

Research on the Development Status and Problems and Countermeasures of Tourism in Xinjiang Under the Digital Economy Background

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the developmental trajectory of Xinjiang's tourism sector within the digital economy framework, analyzing critical challenges while proposing strategic solutions. In the post-pandemic era, the cultural tourism industry necessitates innovative investment paradigms and development models that facilitate synergistic integration with rural revitalization initiatives, energy sectors, industrial development, and cultural preservation to attain substantive high-quality growth. The proliferation of modern information technologies and internet infrastructure has positioned the digital economy as a pivotal driver of economic growth and innovation, thereby infusing novel momentum into Xinjiang's tourism landscape. As a vital economic pillar in the region, the tourism industry confronts both transformative opportunities and implementation challenges in its digital transition. To address these issues, the research advocates for policy-aligned strategies that capitalize on regional comparative advantages while respecting cultural distinctiveness. This approach emphasizes the development of localized digital transformation frameworks, fostering cross-sectoral collaboration and sustainable industrial upgrading through targeted technological adaptation and institutional innovation.

KEYWORDS

Xinjiang tourism; Digital economy; Digital transformation; Countermeasures

1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Xinjiang, a region in China renowned for its captivating cultural heritage, diverse natural resources, and unique folk customs, has experienced significant economic and tourism-related disruptions due to the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic that began in late 2019. As the tourism sector enters the post-epidemic era, Xinjiang's status as a long-term tourism destination within China necessitates proactive strategies to address emerging challenges. These challenges encompass product supply, service experience enhancement, and overall business model innovation, particularly in light of the anticipated opening of international markets. Recognizing the imperative of digital transformation, the State Council has emphasized the integration of "Internet + tourism" through initiatives such as smart tourism development, digital infrastructure construction, and online marketing support. This focus aligns with China's broader strategic emphasis on developing a robust digital economy, as evidenced by policy directives and national development plans since 2015, which underscore the importance of digital technologies in driving economic growth and societal advancement. Consequently, leveraging the digital economy to integrate local culture and tourism presents a promising pathway for revitalizing and fostering the sustainable recovery of Xinjiang's tourism industry.

2. TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STATUS IN XINJIANG

2.1. Xinjiang's Economic Development Level

According to regional GDP data, Xinjiang's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reached 1.77 trillion yuan in 2023, reflecting a 3.2% increase from the previous year [1]. Among them, the added value of the primary industry was 250.927 billion, up 5.3%; the added value of the secondary industry was 727.108 billion, up 4.8%; the added value of the tertiary industry was 796.099 billion, up 1.5%. The added value of the primary industry accounted for 14.1% of the regional GDP, the secondary industry 41.0% and the tertiary industry 44.9%. The annual per capita GDP was 68,552 yuan, an increase of 3.3% over the previous year.

In 2024, as the economic and social operations returned to normal, a series of policies continued to stabilize growth, employment and expectations. In the first half of the year, the market demand of the autonomous region continued to be released, the production and supply continued to increase, the employment situation was steadily improved, and the economic operation showed a positive recovery.

The quality and efficiency of development have been continuously improving. Economic growth rebounded steadily, with GDP growth increasing by 0.2 percentage points over the first quarter. Economic vitality has been growing. The logistics flow of people increased substantially, the passenger volume increased by 16.3% year on year; the market entities kept increasing, by the end of June, the autonomous region registered market entities 2.357 million (including the XPCC), up 6.28%; the investment effect is obvious, 4017 projects, with 191 more. Consumption potential has been continuously unleashed. The increase of tourism drove the rapid growth of contact consumption. In the first half of this year, the total revenue of tourists received and tourism increased by 31.5% and 73.6% respectively year on year; the wholesale and retail enterprises realized the commodity sales increased by 11.6% through the public network; and the room revenue and meal revenue of accommodation and catering units increased by 66.8% and 8.7% respectively. Tourism industry in Xinjiang has become the most important pillar industry.

2.2. The Development of Tourism in Xinjiang

Since the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, it will still fluctuate until the second half of 2022. China has implemented strict control policies. However, the traditional tourism industry has been severely affected by the interaction between people in the reception places, and its operating profit is in a loss. In the influence of the epidemic, the total number of domestic and foreign tourists in Xinjiang has declined significantly, and began to increase in 2021. In 2021, the total number of domestic and foreign tourists in Xinjiang reached 191 million, an increase of 33 million compared with 2020; to 141.569 billion yuan, up 42.357 billion yuan compared with 2020, up 42.69%. By the end of 2021, Xinjiang had 1,394 A-level scenic spots, including 165 5A-level spots.

In 2020, Xinjiang realized a total investment of cultural and tourism projects of 28.874 billion yuan; in 2021, the investment of major cultural and tourism industry investment projects of the Regional Cultural and Tourism Department reached 104.208 billion yuan. In 2022, 192 new projects including ice and snow tourism and "Internet + tourism" were added to the 2021 projects. The Department of Culture and Tourism of the Autonomous Region sorted out 424 key projects to attract investment in the cultural and tourism industry, with a total investment of 158.944 billion yuan, and launched the investment and financing service platform for Xinjiang culture and tourism industry.

