditional medicine and health culture should be emphasized. Continuous improvement of health tourism infrastructure and supporting services, along with the development of a series of products such as Yao medicine health wine, Yao medicine health dietary soups, Yao king balm, and Yao medicine baths, will contribute to the vigorous development of the Yao medicine cultural tourism and health industry, fostering new integrated cultural tourism formats.

3.2 Strengthening the Full Industry Chain Product Structure to Construct a Comprehensive Cultural-Tourism Industry Chain

Hezhou City needs to focus on the characteristics of cultural tourism resources, align with tourist demands, and deepen the multifunctionality of cultural resources. This involves extending the cultural tourism industry chain, cultivating and creating advantageous cultural tourism industry clusters. On one hand, based on the "culture + tourism" concept, the perfect integration of tradition with modernity and natural landscapes with humanities will create new models such as "culture + health" and "culture + agriculture." This will unlock the driving function of the cultural tourism industry, promote the continuous development of products toward high-end and refinement, enhance the interactivity and experiential nature of cultural tourism activities, enrich product content and tourism experiences, and cultivate the cultural tourism industry's "hematopoietic function." On the other hand, for cultural tourism areas with development foundations, extending the industry chain should emphasize overall joint radiation and gradually promote coordinated and orderly development of points, lines, and areas.^[7] Through cross-border strategic cooperation, resource integration in three counties and two districts should be carried out to stimulate innovation vitality, promote the integration of the cultural tourism industry with the primary and secondary industries, improve the cultural tourism six-element industry chain, and build a new pattern of development for the "culture + tourism" full industry chain.

3.3 Enhancing Marketing Efforts for Cultural-Tourism Projects to Increase Brand Visibility

The Hezhou City government must seize the opportunities presented by the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, leveraging the two major characteristics of Yao and Hakka cultures. By combining with the diversified and personalized market demands of contemporary society, the city should explore its multi-dimensional cultural dimensions, create tourism masterpieces and cultural intellectual property (IP), establish a distinctive regional cultural system, advance brand construction in cultural tourism, and build distinctive cultural-tourism brands. Each county should adopt a development path based on its own conditions.^[8] Fuchuan County, rich in ethnic cultural resources, should fully tap into Yao ethnic cultural resources and focus on developing distinctive cultural tourism industries. Zhaoping County can leverage its advantages in Hakka culture, combined with tea culture, to promote the deep development of cultural tourism integration. Furthermore, actively promoting the enrichment of cultural elements within the brand, fully exploring intangible cultural heritage and Yao culture, strengthening trademark and patent protection, and continuously promoting regional cultural empowerment in brand construction should be emphasized.^[9] Additionally, Hezhou City needs to broaden the marketing channels for cultural tourism products. Effectively utilizing ethnic festivals, telling compelling cultural stories, refining the unique features of Hezhou's cultural tourism, designing distinctive slogans, creating cultural tourism promotional videos, and leveraging new media platforms such as WeChat, blogs, Xiaohongshu, and Douyin will contribute to comprehensive

marketing activities using "online live streaming + offline experiences." This will amplify the promotion efforts for attractions and cultural creative products, comprehensively enhancing the connotation, influence, and visibility of the cultural tourism brand.

4. Conclusion

The article emphasizes the significant strategic opportunity in the new era for the tourism industry, highlighting the crucial trend of integrating culture and tourism for high-quality development. Using Hezhou City as a noteworthy example, the city's proactive efforts to deeply integrate culture and tourism across various dimensions and the entire value chain are commendable. Despite challenges like insufficient exploration of cultural connotations and a reliance on a single product typology, the article contributes valuable insights through its review of cultural tourism resources and analysis of existing problems. These findings not only illuminate specific challenges in Hezhou City but also provide transferable insights for other regions seeking a similar integrated approach. The exploration of suitable paths for the integrated development of culture and tourism offers essential lessons for achieving a harmonious balance between cultural richness and tourism appeal. Overall, the article makes a noteworthy contribution to the ongoing discourse on sustainable, high-quality tourism development in the contemporary landscape through the integration of culture and tourism.

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