

Kinetic Energy Conversion and Path Choices: Opportunities and Strategic Breakthroughs for Hubei in the Changing Tourism Revenue Landscape of China

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Abstract: Centered on the concept of "kinetic energy transformation," this study systematically analyzes the dynamic patterns of tourism revenue growth across Chinese provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities from 2000 to 2023. The research reveals two key developments: first, the evolution of China's tourism economy from a single-pole growth model along the eastern coast to a diversified development pattern in central and western regions; second, the shift in driving forces from static factors like natural resources and geographical advantages to dynamic elements including policy innovation, industrial integration, and technological empowerment. The report highlights Hubei Province's dual challenges of traditional path dependence and emerging market dynamics, proposing three strategic initiatives for "new kinetic energy cultivation": the "Cultural IP Revitalization and Urban Tourism Boom" project, the "Industrial Integration and Consumption Scenario Creation" initiative, and the "Regional Synergy and Traffic Management" program.

Keywords: Tourism Revenue Pattern; Hubei; Dynamic Transformation; Development Strategies

1. Introduction

As shown in table 1, since 2000, China's tourism revenue has shown significant regional differences and growth trajectories in different provinces. From the overall trend, except for a few provinces, tourism revenue in all provinces of China has achieved significant growth, but there is a clear differentiation between growth rate and scale. Eastern coastal provinces, relying on their economic foundation and tourism resources advantages, have long been among the top earners in terms of income; The central and western regions have achieved leapfrog development through policy support and characteristic development. The following analysis will be conducted from three dimensions: regional characteristics, growth drivers, and typical provinces.

As the main force of tourism economy, the eastern coastal provinces have always maintained a leading position. Guangdong, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang provinces have shown particularly outstanding performance, with tourism revenue exceeding 40 billion yuan in 2000. Although Guangdong has fallen to 952.6 billion yuan in 2023, Jiangsu (1202.3 billion yuan) and Zhejiang (990.8 billion yuan) still remain in the top three. As municipalities directly under the central government, Shanghai and Beijing have continued to expand their revenue scale with cultural resources and international advantages, reaching 412.7 billion yuan and 585 billion yuan respectively in 2023. The growth of eastern provinces mainly relies on mature tourism industry chains, well-established transportation networks, and high consumption customer groups, but in recent years, the growth rate has slowed down, reflecting the pressure of market saturation and intensified competition.

The central and western regions are showing a trend of "catching up with latecomers". Represented by Yunnan, Guizhou, and Jiangxi, explosive growth is achieved through differentiated positioning such as ecotourism and ethnic culture. In 2000, Yunnan's income was only 20.774 billion yuan, and by 2023, it will soar to 1440 billion yuan, an increase of 68 times; Guizhou increased from 6.241 billion yuan to 740.456 billion yuan, ranking among the top in the country in terms of growth rate. In addition, central

provinces such as Henan and Hunan rely on historical and cultural resources, with a revenue scale exceeding 900 billion yuan. The growth of the central and western regions is due to policy support such as the "Western Development" and "Rural Revitalization", as well as the increase in passenger flow brought about by the improvement of the high-speed rail network.

Table 1: Tourism Revenue of Various Provinces/Municipalities in China Since 2000 (In billions of yuan)

province/ municipality	2000	2010	2018	2023	province/ municipality	2000	2010	2018	2023
BeiJing	883.40	2790.23	5955.39	5850.00	HuNan	146.49	1430.22	8365.18	9565.18
TianJin	314.08	1252.77	3921.26	2215.00	GuangDong	1107.62	3861.50	13738.35	9526.00
HeBei	211.87	916.39	7627.02	10116.00	GuangXi	169.10	956.37	7637.21	9211.00
ShanXi	80.81	1085.64	6726.87	8026.00	HaiNan	77.38	259.34	953.88	1813.00
NeiMengGu	41.36	736.58	4016.10	3355.00	ChongQin	147.12	918.91	4357.75	5734.00
LiaoNing	251.41	2696.57	5380.75	5023.00	SiChuan	256.83	1887.64	10122.15	7443.46
JiLin	56.10	734.07	4215.26	5285.00	GuiZhou	62.41	1062.38	9472.59	7404.56
HeiLongJiang	134.69	887.21	2246.69	2215.30	YunNan	207.74	1012.84	9018.86	14400.00
ShangHai	891.76	2986.72	5010.86	4127.00	XiZang	6.39	71.50	530.89	651.00
JiangSu	639.90	4634.32	13187.84	12023.00	ShaanXi	147.29	989.56	6015.17	6578.00
ZheJiang	467.21	3330.55	10021.94	9908.00	GanSu	22.55	238.07	2060.35	2746.00
AnHui	156.74	1146.33	7260.78	8510.00	QinHai	10.42	71.48	466.51	431.00
FuJian	295.51	1417.62	6691.26	6981.00	NingXia	9.50	67.43	295.95	651.00
JiangXi	134.11	820.05	8149.77	9668.00	XinJiang	69.57	294.42	2565.52	2967.00
ShanDong	409.31	3072.02	9912.80	9714.00	TaiWan	259.53	1465.23	6147.30	6412.36
HeNan	355.77	2330.11	8124.66	9645.60	HongKong	561.29	2099.80	2800.39	1488.91
HuBei	280.85	1463.39	6516.59	7000.00	Macao	596.33	2203.37	3321.04	1424.58

