

# Research on the Development Path of In-depth Integration of Culture, Sports and Tourism in Zigong City Based on the SWOT Model

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## Abstract

Based on the SWOT model, this study takes Zigong City as the research object, adopts research methods such as literature review, logical analysis, field investigation, and interview. It first defines the relevant concepts, then clarifies the current status of the integration of culture, sports and tourism (hereinafter referred to as "culture-sports-tourism") in Zigong City. Subsequently, it analyzes the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of the city's culture-sports-tourism integration. Finally, it explores the development paths of Zigong's culture-sports-tourism integration from four dimensions: SO (Strengths + Opportunities), WO (Weaknesses + Opportunities), ST (Strengths + Threats), and WT (Weaknesses + Threats). From the perspective of the integrated development of culture-sports-tourism, this study aims to guide the structural upgrading of the sports industry, build Zigong's characteristics, form Zigong's brand, and shape the core competitiveness of the sports industry, thereby promoting the in-depth integrated development of culture-sports-tourism.

## Keywords

SWOT Model; Culture-Sports-Tourism; In-depth Integration.

## 1. Introduction

The integrated development of culture-sports-tourism is a new trend, new model, and new driving force for industrial development, as well as an inherent requirement for the high-quality development of county-level economies. With the continuous advancement of national strategies such as "Cultural Confidence", "Beautiful China", "Healthy China", and "Rural Revitalization", and the constant emergence of new changes in the global industry, a trend of continuous integration of multiple industries has emerged, while each industry is reshaping its connotation and structure. Against this background, the integration of culture-sports-tourism is not only the general trend but also an inevitable trend in the evolution of industrial development. The integrated development of the sports industry and the cultural-tourism industry has become a focus of meeting people's needs for a better life, which is in line with the requirements of the era of high-quality development.

In early May 2024, the CPC Sichuan Provincial Committee and the People's Government of Sichuan Province issued the Action Plan for Accelerating the Construction of a Sports-Powerful Province. This plan includes 2 special provisions to support the development of Sichuan's sports industry, injecting new vitality into the industry and enabling it to contribute to economic growth and the construction of a new development pattern. At present, Chinese scholars have conducted relatively few studies on the integration of the culture-sports-tourism industry, which are mainly focused on the theories and logics of the integration, or applied

research on the integrated development of regional industrial economies with cities or towns as carriers.

In terms of theoretical and logical research: He Li (2021) argued that the in-depth integration of the culture-sports-tourism industry improves the market structure of the "sports + tourism" sector, effectively promotes the inheritance and development of China's historical culture, and contributes to the advancement of national cultural systems and policies. However, it also faces certain dilemmas, and the author proposed two effective solutions: "giving full play to the leading role of the cultural and creative industry" and "improving the construction of relevant laws and regulations".

Yin Hong (2019) believed that the core of the integration of the culture-sports-tourism industry lies in improving the efficiency of resource reallocation. He put forward five mechanism functions and four models, and focused on discussing the integration paths centered on four aspects: event resources, product innovation, industrial ecology, and environmental protection. He Wenyi (2019) pointed out that the sports industry plays an important role in the development of the cultural and tourism industries; meanwhile, the cultural and tourism industries can help the sports industry improve its industrial chain and business model, and also play a key role in enhancing industrial added value. After studying the attributes of the culture-sports-tourism industry, he concluded the coupling nature and integration logic of this industry.

Dong Qian (2020) stated that the market foundation is the basic prerequisite for the integrated development of culture-sports-tourism, and it is necessary to make good use of the opportunity brought by the Beijing Winter Olympics to better integrate the functions of culture-sports-tourism in gathering people, educating people, and improving people's health. He emphasized that combining the sports spirit embodied in the Winter Olympics with traditional Chinese culture is of great significance for promoting the integrated development of culture-sports-tourism.

## **2. Definition of Relevant Concepts**

### **2.1. Sports Industry**

The sports industry is a composite industry that integrates economic, social, and cultural attributes. Internationally, the definition of the sports industry centers on the "production and consumption of sports activities", emphasizing its nature as a "service industry" while covering relevant derivative fields. In China, the definition of the sports industry is mainly based on the Statistical Classification of the Sports Industry (revised in 2019, the latest version in effect) issued by the National Bureau of Statistics. This standard, combined with the development stage of China's sports industry (transition from "sports undertakings" to "sports industry"), defines the sports industry as "a collection of activities that provide sports services and products for the public, as well as activities related to these services and products". It emphasizes two key attributes:

Service-oriented: Centered on "meeting the public's sports needs", it is different from the traditional "sports undertakings" (government-led public sports services, such as the construction of national fitness facilities).

