

Exploration of the High-quality Development Path for Eco-tourism in Chongming

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Abstract: Eco-tourism plays a significant role in promoting the sustainable development of the tourism industry. Chongming's eco-tourism significantly lags behind the overall positioning of an excellent ecological island in terms of resource utilization, product development, and consumer satisfaction. The article has conducted a preliminary sorting of the ecological tourism resources in the Chongming area, clarifying the types of resources and focusing on analyzing the unique advantages of its natural resources. Through research methods such as on-site investigations, the article reveals the practical challenges and constraints faced by Chongming's eco-tourism in aspects such as development planning, market mechanism construction, and transportation infrastructure. Against the backdrop of the current era of high-quality development, this study further explores the role of ecological tourism as a new fulcrum for promoting the economic and social development of the region. Specifically, the article proposes a series of development paths, aiming to provide some strategic guidance for the sustainable development of the Chongming area's ecological tourism industry from aspects such as special planning, establishment of development principles, strengthening the market position of tourism enterprises, optimization of transportation conditions, and innovative development of ecological tourism products.

Keywords: Chongming, Eco-tourism, Ecological Economy, Tourism Products, High-quality Development

1. Introduction

As China's socio-economic development

enters a stage of high-quality growth, eco-tourism, as one of the ways of green economic development, is becoming an important lever for high-quality economic growth. The high-quality development of the tourism industry is an inherent requirement for the comprehensive construction of a modern country, an important foundation and strong support for promoting Chinese-style modernization, and an important driving force for promoting high-quality economic development in China. High-quality development is the main thread that runs through the Chinese modernization and it is development that embodies new development concepts, which must adhere to the unified development of innovation, coordination, green, openness, and sharing. The high-quality development of the tourism industry must also follow this principle, forging its own distinctive path and promoting it through innovation-driven, coordinated integration, green orientation, open win-win, and shared inclusiveness.

The rise of eco-tourism is a profound understanding by humanity of the historical laws of civilization progress and environmental change in the development and utilization of natural resources. This form of tourism respects the diversity of nature and culture, emphasizes ecological protection, promotes the development of local communities, and is committed to environmental education. It encourages people to deeply understand nature, enjoy the beauty of nature, and actively participate in nature conservation. Therefore, eco-tourism has rapidly become a significant trend in the tourism industry in the 21st century, marking an important direction for the transformation of the tourism industry towards sustainable development.

China's ecological tourism practices and

academic research started relatively late. Guo Laixi (1997) suggested strategies for the development of ecological tourism in China from the scientific meaning, basic characteristics, and resource potential of ecological tourism ^[1]. Zhong Linsheng, Ma Xiangyuan, and others (2016) reviewed the literature on ecological tourism-related resources, markets, development, management policies, and basic theories ^[2]. He Hongli (2003) conducted a comparative analysis of the ecological tourism resources and development background of Hainan Island and Chongming Island, pointing out that there should be different models for the development of ecological tourism ^[3]. Wu Guoqing (2004) analyzed the advantages of Chongming Island's construction of an ecological recreation area from three aspects: resources, environment, and location, and pointed out the principles and route suggestions for the development and design of ecological tourism products ^[4]. Sheng Hui (2013) analyzed the background, current situation, and market development advantages and disadvantages of Chongming's ecological tourism development, and through questionnaire surveys, studied the composition of tourists and visiting situations of Chongming's ecological tourism, and then proposed relevant strategies and suggestions for market segmentation and marketing of Chongming's ecological tourism ^[5]. From the existing academic attention to Chongming's ecological tourism both domestically and internationally, it can be seen that the level of attention is relatively low, and there are relatively few scholars conducting research, which is somewhat inconsistent with the recent positioning of Chongming as a world-class ecological island.

Chongming's positioning in the development of Shanghai is a world-class ecological island, however, eco-tourism has not yet become a key industry for the development of the ecological island. Chongming Island with less than 20% of Shanghai's land area, contributes nearly half of Shanghai's ecological services with its rich ecological resources and functions. With its unique geographical location and ecological value, Chongming Island has become an important part of ecological protection in Shanghai and even globally. It is not only a key ecological development area for

Shanghai's future but also a guardian of the ecologically sensitive area of the Yangtze River estuary ecosystem.

