

Policy Analysis on Tourism Development in the Inner Mongolia

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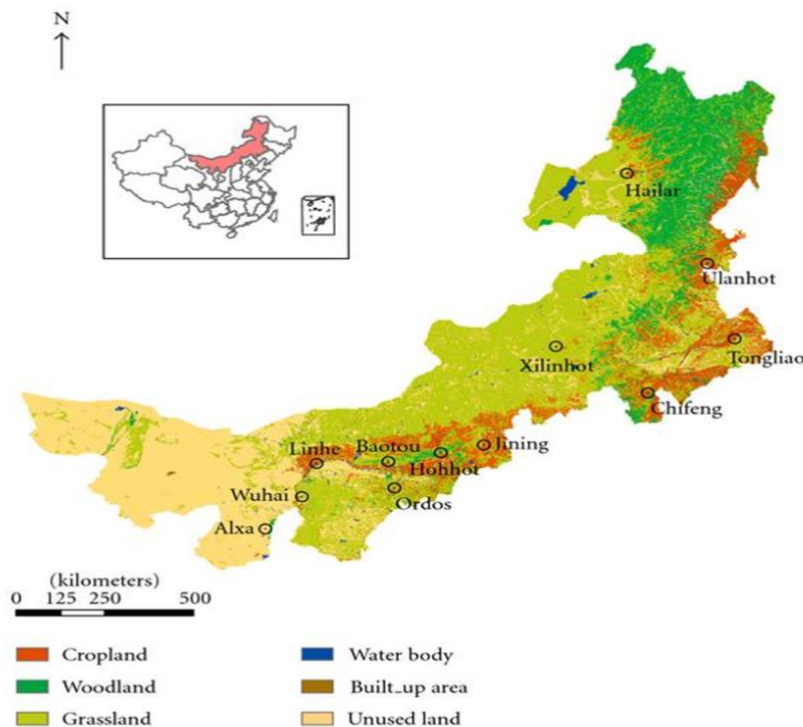
Abstract: In recent years, China's tourism industry has grown significantly, with Inner Mongolia as a prominent example. Known for its unique natural landscapes and rich cultural heritage, Inner Mongolia attracts many domestic and international tourists. This study examines the region's tourism development policies, evaluates their outcomes, and identifies key challenges. It also proposes recommendations for fostering sustainable tourism. A critical focus is the impact of tourism policies on economic growth, environmental protection, and cultural heritage preservation. By analyzing these policies, the study highlights the importance of green tourism, which prioritizes environmental conservation and responsible use of natural and cultural resources. Policymakers must balance tourism's contributions to regional economic development with reducing its negative environmental impacts. Strategies should also promote sustainable local development and strengthen the tourism industry's role in driving economic progress while protecting the environment and cultural heritage for future generations.

Keywords: Tourism Policy, Cultural Tourism, Ecological Protection, Sustainable Development, Green Tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of China's economy, coupled with the improvement in household incomes, has positioned tourism as a vital component of the nation's economic system. Among the various forms of tourism, rural tourism has emerged as a particularly popular travel option, attracting a growing number of visitors. This trend has significantly contributed to the overall revenue generated by the tourism sector, highlighting its importance in driving economic growth and diversification within China. (Su, 2011). The development of tourism in China has demonstrated its potential to become a significant economic sector (Hanqin *et al.*, 1999). Tourism policy can be defined as a set of regulations, rules, guidelines, directives, development and promotion objectives and strategies that provide a framework within which the collective and individual decisions directly affecting long term tourism development and the daily activities within a destination are taken (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009). Tourism enterprises therefore should develop appropriate tourism products and create a summer holiday tourism destination. Tourism has played an important role in poverty alleviation in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and region is rich in natural tourism resources such as grasslands, forests, rivers and lakes, rare animals and plants, volcanoes, as well as cultural tourism resources such as borders, ethnic customs and cultural relics (Hui Li & Ting Guo, 2023). Within the broader trend of industrial integration, the integrated development of agriculture and tourism has become increasingly prevalent. The emergence of such new formats reflects an adaptation to economic and societal development needs. Simultaneously, these new formats promote the sustainable development of both the economy and society, while sustainable development, in turn, drives the continuous transformation and advancement of economic and social structures

(Longtian Fu *et al.* 2024). Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region is located in the northern part of China, and is a vast steppe, desert, and a land rich in cultural heritage and ethnic diversity. The rich natural and cultural tourism resources create broad opportunities for the development of the tourism industry in Inner Mongolia. As the result of the current study indicated, weather and climate positively impact tourist satisfaction. This means that tourists prefer to visit Inner Mongolia in the most comfortable season, namely summer. Tourism enterprises therefore should develop appropriate tourism products and create a summer holiday tourism destination (Chen, 2021). As a result, tourism enterprises should prioritize the development of seasonal tourism offerings aligned with climatic comfort, particularly summer holiday packages. Although the tourism industry contributes substantially to economic growth in the region, the sustainable development of tourism necessitates a balanced approach that also emphasizes environmental conservation and the preservation of cultural heritage. In response to these challenges, the local government has introduced comprehensive policy measures aimed at supporting the sustainable growth of the tourism sector in Inner Mongolia.