Data source: China Tourism Statistical Yearbook (2001, 2011, 2019, 2024) and information release websites of Cultural and Tourism Departments and Bureaus of various provinces and municipalities

It is worth noting that some provinces have experienced fluctuations. The income of Tianjin and Heilongjiang will decline in 2023 compared to 2018, which may be related to industrial restructuring or the impact of the epidemic; Traditional tourism destinations such as Hainan and Xizang, though with a small base, have achieved steady growth through the construction of free trade zones, eco-tourism development and other measures. Overall, the changes in tourism revenue by province in China since 2000 not only reflect the evolution of regional economic patterns, but also reveal the profound impact of policy orientation and resource endowment on tourism development.

Through Figure 1 and the data analysis of four key time nodes in 2000,2010,2018 and 2023, we can clearly depict the pattern of changes in China's provincial tourism revenue.

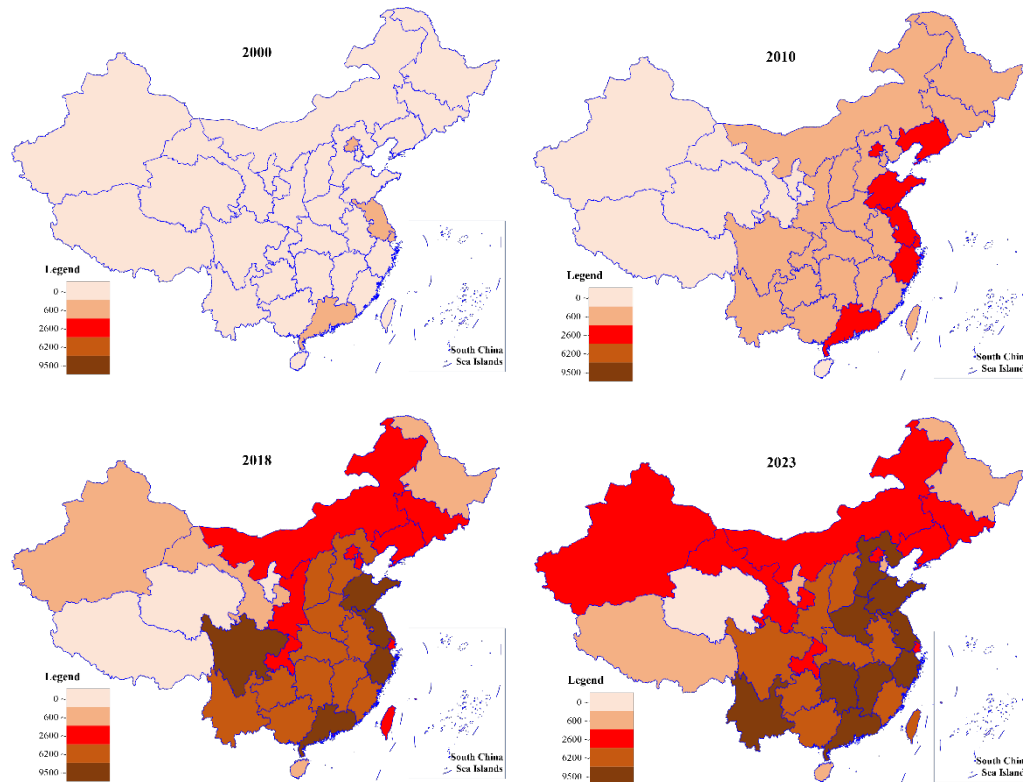


Figure 1: Color-coded map of tourism revenue stratification across provinces in China since 2000