2. Current Status of Eco-tourism Development in Chongming District

2.1 Overview of Chongming District

Chongming District in Shanghai is composed of three islands: Chongming Island, Changxing Island, and Hengsha Island, with a total land area of 1,413 square kilometers. Chongming Island is located at the mouth of the Yangtze River, China's largest river, and is the world's largest estuarine alluvial island, as well as the third largest island in China and marks the midpoint of China's coastline. Changxing Island, with an area of 89.5 square kilometers, is situated outside the Wusongkou in the south channel of the Yangtze River and is well-known in China as the "Island of Marine Equipment" and "Hometown of Citrus." Hengsha Island, the easternmost island at the mouth of the Yangtze River, covers an area of 54.4 square kilometers and is the smallest and most beautiful of the three islands. The proportion of centenarians on the island is four times the United Nations standard, making it known as the "Island of Longevity" in China, with a functional positioning as the "Leisure and Vacation Island." In March 2014, the United Nations Environment Programme included the construction of Chongming's ecological island as a typical case in its green economy teaching materials. In January 2024, Chongming was awarded the titles of "China's Natural Oxygen Bar" and "China's Climate-Livable City (County)."

2.2 The Types of Eco-tourism Resources are Diverse, Especially with Natural Resources Being More Prominent

Chongming District boasts abundant forest, fauna and flora, and cultural resources. As of May 2024, Chongming District has one 5A-level scenic spot, six 4A-level scenic spots, and twenty 3A-level scenic spots, ranking second in the number of A-level scenic spots among all districts in Shanghai. In addition to well-established attractions such as the Xi Sha Pearl Lake, Dongping National Forest Park, Dongtan Wetland Park, Changxing Island Country Park, and Qianwei Ecological Village,

in recent years, places like the Hongqiao Flower Town in Jianshe Town and the Yuhai Tang Scenic Area in Sanxing Town, which focus on flower tourism, have gradually emerged and become new highlights of Chongming's eco-tourism.

Chongming Island was approved by the Ministry of Land and Resources of the People's Republic of China in September 2005 to be established as a National Geopark. Its scope covers the entire Chongming Island and is composed of "one park, three museums, and one station," namely the Xi Sha Geopark, Chongming Island Xi Sha Wetland Science Museum, World Estuary Sand Delta Water Culture Museum, Qianwei Village Fossil Wood Science Museum, and West-chongming Wetland Scientific Experiment Station. The park houses a wealth of geological relics and landform wonders, among which the large river estuary delta stratigraphic system has completely recorded the changes of sea level over the past 2.6 million years. This is not only an outstanding representative of the geomorphology in the Yangtze River Delta region but also showcases its unique geomorphological value and scientific significance in China and even globally.

The Xi Sha Pearl Lake Tourist Attraction, located at the southwest corner of Chongming Island, is renowned for its magnificent natural scenery. It features the largest natural inland freshwater lake on Chongming Island, the Pearl Lake, as well as the unique Xi Sha Wetland. The scenic area covers an area of 7.8 square kilometers, integrating a variety of ecological landscapes such as wetlands, lakes, science education bases, forests, and marshes. It is a comprehensive ecological tourism area that combines water entertainment, ecological agricultural tourism, and competitive leisure sports experiences. In February 2024, it was designated as a national 5A-level tourist attraction and is the first national 5A-level tourist attraction in Shanghai with ecology as its main feature^[6]. The Xi Sha Pearl Lake area is also the only scenic area in the East China region with a complete wetland ecosystem, which maintains the original appearance of the Yangtze River estuary wetland ecosystem. It is also a place visited by the Ming Dynasty Chinese navigator Zheng He during his voyages to the Western Seas, with a deep accumulation of navigation culture. Migratory

birds are hailed as the "ecological barometers" of nature. Their existence is not only an important sign of the health of the ecological environment, but also a direct indicator of the ecological balance in terms of population size and diversity. The Xi Sha Pearl Lake Scenic Area, as a treasure trove of ecological diversity, has recorded 149 species of birds and 67 species of fish, including national first and second-level protected animals and endangered species. On this vibrant land, the first new genus of biology named after wetlands in China - "West-Chong Aquatic Lice," and the Zhen Dan Crow, known as the "Panda of Birds," are outstanding representatives of ecological diversity. In addition, there are precious species such as the Chinese merganser, a national first-level protected animal, the Yangtze finless porpoise, the Chinese sturgeon, and the wild cormorant, a national second-level protected animal. Their presence not only highlights the ecological value of the Xi Sha Pearl Lake Scenic Area but also serves as the best proof of the ecological protection achievements of this land.

