



Research on the Organizational Framework for High-Quality Development of Wellness Tourism for Urban Elderly Populations: A Literature Review Perspective

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Abstract. With the evolution of society, the perception of aging among China's urban elderly population has undergone a significant transformation. There is now a heightened demand for improved quality of life, with consumption preferences shifting from "survival-oriented" to "quality-oriented." This shift reflects a growing emphasis on independent living and a pursuit of higher-level services such as health and cultural tourism. However, academic research on wellness tourism tailored to the urban elderly remains relatively scarce. Based on a literature review perspective, this paper follows a logical framework encompassing top-level design, operational execution, and supporting mechanisms to synthesize existing scholarly contributions on the organizational architecture for high-quality development in wellness tourism. By consolidating and analyzing current literature, the study proposes targeted recommendations for advancing high-quality wellness tourism for the urban elderly population.

Keywords: wellness tourism; high-quality development; organizational framework; urban elderly population

1 Introduction

Rapid urbanization has led to the degradation and damage of ecosystems, coupled with the high-intensity, fast-paced lifestyle that poses significant threats to both mental and physical health. Simultaneously, the aging population is expanding year by year, with a growing number of retired urban elderly individuals expressing a demand for high-quality elderly care. This shift has seen a transition from traditional elderly care models to more dynamic approaches, such as residential recuperation and wellness travel. Increasingly, retirees are favoring in-depth wellness programs that emphasize ecological healing, cultural immersion, and holistic health experiences. The gradual emergence of the wellness tourism industry in this new era is becoming a pivotal growth area within China's tourism sector. While it presents significant opportunities for the development of wellness tourism services, it also poses challenges in terms of how to systematically and effectively deliver high-quality services.

At both the national and local government levels, significant efforts are being made to advance the "Healthy China" initiative, with a policy system for wellness tourism gradually taking shape. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasized, "Placing the protection of people's health in a strategic position of priority development and improving policies to promote people's health." The "14th Five-Year Plan for Cultural and Tourism Development" also proposed to "develop wellness tourism." This research project, based on an extensive literature review, delves deeply into the coordinated development of the wellness industry and tourism industry targeting urban elderly populations, identifying their synergies and intersections. It synthesizes existing scholarly research on the organizational framework for high-quality development of wellness tourism for urban elderly and proposes recommendations to achieve this goal. The study aims to provide insights for local governments and related organizations to promote integrated cultural and tourism activities that combine elderly care, wellness, and tourism. This not only supports high-quality development but also responds to the diversified consumption demands of an aging society, contributes to the upgrading of the tourism industry, and provides significant support for achieving the strategic goals of the "Healthy China" initiative.

2 Research on the Organizational Structure for High-Quality Development of Health Tourism for Urban Elderly

This study systematically analyzes the current organizational structures for high-quality health tourism services targeting urban elderly populations through three critical dimensions: top-level design, implementation and operation, and enabling support mechanisms. The research aims to construct a multi-level, multi-stakeholder collaborative operational system that promotes the transformation of health tourism services from an extensive to intensive management model. Such a framework would ultimately satisfy the growing demands of elderly citizens for diversified and high-quality health tourism experiences.

2.1 Top-Level Design: Government Policy Support and Regulatory Framework

Scholarly research indicates that China's tourism industry policies have undergone evolutionary development from initial exploration to steady growth, and ultimately to optimized evolution. Within this trajectory, health tourism policies - as a critical component - demonstrate a clear transformation path from extensive expansion towards refined specialization. The established three-tier policy system ("National-State (Ministries)-Provincial (Departments)-Municipal (Bureaus)") for health tourism has effectively ensured strategic alignment between national directives and central policies, thereby guaranteeing systematic implementation and localized enforcement^[2].