1.1 The Total Volume has Grown by Leaps and Bounds, and the Status of the National Economy as a Pillar has been Established

In 2000, only three Chinese provinces—Guangdong (110.762 billion yuan), Beijing (88.34 billion yuan), and Shanghai (89.18 billion yuan)—generated tourism revenues exceeding 80 billion yuan. By 2023, over 20 provinces had surpassed the 500-billion-yuan threshold, with Jiangsu, Guangdong, Hebei, Zhejiang, Shandong, Sichuan, and Yunnan notably entering the "trillion-yuan club" or approaching this milestone. The tourism industry has evolved into a pivotal force in stimulating domestic demand and creating employment opportunities.

1.2 The Evolution of a Multi-Polar Pattern has Taken Shape, and Initial Results have been Achieved in Coordinated Regional Development

At the beginning of the 21st century, China's tourism economy exhibited a distinct "strong in the east, weak in the west" pattern, but this pattern has undergone profound changes today. Traditional tourism powerhouses in eastern coastal provinces such as Guangdong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Shandong have shifted their growth models from reliance on traditional sightseeing attractions to high-value-added sectors like cultural-tourism integration, urban tourism, coastal resorts, and digital cultural tourism. The quality of tourism revenue and per capita consumption levels still rank among the highest in the country.^[1]

The central and western provinces have emerged as rising stars in China's tourism sector. Thanks to the sustained development of the "Colorful Yunnan" brand, forward-looking planning and construction of infrastructure like the Greater Western Yunnan Tourism Loop, and in-depth exploration of ethnic cultural resources, Yunnan's tourism revenue in 2023 surged nearly 70-fold compared to 2000, securing its position among the nation's top performers. Provinces such as Hebei, Anhui, Jiangxi, and Hunan have also achieved steady yet rapid growth by leveraging their geographical proximity to major tourist markets and their rich historical and cultural heritage.

1.3 Diversified Driving Modes and High-Quality and Distinctive Development

First, resource-driven models, such as Yunnan, Sichuan, Xizang, and Xinjiang, have built strong core attractions by leveraging their unique natural landscapes and ethnic cultures. Second, source-driven models, like Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Guangdong, serve as both tourist destinations and major sources of visitors, with robust domestic consumption capacity. Third, location-driven models, such as Hebei, Anhui, and Jiangxi, have achieved leapfrog development in tourism by actively integrating into the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei and Yangtze River Delta economic zones, absorbing industrial and tourist transfers, and supported by strong local policy backing.^[2]

2. The Dilemma of Hubei: the Decline of Traditional Driving Forces and the Pain of Transformation

2.1 Opportunity: From a Central Hub to a Strategic Pivot

First, the total volume has surged dramatically: In 2023, Hubei's tourism revenue grew by approximately 24 times compared to 2000, reaching 700.00 billion yuan, with a growth rate higher than the national average, establishing its significant position in the national tourism landscape. Second, the advantages of transportation hubs have become prominent: The geographical advantages of being "in the heart of China" and "a thoroughfare connecting nine provinces" enable Hubei to efficiently radiate to major tourist source markets nationwide, providing inherent conditions for attracting visitors from all directions. Third, the resource endowment is unparalleled: Hubei boasts a profound cultural heritage and a series of world-class tourism resources such as "One River and Two Mountains" (the Three Gorges of the Yangtze River, Wudang Mountain, and Shennongjia), laying a solid foundation for the diversified development of its tourism products.