The Xi Sha Wetland, as the only large tidal freshwater marsh wetland with unique tidal phenomena at the Yangtze River estuary, also has significant scientific research value. It boasts abundant wetland biological resources and unique tidal channel geological and geomorphological natural landscapes, which are typical, unique, and diverse both in China and around the world^[7].

The Dongtan Bird National Nature Reserve, located at the eastern end of Chongming Island, is a key step in Chongming Island's journey towards the construction of a world-class ecological island. Among the many migratory bird routes globally, the East Asian-Australasian Flyway is of particular concern due to the threats it faces. This migratory route spans 22 countries, including China, Russia, and Australia, with over 50 million waterbirds migrating through it each year. Chongming Island, with its advantageous geographical location, is right in the heart of this migratory pathway. In 2002, Chongming Dongtan was officially recognized as an internationally important wetland due to its unique ecological value and significant importance to migratory birds. This honor not only affirms the ecological protection efforts of Dongtan but also confirms Chongming

Island's position on the international stage of ecological conservation. On July 26, 2024, at the 46th UNESCO World Heritage Committee meeting, the Yellow (Bohai) Sea of China: Migratory Bird Sanctuaries (Phase II) successfully passed the review, and the Chongming Dongtan Migratory Bird Habitat in Shanghai and four other nominated sites were expanded into the World Heritage List, making Shanghai the first city in China to have a natural World Heritage site [8].

Changxing Island Country Park is located in the central area of Changxing Island, meticulously crafted by Shanghai Qianwei Industry, and is the first country park in the suburbs of Shanghai to be certified as a "National 4A-level Tourist Attraction" and the first to be awarded the honor of "National Five-Star Park for Leisure Agriculture and Rural Tourism" in the whole area tourism characteristic demonstration zone.

2.3 The Ecological Tourism Product System Has Been Basically Established

National geological parks, nature reserves, forest parks, and wetland parks, and other natural landscapes, constitute the rich diversity of Chongming's ecological tourism products. These tourism products not only present a diversified pattern in form but also show deep-level experiences and distinct features in content, thus being more welcomed and favored by the market. Especially those ecological tourism projects that can provide immersive experiences, such as birdwatching tourism, ecological health care, cycling adventures, and study tours, are gradually becoming the new favorites of the Chongming ecological tourism market and attracting widespread attention and interest from tourists from different fields and backgrounds.

3. Chongming's Eco-tourism Development Issues

Ecological tourism resources are the foundation for conducting ecological tourism activities. The ecological tourism resources in Chongming have distinct characteristics in meeting tourism purposes such as "science popularization, sports, and leisure," but there are obvious shortcomings in the development of corresponding tourism products. The reasons can be mainly attributed to the following aspects:

3.1 The Deficiencies in the Planning and Development of Ecotourism

The "Chongming World-Class Ecological Island Development Plan Outline (2021-2035)" has established guiding principles centered on ecology and green development, aiming to promote a comprehensive green transformation in economic and social development. This plan is dedicated to continuously enhancing Shanghai's soft power in the construction of ecological civilization as an international metropolis, leading the establishment of an ecological product value realization mechanism with Chinese characteristics. Through careful planning and implementation, Chongming Island will be shaped into a model of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, and coordinated development between ecology and economy, namely the "Chinese Model." This will demonstrate China's active participation, contribution, and leadership in global ecological civilization construction, and make the Chongming world-class ecological island an important window to showcase China's ecological wisdom and practical achievements.

In various planning positions related to Chongming, although the positioning of a "world-class ecological island" has long been established, there is no special planning for ecological tourism. For example, "Chongming District Cultural Tourism 'the 14th Five-Year' Development Plan" released in 2021 only mentioned "ecological tourism" twice in its entire text. One was in the name of the "Dongtan Wetland Natural Ecological Tourism Resort," and the other was in the context of "building an international ecological tourism resort." This shows that ecological tourism has not been given due attention in the future development planning of Chongming.