Source: Liu Lee, 2014

Picture 1. Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region

Inner Mongolia, officially known as the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, is one of China's five autonomous regions. It shares approximately two-thirds of China's border with the country of Mongolia. Covering an area of 1.18 million square kilometers, the region has a population of approximately 25 million, of which the Mongolian ethnic group constitutes around 20% (Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Government Portal, 2024).

This article aims to critically examine the achievements and challenges associated with tourism policy in Inner Mongolia. It further seeks to provide informed policy recommendations to enhance the sustainable development of the region's tourism sector.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology consists of the following main methods.

Document analysis. Relevant policy documents pertaining to tourism development in Inner Mongolia were collected and systematically analyzed. This method facilitated the identification of policy objectives, core content, and implementation strategies. Document analysis also enabled the examination of the main focus areas and priorities within the tourism policy framework, with particular attention given to its socio-economic impact on the region.

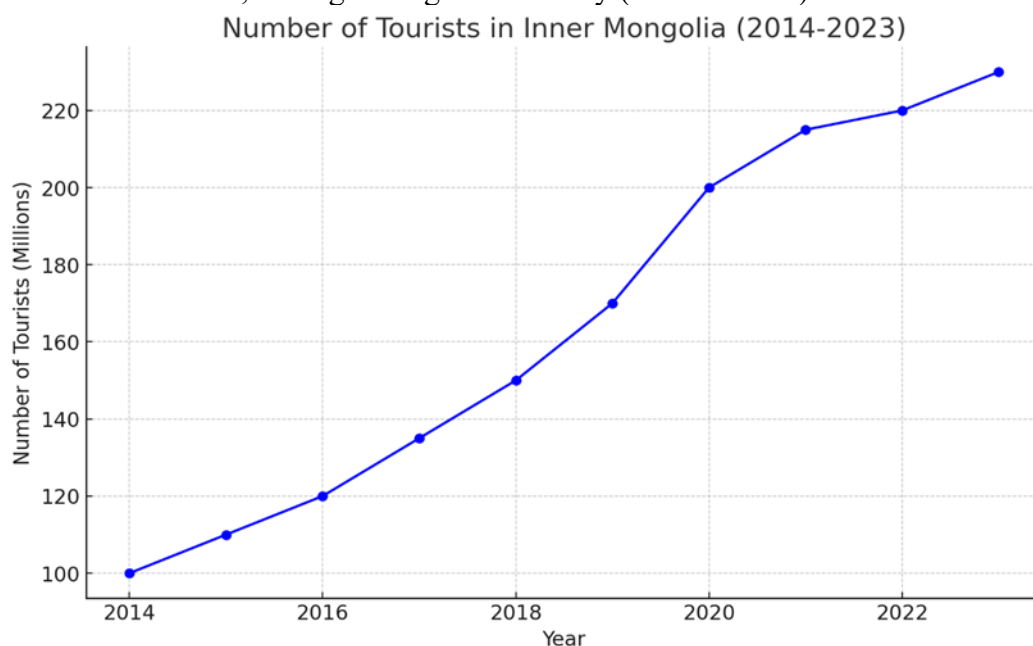
Quantitative analysis. The policy documents included in the study were converted into quantitative data and analyzed using data processing software. This was useful for evaluating the results of policy implementation and allowed us to compare and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the tourism development policy of Inner Mongolia through the identified indicators.

Analytical techniques were applied to interpret the outcomes of policy implementation, focusing on their implications for tourism development. These methods facilitated the identification of both positive and negative impacts of tourism policy on the regional economy and tourism sector performance.

By integrating these methodologies, the study provides a comprehensive assessment of the current status of tourism policy implementation in Inner Mongolia. Furthermore, it identifies the necessary conditions for ensuring effective and sustainable policy outcomes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In recent years, tourism in Inner Mongolia has been developing rapidly. In 2023, Inner Mongolia will receive 230 million foreign and domestic tourists and generate 335 billion yuan in tourism revenue, the highest figure in history (See Picture 2).