Extended relevance: Covering three major sectors: "direct sports activities" (e.g., events, fitness), "sports manufacturing" (e.g., sports equipment), and "sports derivative services" (e.g., sports tourism, sports finance). Its scope expands dynamically with social needs and technological development, with the ultimate goal of meeting the public's sports consumption demands and forming a sustainable economic value chain.

## 2.2. Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism is a composite format formed by the in-depth integration of "culture" and "tourism". Its core logic is to take cultural resources as the core attraction and tourism activities as the carrier, so as to meet tourists' needs for cultural cognition, experience, exploration, and emotional resonance. After the establishment of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MCT) in 2018 (marking that "cultural-tourism integration" officially became a national strategy), documents such as the 14th Five-Year Plan for the Development of Culture and Tourism define cultural tourism as: "Cultural tourism is an activity that relies on resources such as China's excellent traditional culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture, and realizes the goal of 'shaping tourism with culture and highlighting culture through tourism' through tourism products (e.g., cultural heritage tours, folk experience tours, red tourism, cultural performances). Its purpose is to meet the people's diverse cultural tourism needs while promoting cultural inheritance and industrial development."

## 3. Current Status of the Integration of Culture, Sports and Tourism in Zigong City

As a national historical and cultural city, Zigong City relies on its three core cultural resources—"salt, dragon, and lantern". Guided by policies and driven by innovation, it is accelerating the in-depth integration of culture, sports, and tourism, forming a development pattern of "shaping tourism with culture, highlighting culture through tourism, and invigorating tourism with sports". At the same time, it also faces challenges in industrial coordination and supporting upgrading.

### 3.1. Resource Foundation and Policy Support

Zigong has unique cultural-tourism endowments and clear strategic plans. Its "salt-dragon-lantern" cultural system has significant advantages:

Salt well heritage has been included in China's World Cultural Heritage tentative list.

The Dashanpu Dinosaur Fossil Group has become a world geological heritage.

The Zigong Lantern Festival, a national intangible cultural heritage, received over 2.08 million tourists, achieved a comprehensive income of 236 million yuan, and gained over 3 billion online exposures during the 31st session in 2025.

In terms of policies, the 9th Plenary Session of the 13th CPC Zigong Municipal Committee issued the Decision on Promoting the In-depth Integration of Culture and Tourism and High-Quality Construction of an International Tourist City, proposing a development path of "integration of four dimensions" (ecology, culture, industry, and form) and clarifying the goal of basically building an international tourist city by 2030. Meanwhile, it has laid out a "fast-travel and slow-tour" transportation network and eVTOL low-altitude tourism take-off and landing points, laying a foundation for integrated development.

### 3.2. Achievements in Industrial Integration

The industrial integration presents the characteristics of "led by core IP and symbiotic with diverse formats":

Lantern culture: It has regained vitality through the "intangible cultural heritage + technology + market" model. Relying on the Lantern Academy, it has realized the "order-based" cultivation of talents, with young creative teams accounting for over 90%. It has continuously launched popular lantern groups such as "Jingwei Goddess" and "Intangible Cultural Heritage Chinese Dragon", doubling ticket revenue in three years. In addition, it has expanded the international market through the "Zigong Lanterns Light Up the World" campaign.

Dinosaur culture: It has built an industrial chain of "scientific research + popular science + amusement". The Dinosaur Museum received 1.6 million tourists in 2024 and formed a linkage with Fantawild Dinosaur Kingdom, achieving a comprehensive income of 67.92 million yuan in the first half of 2025, with the participation in study tour programs increasing by 14.3% year-on-year.

Salt culture: With the Fuxi River Salt Culture Corridor as the carrier, the "Night Tour on Fuxi River" project receives nearly 10,000 tourists annually. It has also linked with Yanbang cuisine to create a national rural tourism boutique route titled "Visiting the Salt Transportation Waterway and Tasting Yanbang Cuisine".

In addition, new formats such as "sports + cultural tourism" and "red culture + cultural tourism" have gradually taken shape. For example, the "Traveling in Zigong with Events" activity has driven the event economy, and the former residence of Comrade Jiangjie (a revolutionary martyr) has been selected into the top 50 national cultural heritage tourism routes.

### 3.3. Innovation Paths

Zigong has explored an integration mechanism of "government empowerment + market operation + talent support":

Government role transformation: The government has shifted from a "provider" to a "supervisor". It has organized the Lantern Festival through the "government coordination + enterprise bidding" model—dividing 28 lantern group sections and introducing more than 20 enterprises for competition in 2025. It has also issued special policies for lantern talents, promoting the inclusion of "lantern art designer" in the national occupational classification.

Technology empowerment: The Dinosaur Museum has used digital technology to create immersive exhibition areas; the Zigong Lantern Festival has integrated light and shadow technology and new media communication, with Douyin topics gaining 1.284 billion exposures.