3.2 The Main Participants in the Tourism Market Have A Weak Sense of Competition

Tourism enterprises are one of the very important participants in the tourism market. The most important tourism enterprise in Chongming District is undoubtedly the "Shanghai Chongming Ecological Tourism Group Co., Ltd." This company was established in January 2021 based on the original "Shanghai Chongming Tourism

Investment Development Co., Ltd." by the Chongming District Committee and the district government, in accordance with the overall development function positioning of Chongming Island, to further promote the development of the ecological tourism industry, promote the investment, development, and cultivation of ecological tourism throughout the region, and play a demonstrative leading role in government investment. As a local state-owned enterprise with a certain scale that has just been established for 3 years, although the company's name indicates the theme of ecological tourism, the group still shows a lack of market sensitivity and competitive awareness in the development, planning, and construction of ecological tourism resources, as well as in the operation and management of its scenic spots, hotels, and marketing and tourist services. This can be seen from the insufficient promotion of Chongming ecological tourism product routes on the official websites of its subsidiaries and mainstream travel apps.

3.3 The Existing Transportation Remains a Limiting Factor in the Development of Eco-tourism

Accessibility of transportation is a key factor and basic guarantee for the high-quality development of tourism. Currently, the main modes of transportation in Chongming are still self-driving tours or taking tour buses, while the accessibility of public transportation is relatively poor, which greatly limits the further development of ecological tourism in the Chongming area.

Table 1. Transportation Information from Shanghai's Two Major Airports to Main Attractions in Chongming

Departure Point	Destination	One-way Travel Time	Distance	Public Transportation
Hongqiao International Airport	Dongtan Wetland Park	1.40 hours by car (approximately 315 RMB by taxi)	87 km	4 hours
Hongqiao International Airport	Xisha Mingzhu Lake	2.11 hours by car, (approximately 457 RMB by taxi)	124.4km	No direct public transportation available
Pudong International Airport	Dongping National Forest Park	1.40 hours by car (approximately 324 RMB by taxi)	89 km	Almost 4 hours

Data Source: Compiled based on the search results from Baidu Maps.

3.5 The Existing Tourism Products Do Not Highlight the "Ecological" Advantages at All

Currently, the local tourism industry practitioners in Chongming have a clear lack of deep understanding of eco-tourism and have

Starting from Shanghai's two major airports—Pudong International Airport and Hongqiao International Airport—and conducting an optimal route query to the main tourist attractions in Chongming (such as Dongtan Wetland Park, Xisha Mingzhu Lake, and Dongping National Forest Park) under non-traffic-jam conditions, the results show that even the shortest one-way trip requires at least one and a half hours, with taxi fares exceeding 300 yuan, and public transportation takes more than four hours. This fully illustrates the obvious insufficiency in the accessibility of scenic spots and attractions. The lag in the public transportation system, coupled with the 100 yuan toll fee for the Yangtze River Bridge that needs to be paid when driving, further highlights the restrictive role of transportation costs on the development of tourism(as shown in the Table 1).

3.4 The Current Ticket Pricing for the Scenic Spots is Unreasonable

Based on the official information from the scenic area's website and WeChat public account, the Xi Sha Mingzhu Lake Scenic Area in Chongming, as a 5A-level Tourist Attraction, is open to visitors for free. Among the six 4A-level scenic spots, Changxing Island Country Park also implements a free policy, while the average ticket price for the other five Tourist Attractions is 62 yuan. It is worth noting that the ticket price for the Dongtan Wetland Park reaches a high of 80 yuan per ticket during holidays. In addition, among the 20 3A Tourist Attractions, only four charge fees, and the rest are free.

not fully grasped the intrinsic meaning of it. This can be seen from the search results on Ctrip, a mainstream online travel service platform in China. When using "Chongming" as a search keyword, the displayed tourism products are diverse, including one-day tours, group tours, self-guided tours, private group

tours, and study tours. However, none of these product lists explicitly indicate any features related to "ecology." Moreover, popular destinations such as Dongping National Forest Park and Xisha Mingzhu Lake Scenic Area, despite their advantageous geographical locations, also lack clear eco-tourism characteristics.

