

## SWOT analysis of ecotourism development in Qinghai Province from the perspective of Chinese-style tourism modernization

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### Abstract

Chinese-style tourism modernization is a branch and extension of Chinese modernization and plays a guiding role in the development of the tourism industry in the new era. Qinghai Province, due to its unique geographical location, has abundant ecotourism resources. However, its geographical position has also slowed the development of the tourism industry in the region, necessitating strong measures to promote the high-quality development of tourism in Qinghai. This paper uses SWOT analysis to assess the factors influencing the development of ecotourism in Qinghai from four aspects: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It proposes targeted measures to address existing problems, which will help optimize tourism resource allocation, promote socioeconomic development, and ensure the smooth and efficient advancement of the construction of international ecotourism destinations.

### Keywords

Chinese-style tourism modernization; Qinghai Province; Ecotourism; SWOT analysis.

### 1. Introduction

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China made significant strategic deployments to promote green development and foster harmony between humanity and nature. Chinese-style tourism modernization is the latest development within the broader context of Chinese modernization. The term "ecotourism" was first introduced by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 1983, and in 1993, the International Ecotourism Society defined it as tourism activities with a dual responsibility to protect the natural environment and sustain the livelihoods of local communities. Ecotourism has unique functions and characteristics, aligning with modern development trends, and has become a means for promoting economic growth in many countries and regions.

In 2021, Qinghai Province issued the "Overall Plan for Accelerating the Construction of National and International Ecological Civilization Highlands in Qinghai Province," which was guided by Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization. This plan aims to develop "seven new highlands" in the province. While Qinghai boasts rich ecotourism resources, its ecosystem remains fragile, and the economic benefits of its ecological economy have yet to be fully realized. Promoting sustainable economic development in the province through ecotourism is a sound choice. Currently, the development of ecotourism in Qinghai is slow, and numerous issues must be addressed. It is crucial to correctly assess the strengths and weaknesses of ecotourism development in Qinghai and, under the guidance of relevant policies, focus on building national and international ecological civilization highlands. Ultimately, the goal is to create a "Beautiful China" and a "Beautiful World" model in Qinghai.

## 2. Overview of the Study Area

Qinghai Province is located in the northeastern part of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau in China, positioned on the first step of the country's three-step topography. It is the source of the Yangtze River, Yellow River, and the international Lancang River, earning it the titles "Source of Three Rivers" and "Water Tower of China." Due to its unique geographical location, Qinghai has developed a distinctive local culture and abundant tourism resources, giving it significant ecological importance.

## 3. Definition of Concepts

### 3.1. Chinese modernization

The first is the essence of Chinese modernization: Chinese modernization is socialist modernization under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. While it shares common features with the modernization of other countries, it also has distinctive characteristics that are rooted in China's national context. The second is the core requirements of Chinese modernization: These include upholding the leadership of the Communist Party of China, adhering to socialism with Chinese characteristics, achieving high-quality development, promoting whole-process people's democracy, enriching the spiritual lives of the people, achieving common prosperity for all, promoting harmony between humanity and nature, building a community with a shared future for mankind, and creating a new form of human civilization.

Chinese Characteristics of Modernization (Five Key Characteristics): 1. Chinese modernization is modernization with a large population. 2. Chinese modernization is modernization that pursues common prosperity for all. 3. Chinese modernization is modernization that balances material and spiritual civilization. 4. Chinese modernization is modernization that promotes harmony between humanity and nature. 5. Chinese modernization is modernization that follows a path of peaceful development.

Major Principles of Chinese Modernization (Five Key Principles): 1. Upholding and strengthening the comprehensive leadership of the Communist Party of China. 2. Adhering to the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics. 3. Adhering to a people-centered development approach. 4. Persisting in deepening reform and opening up. 5. Upholding the spirit of struggle.