Institutional innovation: It has established a Cultural and Tourism Development Group to integrate resources, promoted the exploration of a new "cultural tourism + traffic" track, and expanded foreign cultural trade relying on the national cultural export base.

### 3.4. Existing Shortcomings

However, the integration of culture-sports-tourism in Zigong still has shortcomings:

Insufficient industrial chain coordination: The linkage between the three core IPs ("salt, dragon, lantern") is weak—salt cultural tourism revenue is only 1/20 of the lantern industry.

Inadequate supporting facilities: The standardization of services such as accommodation and catering around scenic spots is low, and some rural tourism spots have poor transportation accessibility.

Imbalanced talent structure: There is a large gap in high-end operation and creative talents, and the professional quality of front-line service personnel needs to be improved.

Single cultural tourism consumption scenarios: The night economy lacks other supports except the Lantern Festival, resulting in insufficient ability to "convert traffic into retention"—the average stay time of tourists during the 2025 Spring Festival holiday was only 1.5 days.

In general, the integration of culture-sports-tourism in Zigong has entered a new stage of "resource activation → industrial upgrading → brand output". Lantern and dinosaur cultures have become core growth drivers. However, it is necessary to further release the comprehensive benefits of "culture-sports-tourism +" by strengthening IP coordination, improving supporting services, and fostering diverse formats, so as to promote the transformation from a "single-point blockbuster" model to an "all-region and all-season" development model.

## 4. SWOT Analysis of the Integration of Culture, Sports and Tourism in Zigong City

### 4.1. Strengths (S): Core Resources and Industrial Foundation Lay a Solid Foundation for Development

Zigong has three irreplaceable cultural resources ("salt, dragon, lantern"), all of which have formed brand influence:

The Dashanpu Dinosaur Fossil Group has been listed as a world geological heritage.

Salt well heritage has been included in China's World Cultural Heritage tentative list.

The Zigong Lantern Festival (a national intangible cultural heritage) accounts for 92% of the global lantern market share, with the 31st session in 2025 receiving over 2.08 million tourists, achieving a comprehensive income of 236 million yuan and gaining over 3 billion online exposures.

The dinosaur cultural industrial chain has realized the coordination of "scientific research + popular science + amusement". The Dinosaur Museum received 1.6 million tourists in 2024 and formed a complementary linkage with Fantawild Dinosaur Kingdom, achieving a comprehensive income of 67.92 million yuan in the first half of 2025. The participation in study tour programs increased by 14.3% year-on-year, making it a core destination for family tours and study tours in the Sichuan-Chongqing region.

Focusing on the construction of a "fast-travel and slow-tour" transportation network, Zigong has accelerated the advancement of external transportation links such as the Zigong-Yongchuan Expressway and the Jiangjin-Luzhou-Yibin Expressway. It has completed the reconstruction project of the Yantan section of the S213 Line (connecting Xianshi Ancient Town) and the reconstruction project of the Baiguo-Laimu section of the S210 Line in Rong County (connecting rural scenic spots), realizing full coverage of Class III or higher highways in municipal-level or above agricultural parks and 3A-level or above scenic spots. It has innovatively laid out eVTOL low-altitude tourism take-off and landing points, optimized the "Night Tour on Fuxi River" water route, and launched customized services such as scenic spot direct buses and online-hailed public transport. The average occupancy rate of business hotels in the main urban area reached 95.4% during the 2025 Spring Festival, and the improvement of transportation accessibility and service support has significantly enhanced the tourist carrying capacity.

### 4.2. Weaknesses (W): Insufficient Industrial Coordination and Supporting Shortcomings Restrict Development Potential

The three core IPs show a pattern of "dominance of one pole and weakness of the other two":

The lantern industry accounts for over 60% of the total cultural tourism revenue, while salt cultural tourism revenue is only 1/20 of the lantern industry. Salt cultural experience is still limited to the "Night Tour on Fuxi River" sightseeing, lacking immersive interactive projects.

The development of red cultural tourism resources is lagging behind—the number of tourists received by the former residence of Comrade Jiangjie (a red education base) decreased by 45.14% year-on-year during the 2025 Spring Festival, failing to form an effective linkage with the "salt-dragon-lantern" IPs.

There is a lack of unified planning among IPs. For example, the combination of dinosaur-themed cultural and creative products with lantern elements is insufficient, failing to form a synergy effect of "1+1+1>3".

Cultural tourism consumption is highly dependent on seasonal projects. The night economy lacks alternative products except the Lantern Festival—the average stay time of tourists during the 2025 Spring Festival holiday was only 1.5 days, far lower than that of similar tourist cities



in Sichuan-Chongqing (e.g., Leshan, with an average stay of 2.8 days). Rural tourism spots have weak supporting facilities: some areas have poor transportation accessibility, and the standardization of catering and accommodation is low. For example, some tea garden scenic spots in Rong County still have "dead-end roads", restricting the development of all-region tourism. In addition, cultural and creative products are highly homogeneous, lacking popular products such as "Yanbang cuisine + cultural and creative" and "dinosaur IP + technology", with secondary consumption accounting for less than 20%.