4. Suggestions for the High-quality Development Path of Chongming's Eco-Tourism

Eco-tourism's high-quality development is a multi-dimensional, systemic issue that involves the protection of the ecological environment, the enhancement of the quality of tourism products, and the promotion of regional economic development.

4.1 Develop a Special Plan for Eco-tourism Development

The natural tourism resources in Chongming District are prominent, showcasing significant development potential, all of which provide a solid foundation for the sustainable growth of ecotourism. The local cultural and tourism authorities should place great emphasis on the planning and development of ecotourism, actively attracting social capital investment, and enhancing the refinement and growth of public management functions. Simultaneously, collaborating with authoritative tourism planning companies within the industry to devise and implement specialized regional ecotourism development plans, overseen by professional teams for market operations, is crucial. Efforts should be made to achieve policy breakthroughs concerning the utilization of existing ecological public welfare forest resources, land use approvals, and the development of agricultural tourism facilities, aiming to promote the smooth progression of ecotourism. Given that Chongming District's strategic positioning as a world-class ecological island entails certain limitations on its development, the Shanghai municipal government should establish corresponding compensation mechanisms based on the full consideration of Chongming's contribution to the overall ecological value of the city, in order to support Chongming's ongoing endeavors in ecological conservation and tourism development.

4.2 Adhere to the Principle of Prioritizing Protection and Developing in A Scientific and Orderly Manner

In the process of developing ecotourism products, it is imperative for the local area to prioritize the protection of the ecological environment as a core principle, ensuring that natural resources are developed and utilized in a scientific and orderly manner. It is crucial to actively seek new methods and models for the conservation and sustainable utilization of ecological resources. In accordance with laws and regulations, it is essential to utilize existing natural reserves, forest parks, wetland parks, and other resources reasonably, while strictly adhering to relevant legal requirements and management standards. Beyond the core conservation zones, it is important to engage in activities such as ecological education, nature exploration, and ecotourism. By systematically designing product content and establishing construction timelines, a high-quality and diverse ecotourism product system can be developed.

4.3 Fully Explore and Make Rational Use of Advantageous Ecological Resources

The local ecotourism development should strategically leverage the core ecological resources of the Dongtan National Bird Nature Reserve, the Yangtze Alligator Protection Area, the Dongping National Forest Park, and the Dongtan Wetland Park to create forest therapy and eco-sightseeing ecotourism products. Emphasis should be placed on the interconnectedness of various elements within ecosystems to avoid content homogeneity in ecotourism products. Strong efforts should be made to effectively combine forest, wetland, river embankments, and farmland spaces, diversifying the design of tourism products to fully meet the daily recreational and fitness needs of residents and visitors. Advancements in infrastructure such as forest trails, wetland boardwalks, and leisurely and health-conscious paths around Chongming Island should be promoted to enhance the eco-friendliness of facilities.

Simultaneously, the land, water, crops, and livestock in rural areas can serve as attractions for tourism and be integrated as elements in the development of ecotourism products centered around agrotourism and leisure agriculture^[9].

4.4 Strengthen the Market Position of Tourism Enterprises as the Main Body

Local tourism enterprises, particularly, should fully utilize the educational resources of the Dongtan National Bird Nature Reserve to extensively develop diversified tourism products such as study tours. To enhance the educational and experiential functions of ecotourism sites, it is essential to improve infrastructure like visitor centers, interpretive trails, natural history museums, science galleries, and informational signage. Establishing diverse scientific bases, internship sites, ecological civilization education centers, and cultural creation sites can not only enrich visitors' touring experiences but also strengthen the environmental education function of the area. Creating new images for Chongming's ecotourism industry, such as educational ecotourism at Dongtan, sports and wellness ecotourism at Xisha-Dongping, and industrial ecotourism at Changxing Island, and actively employing new media for widespread promotion is crucial. Diversification of products should be promoted by increasing the supply of high-quality tourism products and services, developing new formats and themes centered on experiences, health, education, culture, and sports. Enhancing the added value of products, exploring the cultural significance of natural ecological resources, strengthening the integration of culture and tourism, introducing new technologies, innovating product expressions, and enhancing visitor engagement methods are key strategies. Attention should be given to construction, management, and operation to extend the tourism industry chain, vigorously developing new formats such as forest therapy, water sports, parent-child study tours, and RV camping.