^[3] Huang Rui et al. (2021) conducted an industrial development-oriented analysis of health tourism-related policies enacted between 2009 and 2018. Their empirical research revealed that enhanced policy intensity significantly stimulates tourism industry

expansion and investment growth. However, the policy effects demonstrate distinct phased characteristics: during the policy opportunity period, policy interventions produce pronounced stimulative impacts; following the conclusion of this window, the marginal policy efficacy exhibits a clear downward trend.

^[4]Zhang Guanghai et al. (2022) observe that while there is a general convergence between policy formulation quantity and policy intensity impact value trajectories, significant gaps remain in two critical areas: (1) the establishment of quantitative standards for policy objectives in niche markets, and (2) the development of systematic implementation guidelines for operational procedures.

^[1]Zhang Wenjuan et al. (2024) argue that local governments maintain policy alignment with central directives while pursuing localized innovation and extension. Their analysis reveals a transformation in policy content from single-dimensional medical care-oriented approaches to integrated development of multiple formats including health tourism and tourism-based elderly care. However, the research emphasizes that systematic legal and regulatory safeguards remain critical gaps in policy formulation, particularly regarding operable mechanisms for multi-sectoral coordination.

This research synthesis demonstrates that while China's health tourism policy system has achieved notable progress, there remain critical areas requiring refinement in three dimensions: (1) policy granularity - particularly in elder-specific health tourism policy formulation, (2) legal and regulatory safeguards, and (3) long-term mechanism development. Such improvements are imperative to ensure the sustainability and stability of policy outcomes, thereby realizing the full potential of health tourism as a strategic response to population aging.

2.2 Implementation and Operations: Research on Supply-Side and Demand-Side Behavioral Patterns in Health Tourism

This study adopts a bidirectional interaction perspective within the industrial ecosystem to analyze behavioral patterns in health tourism supply and demand.

The behavioral patterns on the supply side are primarily manifested in the research on wellness tourism resources, products, and destinations. This research is closely centered around three dimensions: resources, capabilities, and the market. It emphasizes strengthening the construction and management of key factors such as the professionalization level of human resources, wellness facility resources, medical service capabilities, operational management capabilities, and the intensity of wellness consumption demand^[5]. ^[6]Wang Zhaofeng et al. (2025) also highlighted that road density, forest area, policy support for wellness tourism, and urban per capita disposable income are key factors influencing the high-quality development of wellness tourism. By fostering synergy between the supply and demand sides, the goal of high-quality development can be achieved. ^[7]Chen Xue jun et al., through the analysis of classic cases, proposed and comparatively analyzed four supply-side innovation models, including collaborative shared innovation within the industry. They also provided strategies for selecting appropriate development models. However, the current supply side still faces structural contradictions, such as severe product homogenization, insufficient reserves of

professional talent, and the absence of service standards. These issues lead to a misalignment between the quality of supply and market demand.

Safety and health are the foremost concerns for elderly wellness tourists^[8]. This behavioral pattern directly influences the design of wellness tourism products and the provision of services. The safety needs of the elderly group are reflected not only in transportation and accommodation security during travel but also in medical support and emergency response capabilities. Research indicates that the proportion of expenditures by elderly wellness tourists on non-essential tourism consumption, such as physical and mental health, cultural experiences, social and emotional interactions, and value realization, has increased. In contrast, the proportion of spending on essential tourism consumption has declined^[9].

Through an analysis of behavioral patterns on both the supply and demand sides, the author notes that the key to supply-demand matching lies in precise alignment. The supply side must conduct market research and data analysis to gain an in-depth understanding of the wellness tourism needs of elderly tourists, thereby designing high-quality products with distinctive features. Simultaneously, governments and enterprises should strengthen collaboration to promote resource sharing, thereby addressing structural contradictions on the supply side. This approach aims to achieve efficient cooperation between supply and demand, ultimately driving the sustainable development of the industry^[10].