#### **4.3. Opportunities (O): Policy Windows and Market Demand Create Development Space**

As the rotating chair of the Southern Sichuan-Western Chongqing Culture-Sports-Tourism Integration Development Alliance, Zigong can rely on the "Construction of the Chengdu-Chongqing Twin-City Economic Circle" strategy to jointly launch the "Southern Sichuan Cultural Tourism Boutique Tour" route with Luzhou and Yibin, connecting scenic spots such as Fantawild Dinosaur Kingdom, Shunan Bamboo Sea, and Dazu Rock Carvings. The alliance's booth sold over 2 million yuan worth of cultural and creative products on-site at the 2025 Chongqing Urban Cultural Tourism Festival, showing initial results in regional linkage.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MCT) is promoting the integrated development of "intangible cultural heritage + tourism" and "museum + tourism". Zigong can take this opportunity to apply for the Dinosaur National Tourist Resort and include the salt well heritage in the World Cultural Heritage application sequence, further enhancing its international influence.

Zigong lanterns have been exhibited in more than 80 countries and regions. In 2025, it plans to realize over 200 domestic lantern exhibitions and over 100 overseas lantern exhibitions through the "Zigong Lanterns Tour in 100 Cities" and "Chinese Lanterns Light Up 100 Countries" campaigns. Relying on the national foreign cultural trade base, it can further expand the "lantern + Yanbang cuisine" and "lantern + intangible cultural heritage" overseas models. For example, during the 60th anniversary of the establishment of China-France diplomatic relations in 2025, the Paris Lantern Exhibition drove a surge in the import of Sichuan cuisine ingredients in France, with sales exceeding 1.2 billion yuan, showing great potential for linkage between cultural trade and cultural tourism consumption.

#### **4.4. Threats (T): Regional Competition and External Risks Intensify Development Pressure**

Surrounding cities are increasing their investment in culture-sports-tourism integration:

Leshan is building the "Greater Emei" tourism circle centered on Mount Emei and Leshan Giant Buddha, receiving over 50 million tourists in 2024.

Yibin has built a diversified product system relying on Shunan Bamboo Sea and Wuliangye wine culture, forming differentiated competition.

If Zigong fails to accelerate IP innovation, it may face the risk of "tourist diversion". For example, the number of tourists received by Fantawild Dinosaur Kingdom decreased by 18% year-on-year during the 2025 Spring Festival, with some tourists diverted to Chengdu Happy Valley and Chongqing Sunac Land.

Overseas lantern projects are greatly affected by factors such as geopolitics, exchange rate fluctuations, and recurring epidemics. Some overseas lantern exhibitions were forced to be postponed due to local policy restrictions in 2024. At the same time, competition in the global simulated dinosaur market is intensifying—low-cost products from Vietnam, India, and other countries are seizing the mid-to-low-end market. Although Zigong's simulated dinosaurs account for 90% of the global market share, they face dual pressures of "price wars" and "technology imitation", and the profitability of the international market is under pressure.

## **5. Development Paths of the Integration of Culture, Sports and Tourism in Zigong City**

### **5.1. SO Path (Strengths + Opportunities): IP Coordination and International Expansion**

Develop "salt-dragon-lantern" themed immersive scripted murder games and digital collectibles.

Jointly launch the "intangible cultural heritage study tour route" with cities in Southern Sichuan and Western Chongqing.

Establish lantern cultural centers in Europe and America and cultivate local operation teams.

### **5.2. WO Path (Weaknesses + Opportunities): Scenario Innovation and Talent Cultivation**

Build the "Fuxi River Salt Culture Complex" and introduce Yanbang cuisine experience workshops.

Co-establish the "Cultural Tourism Digital College" with Sichuan University of Science and Engineering to cultivate VR/AR technical talents.

Construct the "Zigong Cultural Tourism Big Data Platform" to accurately match tourist needs.

### **5.3. ST Path (Strengths + Threats): Differentiated Competition and Risk Prevention**

Focus on the niche market of "low-altitude tourism + dinosaur popular science" and launch eVTOL dinosaur site exploration experiences.

Establish a risk assessment mechanism for overseas projects and sign long-term cooperation agreements with local cultural and tourism institutions.

### **5.4. WT Path (Weaknesses + Threats): Shortcoming Remediation and Resource Protection**

Formulate the Standards for the Development of Salt Cultural Tourism to standardize experience projects.

Establish a special fund for cultural relic protection to be used for the restoration of salt well heritage and the protection of dinosaur fossils.

Introduce third-party institutions to conduct service quality rating and improve the standardization level of catering and accommodation.

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