4.5 Focus on Developing High-quality Eco-tourism Products

Local tourism development and operational entities should effectively drive the transformation of local ecological resources into tourism value, fostering synergistic development across multiple industries. The key focus should be on developing forest therapy, eco-sightseeing, nature education, and other ecotourism products, introducing a series

of ecologically unique tourism routes characteristic of Chongming. Advancements in forest trails, leisure and health paths, and further development of forest therapy tourism should be pursued.

Efforts should be made to seamlessly integrate ecotourism with other sectors to diversify the product offerings of ecotourism. Establishing the Dongtan National Bird Nature Reserve, wetland parks, forest parks, and 5A scenic areas in Chongming as the fundamental ecological tourism destination system is vital. While emphasizing the protection of the ecological environment and resources, eco-friendly tourism activities should enhance natural education, ecological experiences, and construct a high-quality, diverse ecological tourism product system. Scientifically designing ecotourism routes, fully tapping into Chongming's ecological tourism resources and market conditions, and nurturing ecotourism routes distinctive to the Chongming region ^[10]. Enhancing the attractiveness of core scenic areas within the region, enhancing interaction with surrounding industries, and promoting the integrated development of agriculture, culture, and tourism are essential. Leveraging the advantages of the recently upgraded 5A scenic area, Xisha Mingzhu Lake, to create a new representation of Chongming's ecological tourism. Within the context of the national strategy for the integrated development of the Yangtze River Delta region, positioning itself as a significant leisure tourism destination, efforts should focus on developing Xisha Mingzhu Lake into the "Yangtze River Eco-lounge," aiming to establish it as a world-class "Central Park" within the Yangtze River Delta ^[11].

Through the format of study tours, promoting environmental education, utilizing ecotourism as a conduit for disseminating ecological civilization concepts, enhancing environmental education, and elevating visitors' environmental awareness are paramount. Improving the overall ecosystem services on the island, conducting environmental education within bird nature reserves, Yangtze alligator protection areas, Dongtan Wetland Park, and Dongping National Forest Park, to offer visitors high-quality services for getting close to and experiencing nature.

4.6 Optimize and Improve the Existing

Transportation System

With the commencement and completion of projects such as the second phase of the Chongming Ring Road Landscape Project, the upgrading of flood control measures and landscape enhancement around Chongming Ecological Island, Chongming's development in slow traffic greenway systems, shoreline resource development, and natural ecological environment optimization will be accelerated. On one hand, the Shanghai Rail Transit Chongming Line, connecting Chongming District with the central urban area of Shanghai, passing through Chongming Island, Changxing Island, and Pudong New Area with a total of eight stations, will significantly improve transportation in the eastern region of Chongming. On the other hand, the Shanghai-Chongqing-Chengdu High-Speed Railway (starting from Shanghai, passing through Jiangsu, Anhui, Hubei, Chongqing, and ending at Chengdu Station in Sichuan, spanning four provinces and two municipalities) will greatly enhance regional transportation convenience and efficiency. This will promote economic growth in the basin, achieve regional balanced development, and bring substantial benefits. Positioned as the starting point of the eastern section of this railway line, Chongming will benefit from optimized ecological tourism transportation services, facilitating transportation between key ecotourism destinations and the main line.

5. Conclusion

The construction of ecological civilization should fully utilize local advantageous resources to enhance the internal momentum for high-quality development. "Green development," as one of the new development concepts, relies on ecological tourism as a carrier. While promoting ecological environment protection and cultural heritage, it can vigorously promote the high-quality economic and social development of the local area. As the ecological significance of Chongming Island becomes more prominent, the high-quality development path of its ecological tourism should be highly valued by the government, enterprises, and all sectors of society. Through on-site research and visits, this article has preliminarily explored the current development status of local ecological

tourism, the problems faced, and the areas in urgent need of improvement. It is hoped that through concerted efforts from various parties in terms of special planning, market operation entities, and comprehensive traffic layout, the quality of ecological tourism can be enhanced.

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