Two Major Tasks of Chinese Modernization: 1. Fully building a strong socialist modern country. 2. Fully advancing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

On October 16, 2022, the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China was held in Beijing, where the General Secretary provided an in-depth explanation of Chinese modernization and emphasized the Party's central mission. We must incorporate the content of the 20th National Congress report into all aspects of social development and related activities, promoting the continuous integration of Chinese modernization with practical implementation. This will help to deepen and enrich the process of Chinese modernization. Since the 20th National Congress, the importance of Chinese modernization has garnered widespread attention, and many scholars have contributed to discussions on the topic, leading to a significant increase in academic publications on Chinese modernization.

### 3.2. Chinese-style tourism modernization

Wei Xiao'an believes that Chinese-style tourism modernization represents a new transformation of the tourism industry. The structure of the tourism market is changing, with declining consumer capacity, rising diversified demands, and adjustments in the traditional supply framework. As new highlights and challenges coexist, it is necessary to fully explore the

role of tourism, clearly distinguish between the public and private sectors, establish new evaluation indicators, and promote the deep integration of culture and tourism.

Wu Wenxue points out that the 20th National Congress report calls for using modern thinking to plan and construct a new development pattern for tourism. Tourism development should be integrated into the broader context of national modernization. By focusing on new consumption and supply trends, and by innovating tourism products, cultivating market players, and expanding new tourism spaces, tourism can fully showcase its new role.

Zhou Jiucui believes that Chinese tourism is undergoing a fundamental shift from market-driven and investment-led development to socially-driven development. The development of tourism in the new era must align with the characteristics of the times and demonstrate social responsibility. Emphasis should be placed on cross-industry integration, themed tourism development, and the application of platform thinking. Additionally, cultural elements must be deeply integrated into national strategies such as rural revitalization and urban renewal.

Song Rui emphasizes that, according to the 20th National Congress report, tourism development must be viewed in the context of Chinese-style modernization, unprecedented global changes, high-quality development, the "visible hand" (government intervention), and innovation. These five aspects must be accurately understood and thoughtfully applied to explore new paths for high-quality tourism development in the current environment.

Zhang Hui believes that achieving high-quality development is the main goal for the future of China's tourism development. High-quality tourism should act as an important engine for the national economy, countering cyclical fluctuations, becoming a key component of rural revitalization and urban renewal, and serving as a powerful force in building a modern socialist country.

Lei Haisu points out that the five characteristics of Chinese-style modernization have created significant opportunities and injected strong momentum into the high-quality development of tourism. In the new era and under the new development pattern, the tourism industry should fully play its role as a strategic pillar industry and modern service sector, contributing to economic growth, social well-being, environmental sustainability, and acting as a platform for international and domestic cooperation.

Wu Jinmei believes that enterprises are the cells of the social economy, and the construction of Chinese-style tourism modernization requires innovative practices from a group of healthy and dynamic Chinese tourism companies, capable of competing on the world stage. As the tourism industry enters the new era, Chinese tourism enterprises must clarify their service goals, find new development paths, take on new responsibilities, and contribute to the realization of Chinese-style tourism modernization through high-quality business development.

Li Xinjian and Gu Jiaxian argue that Chinese-style tourism modernization is not only a critical part of Chinese modernization but also a driving force behind it. Tourism modernization must be considered in the context of China's large population, common prosperity, the balance between material and spiritual civilizations, harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature, and the path of peaceful development. It is essential to explore how the tourism industry can implement and respond to the strategies of Chinese-style modernization.

## **4. Analysis of the Current Situation of Ecotourism Development in Qinghai Province**

### **4.1. Strengths Analysis**

#### **4.1.1. Abundant Ecotourism Resources**

Qinghai Province boasts rich and diverse ecotourism resources, covering a wide range of areas, including world natural heritage sites, national-level ecotourism demonstration zones, nature

reserves, scenic spots, water conservancy scenic areas, geological parks, forest parks, and wetland parks. A variety of destination systems have been gradually established, utilizing these tourism resources as carriers.

#### **4.1.2. National Policy Support**

In August 2016, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized the "Three Greatest" strategic positioning of Qinghai, highlighting its significance for national ecological security and the long-term sustainable development of the nation. This strengthened Qinghai's determination and confidence in deeply implementing the "One Excellence, Two Highs" strategy and in resolutely building an ecological civilization highland. In March 2021, during the deliberation of the Qinghai delegation at the National People's Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed the construction of four major industrial bases ("Four Lands") in Qinghai, pointing the way for the province's high-quality development. Building an international ecotourism destination in Qinghai not only protects the environment but also showcases the boundless beauty of Qinghai, playing a crucial role in promoting cultural exchange and sustainable economic development.