2.2 Challenges: There are Role Models Ahead and Pursuers Behind

First, the gap with the "first-tier" provinces continues to widen: The tourism revenue disparity with strong provinces like Jiangsu has been growing annually, reaching approximately 502.3 billion yuan by 2023. Compared to provinces with similar development starting points such as Hunan, Jiangxi, and Anhui, Hubei's tourism revenue significantly lags behind by 2023. Second, brand influence requires

breakthroughs: Compared to the successful branding and promotion of provincial tourism destinations like Shandong and Henan, Hubei's tourism brand recognition and reputation remain notably underdeveloped. Third, product structure and consumption depth are insufficient: In cultivating high-quality, premium industries like digital tourism, wellness tourism, and experiential tourism, Hubei shows a clear gap compared to advanced provinces. Fourth, due to imbalances in infrastructure and market promotion, Hubei's tourism development remains concentrated in Wuhan and its surrounding areas, with the comprehensive tourism development pattern needing further refinement.^[3]

2.3 Analysis: Core Dilemmas and Reconsideration

First, the "transit corridor effect" of Hubei's geographical advantages has become prominent, with Wuhan's tourism flow demonstrating stronger "transit" characteristics than "destination" appeal. Second, the diminishing marginal returns of core resources have tested the "One River, Two Mountains" initiative's ability to attract new tourist demographics. Third, the "forgetting effect" of brand influence has intensified, leaving Hubei's tourism brand image bland and struggling to build lasting brand recognition and customer loyalty. Fourth, the "strategic dilemma" of industrial integration has become evident, as the tourism sector lacks exemplary models for collaboration with cultural, technological, and other fields, making it difficult to identify breakthroughs aligned with its own development trajectory.

3. Structural Changes: from "Factor-Driven" to "Innovation-Driven"

3.1 Basic Momentum: Resources and Location Deliver Dividends

From 2000 to 2010, the explosion of China's tourism market was caused by the initial release of national tourism demand. Provinces with top natural resources or unique geographical advantages were the first to share the dividend.

The first model is resource-driven: Regions like Yunnan, Sichuan, and Anhui have rapidly established market recognition and completed initial capital accumulation by leveraging their world-class tourism resources through "protective development" strategies that transform natural endowments into product advantages. The second model is location-driven: Cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong attract top-tier and diverse business and tourist flows through their powerful transportation hubs and unique urban appeal. Their growth logic revolves around "monetizing traffic," converting geographical advantages into market strengths.^[4]

3.2 Converting Kinetic Energy: Policies and Investment to Leverage Leapfrog Development

From 2010 to 2018, as market competition intensified and infrastructure conditions improved, relying solely on innate advantages was no longer enough to maintain high growth. A number of provinces achieved a leap forward by "creating something out of nothing and creating something out of something" through advanced policy design and huge capital investment.

The first model is the transportation-driven breakthrough: Guizhou's "Highway Access to Every County" and "Refreshingly Guiyang" initiatives have interconnected scattered tourism resources into a cohesive network, materializing the vision of a "Park Province". This growth model operates through "investment leverage", transforming infrastructure advantages into competitive edges. The second model is policy empowerment: Jiangxi has implemented large-scale, targeted industrial support policies to concretize its "Tourism Powerhouse" strategy, revitalizing the entire tourism sector. Its growth logic follows "government guidance with market participation", converting policy determination into market confidence. The third model is regional synergy: Hebei has seized opportunities from the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei coordinated development strategy, positioning itself as "Beijing-Tianjin's backyard" to capture substantial spillover benefits. This growth model emphasizes "proactive integration with functional complementarity", translating strategic opportunities into tangible development outcomes.^[5]

3.3 Emerging Drivers: Integrated and Technology-Driven Connotative Growth

Since 2018, emerging drivers have driven the connotation of cultural tourism development.

The first category is the deep cultural-tourism integration model: Through in-depth exploration and precise presentation of representative high-quality cultural IPs such as "Tang Palace Night Banquet", Henan has achieved remarkable results in tourism brand building, industrial upgrading, and cultural

heritage preservation. Its growth logic is "cultural empowerment", transforming cultural potential into tourism momentum.

The second model is the Smart Tourism Leadership Approach: As a pioneer in digital economy development, Zhejiang has significantly enhanced tourist experiences and operational efficiency through its "Future Scenic Areas" and "Smart Hotels" initiatives, coupled with big data-driven tourism marketing and public services. This growth strategy leverages "technology empowerment" to transform technological advantages into sustainable momentum for tourism development.

Third, innovative consumer scenarios: Driven by free trade port policies, Hainan has actively developed duty-free shopping tourism, deeply integrating tourism with high-end consumption to create unique appeal. Chongqing employs viral city marketing strategies to transform urban landscapes into sustained tourist flows. Its growth logic follows the "scene revolution" approach, converting consumer demands into travel motivations.^[6]

4. The Way to Break the Deadlock: Three New Drivers of Tourism in Hubei

4.1 Implement the "Cultural IP Revitalization and Urban Tourism Boom" Initiative to Create a Premier Tourist Destination

The core idea is to transform central cities such as Wuhan into tourist destinations with strong ability to retain guests, from "selling mountains and rivers" to "selling culture" and "selling life".