Source: Chinese Tourism Organization, 2024

Picture 2. Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region

This success is due to Inner Mongolia's rich tourism resources and the active support of the government. The resolution of the National Assembly "On a set of measures to protect the health and income of citizens, preserve jobs, and stimulate the economy during the epidemic of the coronavirus infection COVID-19", on the reduction and exemption from corporate income tax, Exemption from tax arrears and fines, Exemption from personal income tax, Exemption from customs duty, Exemption from value added tax, Exemption from social insurance contributions, unemployment insurance fund support, Exemption from fines and fines for social insurance contributors, Laws on Amendments to the Law on International Agreements were approved, respectively. Risk perception significantly influences tourists' attitudes towards visiting a destination. Factors such as global pandemics, including COVID-19, safety concerns, climate conditions, and the risk of natural disasters can deter potential visitors (Heesup Hun *et al.*, 2021). To mitigate these risks, tourism organizations must provide comprehensive and accurate information about the destination to enhance tourists' confidence and reduce their perceived level of risk.

As of the summer of 2024, Inner Mongolia's online tourism bookings ranked second in the country. As of the first five months of this year, Inner Mongolia received 99.9 million domestic tourists. According to the data of the Inner Mongolia Tourism Department during the start of the summer season, the number of summer tourism bookings in Inner Mongolia increased by 26% compared to the previous year, the number of outbound travel bookings increased by 66%, and the number of cross-border travel bookings increased by 111%. (National Statistics Committee of China, 2024).

The "Decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of Inner Mongolia on the Coordinated Development of Tourism in the Three Northeast Provinces and Autonomous Regions" officially came into effect on July 1. This decision aims to provide institutional support for the coordinated development of the tourism industry in Liaoning, Jilin, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, and to establish and improve cooperation mechanisms to enhance overall competitiveness. The decision outlines the establishment of a three-tiered mechanism for coordinated development. Provincial and regional governments will jointly address major issues in tourism development, establish mechanisms to promote tourism cooperation, and establish permanent communication and consultation mechanisms for tourism organizations to jointly promote and implement regional cooperation initiatives, and support local governments in provinces and autonomous regions in establishing cooperation mechanisms for inter-regional tourism development. The decision emphasizes the unique tourist attractions of the three northeastern provinces and one region, and emphasizes the coordinated development of ice and snow tourism, ecotourism, ethnic cultural tourism, industrial tourism, agricultural and pastoral tourism, and cross-border tourism (Chinadaily.com.cn, 2024). The diversification and innovative implementation of tourism policies directly or indirectly impact the attractiveness and competitiveness of a destination, thus necessitating a comprehensive consideration of multiple factors in policy-making to achieve harmony and equilibrium (Weichen Ke, 2024). In addition, the policy is planned to intensify the development of new tourism models, forms, and experiences in line with the current and future trends of integrating tourism with other sectors.

The construction of tourism infrastructure in Inner Mongolia has also made great progress. For

example, 279 high-grade travel camps, recreation areas and campsites have been established, ranking first in the country in the number of 5C and 4C grade travel camps and second in the number of national ski tourism resorts.

The Inner Mongolian government is implementing a variety of policies to actively promote tourism. These policies cover many areas, including tourism infrastructure, cultural heritage protection, ecological protection, and tourism brand building.

Infrastructure improvement policy. The Inner Mongolian government places significant emphasis on enhancing tourism infrastructure. For instance, it is undertaking projects to improve road, railway, and air transport systems to expand the regional tourism transportation network. Such infrastructure improvements not only increase travel convenience for tourists but also stimulate the development of new tourism areas. Additionally, the government focuses on creating favorable conditions for visitors by supporting the development of hotels, resorts, and ecological tourism projects.

Cultural tourism policy. Inner Mongolia possesses a rich cultural heritage encompassing steppe culture, Mongolian customs, and religious traditions. To promote cultural tourism, the government implements policies supporting festivals and events that highlight Mongolian culture. For example, events such as the Naadam Festival and the Genghis Khan Sacrifice Ceremony attract numerous tourists while simultaneously fostering local cultural pride.

Ecological tourism policy. Environmental protection plays a crucial role in tourism development. The Inner Mongolian government mandates that tourism projects adhere to the principle of “conservation first, rational use,” aiming to minimize ecosystem destruction resulting from the overexploitation of natural resources. Furthermore, the government supports the development of green tourism and promotes initiatives such as steppe ecological tourism and environmentally friendly tourism projects.