#### **4.1.3. Prominent Ecological Value**

The Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, known as the "regulator and stabilizer of the Earth's atmosphere," holds unique geographical significance. Qinghai Province, located in the plateau, is rich in biodiversity and plays a critical role in China's ecological security. Its ecological value includes serving as an ecosystem regulator, a "Water Tower of China," the source of major rivers, a region with diverse biological lineages, and a frozen soil zone that maintains ecological balance.

### **4.2. Weaknesses Analysis**

#### **4.2.1. Significant Seasonal Variations in Tourism**

Qinghai Province has a typical high-altitude continental climate, with cold winters, strong winds, and dry air, which contribute to low human comfort indices for most of the year. The peak tourism season is concentrated in the months of June to August. Many domestic and international tourists have concerns about the region's climate, leading most visitors to opt for travel during the peak season.

#### **4.2.2. Infrastructure and Services Need Improvement**

The transportation network is unevenly distributed, and the distances between tourist attractions are relatively long and disconnected, which hinders the development of ecotourism in Qinghai. Additionally, the province's ecotourism resources have not been fully integrated. Although the resources are abundant, there is a lack of cohesive connection between attractions, resulting in fragmented tourism experiences. Tourists often prefer well-known attractions, which leads to inefficiencies in balancing economic, social, and ecological benefits. Some popular scenic spots have not adopted intelligent systems, resulting in fragmented and insufficient services.

#### **4.2.3. Insufficient Development of Tourism Products and Limited Influence**

The forms of ecotourism products are relatively singular, lacking innovation, and the products offered do not fully integrate local characteristics. Large sports events and entertainment activities are held infrequently, which limits their ability to attract a substantial number of tourists. Moreover, the development of influential tourism brands has been lacking, and data analysis has not been effectively used to package and promote tourism products.

### **4.3. Opportunities Analysis**

Ecotourism relies on natural ecological environments, striving for a harmonious connection between humans and nature. Analyzing domestic and international tourism market trends reveals that China's tourism industry is advancing to deeper levels, gradually shifting toward western resource markets. Qinghai Province, with its unique and abundant resources—

including snow-capped mountains, wetlands, forests, folk culture tourism, ice and snow tourism, and self-driving tourism—possesses significant advantages in these areas.

#### **4.4. Challenges Analysis**

Tourists, tourism practitioners, local residents, and tourism resources form a unified relationship, and all are stakeholders. Although Qinghai is an ecologically rich province, its environment is extremely fragile. Protecting the natural environment remains a challenging issue in the development of the tourism industry. Therefore, while pursuing economic benefits, it is essential to adhere to the principle of harmony between humanity and nature, as outlined in the 20th National Congress report. Following the "Two Mountains Theory" will better ensure the sustainable development of ecotourism.

### **5. Future Development Pathways**

#### **5.1. Seizing National Opportunities and Promoting Development**

Qinghai Province is an ecological powerhouse. The future development of its ecotourism must align with the overarching strategies of the "Three Greatest" and the "Four Bases" proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping. Efforts should be concentrated on developing Qinghai's ecotourism, building an international ecotourism destination, and transitioning from traditional sightseeing tourism to ecological experience tourism. Additionally, there should be a strong focus on developing high-altitude polar tourism, creating world-class ecotourism routes, aligning with national macro policies, and enhancing the visibility of Qinghai's ecotourism. These actions will lay the groundwork for high-quality development of international ecotourism destinations.

#### **5.2. Improving Infrastructure and Enhancing Service Efficiency**

Infrastructure is the backbone of tourism development and a guarantee for sustainable growth. While improving infrastructure, Qinghai should promote the adaptive use of new technologies in scenic area management, continuously optimize the structure of facilities, and enhance the visitor experience. In addition, accessibility between tourist hubs and scenic areas should be improved by establishing direct transportation routes, reducing the time tourists spend on the road. Professional tourism talent should be cultivated or recruited to improve service quality.