2.3 Support and Safeguards: Intelligent Platforms and Talent Team Development

The "14th Five-Year Plan" explicitly outlines the strategic goal of developing the "smart health and elderly care" industry. In 2024, the National Health Commission, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, issued the "Construction Standards for Smart Service Platforms in Wellness Tourism," further regulating industry development in areas such as data security and service processes. Under the auspices of national and local policy initiatives, China has achieved remarkable progress in technological innovation and functional optimization of its smart health tourism platforms. Research evidence^[11] demonstrates that the application of intelligent technologies in this sector exhibits positive developmental trajectories across four critical dimensions: technological penetration rates, service-oriented functionalization consciousness, marketing digitalization sophistication, and management data-driven capacity. However, the development of the smart wellness tourism industry still faces numerous challenges, including insufficient integration of the industrial chain and severe homogenization of industrial information platforms^[12].

^[13]Based on current technological trajectories and industry maturity assessments, it is recommended to implement stratified development frameworks that distinguish between leading platforms and emerging enterprises. For top-tier smart platforms, strategic collaborations with AI technology firms and IoT solution providers should be prioritized to construct integrated service ecosystems that synergize smart health tourism with cross-industrial value chains. Meanwhile, SMEs should concentrate on niche market penetration through value innovation, leveraging specialized service competencies

to establish unique positioning in fragmented market segments. This tiered approach not only capitalizes on the resource aggregation advantages of incumbent platforms but also stimulates endogenous innovation capacities among smaller enterprises, thereby catalyzing high-quality development through optimized industrial symbiosis.

^[15]The sustainable development of China's health tourism industry urgently necessitates the establishment of a sophisticated professional talent development framework. ^[16]As a foundational pillar of industrial advancement, professional human capital formation requires constructing a multi-dimensional talent cultivation hierarchy that integrates research-oriented, management-savvy, and innovative personnel. Of particular urgency lies the cultivation of hybrid competencies through interdisciplinary training programs that synthesize health preservation expertise with tourism management acumen – a critical requirement for addressing the multifaceted service needs of elderly demographics. However, ^[14]as an emergent industry, health tourism confronts severe talent supply deficits. Resolving this requires a dual-governance model that balances market-driven resource allocation with enhanced government macro-policy orchestration and institutional support. The sustainable development of China's health tourism industry urgently necessitates establishing and refining talent information identification mechanisms, constructing specialized talent exchange platforms, enhancing talent information repositories and expert advisory systems, and innovating pluralistic talent development pathways. Notably, ^[4]Within the current national policy framework, the proportion of policies related to talent development is relatively small. This highlights the need for further improvement and reinforcement in the goal setting and specific measures for professional talent team building within the wellness tourism industry policies.

3 Conclusion and Recommendations

The construction of a scientifically sound and rational organizational framework for wellness tourism holds significant importance for promoting the healthy development of the industry. This paper reviews China's recent research on wellness tourism from the perspective of high-quality development and organizational frameworks, revealing that while notable achievements have been made, several pressing issues remain to be addressed.

In terms of policy formulation and the construction of the supervision system, efforts should be made to improve the legal and regulatory system related to the wellness tourism industry, with a focus on improving professional talent training policies and constructing a multi-level and multi-channel talent supply mechanism. In terms of technological integration and innovation, in view of the currently widespread phenomenon of data silos, it is urgent to strengthen data docking and coordination among medical, cultural and tourism, and transportation systems, with a focus on breaking through key bottlenecks such as data interoperability barriers and technological self-innovation, and promoting the establishment of a unified data sharing platform and technical standard system. In terms of optimizing supply-demand matching, market operation rules should be thoroughly grasped, market demands accurately judged, and the government-

enterprise cooperation mechanism deepened. Supporting policies and measures such as market access approval, high-end talent introduction, and regional coordinated development should be accelerated and improved. Through legal and standardized means, the high-quality and sustainable development of the wellness tourism industry should be promoted.

Acknowledgments

This work was funded by the Scientific Research Fund of the Education Department of Yunnan Province—"Research on the High-Quality Development of Wellness Tourism for Urban Elderly Populations" (Project number: 2024J1187).

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