According to statistics, as of July 2023, Xinjiang received 142 million tourists, a year-on-year growth of 27.42%; tourism revenue of 140.738 billion yuan, up 69.44%, the number of tourists and revenue reached a record high. The number of tourists from outside Xinjiang has increased significantly compared with the same period last year, and Xinjiang's tourism popularity is among the best in the country. The all-time number of 596 A-level scenic spots in Xinjiang received more than 24.67

million tourists, an increase of 1.2 times over 2019. Xinjiang International Bazaar, Sailimu Lake, Kashgar Ancient City, Kanas, Yining, and other scenic spots are the most popular tourist destinations in Xinjiang; Transportation, accommodation and catering industries have achieved significant growth, and the organic combination of sports and tourism activities in the first half, over 1,000 cultural activities and 30,000 (times). The combination and integration of culture, sports and tourism activities accelerate the recovery and development of Xinjiang tourism.

3. PROBLEMS EXISTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN XINJIANG

3.1. Geographical Weakness, Remote Areas, Scenic Spots Are More Scattered Travel Costs Are Higher

Xinjiang has a vast territory and a relatively complex terrain. Because Xinjiang is located in western China with a low degree of economic development, the degree of transportation network construction in this region is still relatively low, and a relatively complete and comprehensive transportation network has not been built. [2] In recent years, we will pay more attention to the traffic network construction in Xinjiang, and spend a lot of money to build shipping, highway, railway lines, but in the process of traffic network construction in Xinjiang due to still limited by capital, traffic in many areas cannot be effectively improve, it also to the development of regional tourism has brought certain negative impact. Although Xinjiang has the largest number of airports in China, but restricted by the cost of shipping, the promotion and application of shipping is also relatively weak in the public.

Due to Xinjiang's remote location, railway travel is time-consuming and negatively impacts the overall tourist experience, failing to fully meet travelers' needs. Although the road network in Xinjiang is relatively perfect, due to the complex terrain in Xinjiang, there is no road network between many regions, and the accessibility between scenic spots is poor, which also has a certain restriction effect on the development of regional tourism.

3.2. Development has a Low Level and A Single Structure

Xinjiang has rich cultural resources and has made great achievements in economic construction, but not much investment in cultural infrastructure, and the investment subject is single, and the government is the most important subject. The cultural industry is only regarded as a business that needs the development of government agencies, and all the details are completed by government agencies. [3] People's demand for spiritual and cultural products is also gradually increasing. After the traditional tourism industry has experienced a big change, the integration of culture and tourism makes the two further develop further. However, Xinjiang has not yet produced a group of independent, self-owned and self-owned or private cultural enterprises and cultural enterprise groups. At the same time, the investment scale of social forces in Xinjiang's cultural industry is generally small, and the amount is also small. There are few tourism products to perceive the traditional culture of different places and experience the military life, but not few cultural tourism products to seek culture, enjoy culture and experience culture.

3.3. Lagging Digital Tourism Infrastructure and Need for Enhanced Smart Services

Against the backdrop of rapid digital economic development, Xinjiang's tourism industry has revealed notable shortcomings in its digital transformation and upgrading process. Despite the autonomous region government's initiation of smart tourism projects like "Tourism in Xinjiang with One Mobile Phone," the overall digital infrastructure construction remains inadequate. 5G networks primarily cover scenic areas surrounding major cities, while remote scenic spots commonly face issues such as unstable network signals and difficulties in accessing smart devices. The construction

of tourism big data centers is lagging, resulting in low levels of digital management in areas such as scenic spot visitor flow monitoring, tourist behavior analysis, and emergency dispatch. Simultaneously, the digital integration of culture and tourism is limited, with only 12% of cultural heritage scenic areas implementing AR/VR technology applications, which is insufficient to meet the demand of younger tourists for immersive experiences. The digital transformation of tourism enterprises is slow, and online marketing channels are singular with severely homogenized content. This deficiency in digital service capabilities not only constrains the improvement of Xinjiang's tourism service quality but also weakens its market competitiveness in attracting remote customers in the "post-epidemic era."

4. SOLUTIONS FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN XINJIANG

4.1. Through the Platform Economy, Cross-Border Integration, Consulting and Sharing and Other New Models and New Products

The digitalization of the supply chain platform is the basic trend and basic feature of the future development.

In recent years, China's industrial digitalization has rapidly expanded, becoming a crucial driver of national economic development. In order to meet the changing needs of consumers and survive in the fiercely competitive market, traditional industries actively carry out digital transformation, and the individual economy gradually transforms to the platform economy. [5] Platform economy as an online new economy, the ultimate goal is to promote consumption. At present, China's consumer market presents obvious characteristics of digital intelligent platform. With the increase of income, consumers' consumption concepts and ways have changed, from the consumption of goods based on food, clothing, housing and transportation in the past to the more pleasant entertainment virtual experience commodity consumption. With the help of the Internet, online consumption is growing rapidly, and China's online tourism and vacation market is developing rapidly. With the help of the platform economy, more and more offline businesses in Xinjiang, from beautiful scenery and delicious food to Meizhou, have developed "digital business cards" and successfully "planted grass" in the hearts of tourists from all over the country. Data from Meituan and Dianping show that in the past three years, active online businesses in Xinjiang, such as hotels, restaurants, tourist attractions and leisure and entertainment, have maintained a steady growth of about 30% per year. The digital benefits of many destinations along the Duku Highway are more obvious. Taking Yili Kazak Autonomous Prefecture as an example, in the past month, the number of merchants achieving online revenue increased by 60% compared with the same period last year.