Tourism brand building and market expansion policy. The Inner Mongolian government is actively engaged in developing and strengthening tourism brands to enhance market reach. It promotes branding initiatives such as “Beautiful Inner Mongolia” and “The Edge of the Sky” to showcase the region’s natural beauty and cultural characteristics to both domestic and international markets.

The results of Inner Mongolia's tourism policy are described as follows.

Economic Benefits. The development of tourism in Inner Mongolia has significantly contributed to local economic growth. The tourism sector has increased regional budget revenues, created numerous employment opportunities, and positively influenced the livelihoods of local residents.

Ecological Benefits. Alongside the expansion of tourism, Inner Mongolia’s tourism policies have placed considerable emphasis on environmental protection. Certain tourist areas have implemented measures to reduce pressure on natural resources, such as regulating visitor numbers and preserving the region’s natural landscapes.

Cultural Benefits. The cultural tourism development policy has played an essential role in preserving and promoting Mongolian culture on a broader scale. With government support,

local cultural festivals and celebrations are organized in close association with tourism, thereby enhancing cultural pride among local communities.

There are the following issues and challenges in implementing tourism policies.

Balancing Ecological Protection and Tourism Development. Researchers highlight that achieving a balance between ecological protection and tourism development remains a critical challenge. The steppe and desert ecosystems of Inner Mongolia are extremely fragile, and the rapid growth of tourism has exerted significant pressure on the environment. In certain regions, overexploitation and inadequate management have resulted in steppe degradation and depletion of water resources. Consequently, it is imperative that future tourism policies are more effectively integrated with environmental protection measures.

Deepening cultural tourism development. Although cultural tourism has achieved considerable success in Inner Mongolia, researchers note that in some areas, the cultural tourism content remains shallow and lacks depth, limiting its appeal to high-end tourists. Additionally, concerns have been raised regarding the excessive commercialization of culture, highlighting the need for strategies that preserve cultural authenticity while enhancing the quality of cultural tourism offerings.

Improving the quality and international standards of tourism services. With the expansion of the tourism market, there is an increasing demand for high-quality services. However, some regions continue to face deficiencies in service infrastructure, guide training, and overall tourist experience. Aligning tourism products and services with international standards is essential, as this will not only enhance competitiveness but also generate economic benefits, including increased income, employment, and investment within local communities.

Strengthening ecological protection. Enhancing ecological protection is fundamental to ensuring the sustainable development of tourism in Inner Mongolia. It is essential to implement measures that strictly regulate the use of natural resources and control visitor numbers within tourism projects to minimize environmental degradation.

Deepening cultural tourism development. To improve the competitiveness of Inner Mongolia's cultural tourism, it is crucial to undertake in-depth studies of cultural heritage and develop tourism products that offer novel cultural experiences. Collaborating with universities and research institutions to conduct comprehensive research on the history and customs of the Mongolian people is of particular importance in this regard.

Improving the quality and international standards of tourism services. Enhancing the quality of tourism services significantly influences tourist satisfaction and their intention to revisit. Therefore, it is vital to provide professional training for tourism service personnel and upgrade service infrastructure to meet the expectations and requirements of international tourists.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The tourism development policy of Inner Mongolia is of significant importance due to its positive implications for the regional economy, society, and environment. The findings indicate that sustainable tourism development necessitates a careful balance among economic benefits,

cultural heritage preservation, and environmental stewardship. To enhance regional economic efficiency, it is recommended to attract both domestic and foreign investment while simultaneously increasing employment opportunities to improve the living standards of local residents. Furthermore, the implementation of green tourism initiatives is advisable to mitigate the environmental burden caused by tourism activities and to protect the region's unique natural landscapes and ecosystems. The preservation of cultural heritage is believed to not only contribute substantially to tourism growth but also foster a sense of pride among local communities, thereby encouraging their active participation in the tourism sector.

Integrating the distinctive characteristics and cultural heritage of Inner Mongolia into tourism products and providing unique experiences to both domestic and international tourists can enhance the cultural value of the region. This approach simultaneously ensures the preservation of local culture and generates increased income for the region. It is also essential to emphasize the critical role of government regulation and support in promoting sustainable tourism development. The integrated implementation of local and central government policies, along with the coordinated development of infrastructure, environmental protection measures, and economic support, is imperative. Additionally, regular evaluations of policy implementation, coupled with enhanced research and analysis, are necessary to optimize policy outcomes. Through the adoption of these recommendations, Inner Mongolia's tourism sector can exert a positive influence on the economy, society, and environment, thereby creating the foundations for sustainable and efficient development. Consequently, Inner Mongolia has the potential to become a model region exemplifying regional economic growth, cultural heritage preservation, and balanced environmental utilization.

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