4.1.1 Deeply Activate the 'Jingchu Culture' Super IP

Project implementation: Learn from the "Only Henan" model, and plan to build a large-scale drama fantasy city project with the theme of "Jingchu Story" or "Three Kingdoms Storm" in Wuhan or Jingzhou, making it a new landmark of Hubei culture and tourism.

Scenographic experience: Create immersive themed streets such as "Chucheng" and "Three Kingdoms City", and transform intangible cultural heritage such as bianzhong music and dance, Chu-style lacquerware, Wudang martial arts and Taoist health care into daily experiences and cultural and creative products that can be participated in and consumed.

Storyline integration: By designing cross-regional themed routes such as "Retracing the Three Kingdoms Trail" and "Exploring Chu Civilization", the project organically connects scattered cultural heritage sites (including Ancient Longzhong, Chibi, Jingzhou Ancient City, and Dangyang) through narrative threads, forming a cohesive storytelling loop.^[7]

4.1.2 Extreme Development of "Urban Culture and Tourism"

Building a "Pearl of the Yangtze" world-class urban leisure belt: comprehensively upgrading the tourism, leisure and night economy functions of Wuhan, Yichang, Xiangyang and other cities along the Yangtze and Han rivers, especially optimizing the night lighting and business layout, and creating a new consumption landmark and cluster integrating night tourism, night banquets, night performances, night entertainment and night shopping.

Developing "University City" study trips: Transforming Wuhan's abundant higher education resources into tourist attractions, opening up special museums and laboratories, and designing science and technology study trips to attract teenagers across the country.

Innovative "industrial heritage" tourism scene: transform industrial heritage and historical blocks such as Hanyang Iron Works and Hankou Old Concession into art centers, design hotels and creative markets, and cultivate new urban micro-vacation space.

4.1.3 Strengthen the Top-Level Design of "Brand Leadership"

Revitalize the "Zhiyin Hubei" brand ecosystem: Move beyond simplistic slogans by weaving brand narratives into tangible products, and develop a comprehensive visual identity system and application framework for the brand. Hubei Province can further improve the construction of tourism brands, deeply explore the profound cultural legacy of Boya and Ziqi's legendary "High Mountains and Flowing Water" (a classical Chinese metaphor for profound musical harmony), extending this concept to modern tourism experiences like "Hubei's Mountains Understand You" and "Hubei's Services Cater to Your Needs".^[8]

4.2 Advance the "deep industrial integration and consumption scenario creation" initiative to break through the income ceiling

Core ideas: Actively apply for and establish national and international cultural and tourism festivals, sports events and academic conferences, vigorously develop secondary consumption, create new supply through "tourism +" and lead new demand.

4.2.1 Tourism + Health

Building the "Chinese Health Valley": Leveraging the selenium-rich, forested, and hot spring resources of Shennongjia, Enshi, Xianning, and other areas, we will introduce internationally renowned health institutions to develop high-end forest health, hot spring therapy, and traditional Chinese medicine wellness tourism products that integrate collective check-ups, recuperation, rehabilitation, and leisure.

4.2.2 Tourism + Big Agriculture

Developing 'Refined Rural Tourism': Support the construction of high-end rural tourism resorts and homestay clusters with Chu-style and Han-flavored characteristics. Hubei Province should develop supporting agricultural experiences, countryside photography, and e-commerce for agricultural product processing to achieve the goal of "living in and being able to take away" experience. ^[9]

4.2.3 Tourism + Big Technology

Establishing a "Smart Cultural Tourism Demonstration Zone": Deploy 5G and IoT across all 4A-level and above scenic spots in Hubei Province, while introducing smart services including AI tour guides, VR previews, unmanned hotels, and intelligent navigation. Hubei Province will further collaborate with tech giants like Tencent, Alibaba and other companies to develop immersive experience projects and digital museums. Launch the "Hubei Culture and Tourism" cloud platform to achieve interaction between online virtual tours and offline on-site experiences.