#### **5.3. Innovating Product Systems to Meet Public Demand**

Focusing on ecological protection, leveraging resource advantages, competing through product and service innovation, and aiming for economic benefits, Qinghai must continuously innovate its tourism product systems and service methods. Local cultural characteristics should be embedded in tourism products to enrich their cultural content and value. The integration of culture and tourism should be actively promoted to foster growth.

##### **5.3.1. Creating Ecotourism Demonstration Zones**

Key scenic areas identified in the "Qinghai Plan for Building an International Ecotourism Destination" should be developed. Utilizing mountain, water, forest, field, lake, grassland, sand, and ice resources, functional and facility enhancements in these areas should be continuously expanded and improved. Experts should be brought in to create detailed improvement plans, innovating across all six essential tourism elements.

##### **5.3.2. Developing Year-Round Tourism and Enriching Tourism Products**

Qinghai's high-altitude continental climate brings significant seasonal variations. The province should develop tourism products or activities that adapt to these seasonal changes, extending the tourist experience throughout the year. For example, winter snow tourism or health tourism, adventure tourism, and stargazing tourism can be developed based on tourists'



interests. Additionally, tourism activities can be organized around the six new tourism elements: business, wellness, learning, leisure, emotions, and novelty, to better meet the diverse needs of the public.

### **5.3.3. Rooting Tourism in Local Culture and Promoting Cultural Integration**

The 20th National Congress report emphasizes the need to shape tourism with culture and showcase culture through tourism, promoting deep integration of culture and tourism. Cultural development is given a prominent position, reflecting the great importance the central government, under the leadership of Xi Jinping, places on cultural and tourism development. Qinghai Province should strengthen policies supporting culture and tourism, fostering creativity, and developing new tourism experiences rooted in local cultural characteristics, creating culturally rich scenic spots.

### **5.4. Diversifying Activities and Unlocking Consumption Potential**

The key to enhancing consumption within scenic areas is building a strong promotional platform, utilizing the internet, media, short video platforms, newspapers, and other communication channels. While creating unique tourism experiences, promotion should be intensified to attract external media and tourists. Qinghai's unique scenic resources can host themed activities, such as the Qinghai Lake Music Festival and the Qinghai Lake Tour of Qinghai Lake Cycling Race, which, when combined with local tourism industries, can drive the growth of subsidiary industries. This approach will foster integrated development, stimulating consumption while diversifying tourism activities. Furthermore, during the off-season, discounts can be increased by offering promotions on tickets and store merchandise through group buying and other special offers.

### **5.5. Strengthening Scenic Area Management and Enhancing Safety**

Scenic area management should be improved by developing emergency response mechanisms, establishing comprehensive, all-around video surveillance systems, and adopting more intelligent equipment. This will enhance internal management and coordination within scenic areas. An intelligent early warning system should be established to predict emergency situations, ensuring the safety of both scenic areas and tourists, and preventing potential risks. The management system should be optimized by assigning specific responsibilities to individuals. Incentive policies should be introduced to encourage creativity and innovation within scenic areas. Local cultural characteristics should be integrated into scenic area development, creating attractive local brands and product systems. Following the principle of "shaping tourism with culture, showcasing culture through tourism," efforts should be made to promote the high-quality development of cultural tourism.

## **6. Future Development Pathways**

Through SWOT analysis, it is evident that Qinghai Province has clear strengths and weaknesses in developing ecotourism. Its strengths lie in its unique tourism resources and prominent ecological value. However, there is much room for improvement in infrastructure, talent development, intelligent systems, management structures, product systems, and innovative activities. Qinghai must seize opportunities, relying on national policy support and leveraging its tourism resources to ensure quality development. While accelerating development, efforts should be made to address and improve weaknesses, maintain close ties with leading tourism provinces, and learn from successful experiences to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. By following the path of Chinese-style tourism modernization, Qinghai can elevate its ecotourism to a new level.

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