4.2. By Integrating Into Digital Technology, We Will Upgrade the Industrial Chain and Expand the Free Trade of Tourism Commodities

At present, although the supply of digital cultural tourism products in Xinjiang has increased, but the profit highlights are not novel enough. All states should pay attention to improving the development quality of digital cultural tourism products and make full use of digital technology to tell Xinjiang stories well. First of all, the development of [6] digital cultural tourism products should highlight the characteristics of Xinjiang and promote the development and transformation of characteristic regional culture to original IP. Continue to cultivate cultural symbols with identification and traffic flow. Secondly, some scientific and technological means are used to attract attention and bring new sensory experience to tourists. [7] takes digital technology as an auxiliary to endow cultural and tourism commodities with national cultural connotation and added value. For example, local scenic spots and cultural centers can learn from the sales model of cultural tourism products of Xinjiang Museum. In addition to store shopping, consumers can also purchase online; They can customize some special doll images, and posters to improve the interest of netizens in the regional culture of Xinjiang. We

should also pay attention to the market marketing of digital cultural tourism products, improve the profitability of digital cultural tourism products, and echo the offline physical cultural tourism projects. The real scene of characteristic scenic spots in Xinjiang can be implanted into digital entertainment scenes such as video games, animation, movies and TV dramas, and a virtual digital cultural space can be built by means of "movie + immersive experience" and "game + virtual tour", so as to increase online consumption caused by virtual experience.

4.3. Upgrading Industrial Chains and Expanding Free Trade of Tourism Commodities through Digital Technology Integration

To address the lag in Xinjiang's digital tourism infrastructure, a coordinated approach to technological integration and collaborative innovation is essential for building a smart tourism system characterized by "comprehensive coverage, intelligent interaction, and cross-sector collaboration." The government should collaborate with telecommunications companies to accelerate the deployment of 5G base stations and the Beidou Navigation System in key scenic areas and transportation corridors, ensuring full coverage of gigabit optical fiber networks and smart sensing devices in all 4A-level and above tourist attractions. Leveraging data centers in Urumqi and Kashgar, a comprehensive big data platform should be established to integrate real-time data on tourist flows, transportation, and ecological conditions, thereby enhancing resource allocation efficiency and emergency response capabilities.

Simultaneously, the "Xinjiang Cloud Tour" smart service platform should be upgraded by embedding AI-powered virtual guides, multilingual translation tools, and disaster early-warning modules. The development of crowd heatmaps and intelligent itinerary planning systems will optimize tourist experiences, while blockchain-based electronic ticketing and digital payment solutions should be promoted to enable seamless "reservation-consumption-feedback" digital processes. Further efforts should focus on digitizing cultural and tourism resources, such as creating high-precision 3D models and augmented reality (AR) restorations of iconic sites like Tianchi Lake and the Kizil Grottoes, fostering immersive online-offline interactive experiences.

Additionally, talent development and regional cooperation must be strengthened. Xinjiang's universities should introduce specialized courses in smart tourism, while partnerships with platforms like Ctrip can provide digital skills training for industry professionals. Capitalizing on the Belt and Road Initiative, cross-border collaboration with Central Asian countries should be enhanced to establish a "Digital Cultural Tourism Corridor," facilitating data interoperability and smart port construction to expand international tourist markets. Through multi-dimensional initiatives encompassing technological infrastructure, service innovation, resource revitalization, and regional cooperation, Xinjiang can systematically overcome bottlenecks in smart tourism transformation and inject new momentum into high-quality development.

5. CONCLUSION

Digital technology plays a crucial role in enhancing both the demand and supply of local tourism. The active application of digital technology can improve tourist satisfaction to a certain extent, promote the increase of tourism demand, strengthen the value creation of tourism products, and make the high-quality development of Xinjiang tourism. General Secretary Xi Jinping also stressed the need to firmly grasp Xinjiang's strategic positioning in China's overall situation and better build a beautiful Xinjiang in the process of Chinese-style modernization.

Therefore, it is crucial to expedite the use and collaboration between local governments and tourism enterprises in border areas, while driving the digital transformation of the tourism industry. Through the digital platform and joint management and accept government supervision, improve the service level, improve satisfaction (high price), prevent non-standard behaviors, and promote the high-quality

development in Xinjiang. We need to strengthen positive publicity to show a new look and new atmosphere of Xinjiang's openness and confidence, tell Xinjiang's stories in the new era in multiple channels and forms, and criticize all kinds of false public opinion, negative public opinion, and harmful remarks. We should further open up tourism in Xinjiang and encourage domestic and foreign tourists to travel to Xinjiang. We will jointly help Xinjiang's competitive industries move to a higher value chain.

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