4.2.4 Tourism + Big Consumption

Innovate the "Hubei Gifts" cultural and creative product system: Establish a government-guided fund to support design institutions and enterprises in developing artistic and practical cultural and creative products with Jingchu cultural elements as the core. Hubei Province plans to establish more flagship stores of "Hubei Gifts" at major airports and high-speed railway stations, and open up online sales channels.

4.3 Build the "Regional Coordination and Traffic Operation" project to reshape the new advantages of hub economy

The core idea is to build a "fast and slow" transportation network, and upgrade the channel advantage of "the thoroughfare of nine provinces" into the traffic operation advantage leading the region.

4.3.1 Promoting the Coordinated Development of "One Circle and Two Belts"

The core of tourism in Wuhan metropolitan area is to strengthen the radiation and driving role of Wuhan, integrate the surrounding resources such as Huangshi, Huanggang and Xiaogan, and launch cross-city high-quality routes.

The ecological and cultural tourism belt in the west of Hubei province: stringing pearls such as Shennongjia, Wudang Mountain and Enshi Grand Canyon into a necklace, breaking administrative barriers, realizing resource sharing, mutual tourist flow and mutual benefit of tickets.

Deepening cross-provincial cooperation: Strengthen the 'Yangtze River Midstream Urban Agglomeration' tourism community. Hubei Province should collaborate with Chongqing, Hunan, and Jiangxi to launch the 'Central Triangle Tourism One-Card System', enabling joint ticketing, data sharing, and coordinated marketing across scenic areas. Jointly develop the Yangtze International Golden Tourism Belt, highlighting thematic experiences such as the Three Gorges Essence Tour and Jianghu Wetland Tour.

4.3.2 Implement "Precise Traffic Operation"

Data empowerment: Establish a unified provincial tourism big data platform to monitor the source of tourists, tourist profile and consumption behavior in real time, and provide decision support for "targeted" precision marketing and service optimization.

Segmented marketing: For business exhibition visitors, focus on urban prosperity and convenience;

Hubei should adopt different products and marketing strategies for different customers, focusing on urban prosperity and convenience for the business exhibition customer group; for the young generation Z, it should mainly focus on internet-famous check-ins and China- fashion experience; for the family and parent-child customer group, we focus on popular science education and natural exploration.

Establish a "tourism hub incentive fund": travel agencies that organize tourists to stay overnight in Hubei for a certain number of days will be given additional incentives, which will guide the policy to change "transit" into "stay".

4.3.3 Optimize the Ultimate Service Environment

Promote the golden standard of "Hubei Service": carry out a special action to improve the service quality in the tourism industry of the province, establish a credit system and a "blacklist" system, and have "zero tolerance" for cheating and cheating customers.

Create a "shared" friendly environment:

Hubei should focus on strengthening two aspects of work, one is to provide comprehensive multilingual services at major ports and scenic spots, popularize electronic payments, and establish foreign-related service windows. The second is to promote the renovation of tourism public service facilities and enhance the hospitality of citizens.

Implement the "Cultural and Tourism Talents" program:

Hubei's tourism administration, management departments, and tourism industry association will focus on two aspects: firstly, strengthening cooperation with universities within the province to cultivate high-quality professionals in tourism planning, digital marketing, and business management. Secondly, optimize the establishment, management, and utilization of the Hubei Tourism Innovation and Entrepreneurship Fund to attract and retain high-end talents.^[10]

5. Conclusion

The competition in China's tourism development has evolved from a "static game" of resource endowment to a "dynamic race" of the speed of development momentum iteration. Hubei once ranked among the top in the country with its traditional momentum, but today's difficulties stem from the "time gap" in the transition between old and new momentum. Hubei's tourism development has reached a critical moment where "if you don't advance, you'll fall behind."

The breakthrough lies in breaking the path dependence on the "mountain-water hub", revitalizing the soul through cultural IP activation, expanding opportunities via deep industrial integration, and elevating advantages through regional traffic operations. Once these three new drivers synergize, Hubei's tourism will establish an unshakable core competitiveness in development quality. The province's geographical advantage as the "crossroads of nine provinces" and its resource advantage as the "province of a thousand lakes" will be transformed into economic advantages of a trillion-yuan industry. This will achieve a historic leap from being a major tourism province to a strong tourism province, writing a new chapter of high-quality development for Hubei's tourism in the new era.

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