

# Analysis of system structure and evaluation of competitiveness of small and medium-sized tourist cities from international perspective -- A case study of Qinhuangdao City

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to study the connotation, structure, content, environment and function of the competitiveness system of small and medium-sized tourism cities, analyze the operation mechanism of the competitiveness system of these cities, establish a competitiveness evaluation model of them, and take Qinhuangdao city as an example for empirical analysis. Under the background of the integrated development of the world economy, the competition of tourism city, a special function type city, is becoming more and more fierce, and the main competitive position of small and medium-sized tourist cities is becoming increasingly prominent, and the competitiveness of the cities has become a new research topic in economics and management circles at home and abroad. The evaluation of city competitiveness is an important part of the research on the competitiveness of small and medium-sized tourist cities. This paper points out that the management power of the government of small and medium-sized tourist cities is an important driving force for the improvement of their competitiveness, and the government's leading capabilities such as planning and driving force, management and supervision, and active participation in operation and marketing promote the improvement of the competitiveness of small and medium-sized tourist cities. Strengthening inter-regional cooperation is also an important force to enhance the competitiveness of small and medium-sized tourism cities. It is very important to form industrial clusters in urban agglomerations and an environment conducive to cooperation. Macro and micro environments have a significant impact on the competitiveness of small and medium-sized tourism cities. Finally, in the empirical research part, this paper analyzes the evaluation results of Qinhuangdao's competitiveness, and puts forward countermeasures to improve its competitiveness.

**Keywords:** small and medium-sized tourist cities; Competitiveness system analysis; Competitiveness evaluation index system; Qinhuangdao

## 1. Introduction

With the globalization of tourism market and the internationalization of tourism competition, urban tourism has become the main body of tourism competition, an important destination of modern tourism, and an important support of world tourism.

China is developing from a leading tourism nation to a world tourism power. As an important tourist source and destination, cities constitute the main body of a country's international tourism competitiveness<sup>[1]</sup>. Having a group of internationally competitive tourism cities is very important for improving the international tourism competitiveness of a country and a region. At present, the international tourism industry is developing at a relatively stable growth rate, and it is of great significance for the formation of a group of emerging international tourism cities to make conscious long-term efforts and increase the intensity of tourism development<sup>[2]</sup>. In these emerging or emerging international tourism cities, the status of tourism has been more prominent, and has become a driving force for urban economic development. Tourism not only brings huge foreign exchange income, but also brings economic and cultural exchanges, which makes cities a part of the global economic division of labor and economic competition, so more and more countries and regions take the establishment of tourist cities as the focus of economic development to actively cultivate.

The study of urban competitiveness is a new international hot topic. Many scholars in the fields of

economics, management and sociology in China and abroad have realized that theoretical research on development and urban competitiveness has gone beyond the simple economic significance, and has become a new power source to promote international, regional and inter-city material, information and ideological exchanges, stimulate local innovation mechanisms, and drive local economic development. The medium and small tourist cities in China are important parts of the whole national city system, not only play an important role, but also undertake a unique historical mission, and play a more prominent role in social economic development<sup>[3]</sup>. From the perspective of urban development in the world, in developed countries such as Europe and the United States, except for a few big cities, the vast majority of tourist cities are small cities with a population of 200,000-300,000. Therefore, small and medium-sized tourism cities have great potential competitive ability. This paper's study on the competitiveness of small and medium-sized tourism cities in our country will not only help improve the construction and management level of small and medium-sized tourism cities in our country, make greater contribution to the development of national economy, but also have great guiding significance for the development of the whole country and other types of cities.

## **2. The connotation of the competitiveness of small and medium-sized tourist cities**

Tourism city is a kind of city type with special nature. Compared with other cities, tourism city has many different characteristics and development laws, so their respective competitiveness must have many differences. The competitiveness of small and medium-sized tourist cities is a concept with vague connotation and diverse performance.

Based on the research results of relevant researchers on tourism city competitiveness or national and city tourism competitiveness models, this paper analyzes the classification, tourism functions and competition trend of small and medium-sized tourism cities, and constructs the connotation of competitiveness of small and medium-sized tourism cities as follows:

The competitiveness of small and medium-sized tourism cities means that in a certain competitive environment, they make use of their own tourism resources and integrate their own tourism, culture, environment, human resources, economy and other resources to improve the attractiveness of tourists, at the same time, improve the living standards of local residents and the ability of sustainable urban development.

## **3. Competitiveness system of small and medium-sized tourist cities**

So far, domestic and foreign scholars have not given a clear definition of the connotation of tourism city competitiveness, especially the competitiveness of small and medium-sized tourism cities, but the relevant research on urban competitiveness has reached a consensus: urban competitiveness is an open complex system, which is the result of interaction, coordination and integration of many influential factors in different forms at different levels.

The systematic research on the competitiveness of small and medium-sized tourist cities needs to reveal the competitiveness of tourist cities from the impact of macro environment and micro environment, auxiliary resources and facilities, core resources and attractions, destination management, destination policies, planning and development, and regional competition factors. Therefore, the competitive power system of small and medium-sized tourist cities is a dynamic, chaotic and multilevel complex system. According to the competition and cooperation of tourism space, it reveals the different performance of the competitiveness of tourism cities in different regions and the comprehensive consideration of tourism resources, social economy, environment, science and technology and other factors on the competitiveness of small and medium-sized tourist cities.

According to the definition of the competitiveness of small and medium-sized tourism cities, this paper holds that the competitiveness system of small and medium-sized tourism cities is a three-dimensional and multi-level open social complex system with specific structure and function, which is based on the tourism resources owned, gathered or controlled by small and medium-sized tourism cities under specific natural and social environment. It is the city comprehensive competitive ability formed by the charm, livable and green subsystems through nonlinear coordination and integration<sup>[4]</sup>.

#### **4. Operation mechanism of competitiveness system of small and medium-sized tourist cities**

##### ***a. Analysis on the characteristics of core charm of small and medium-sized tourist cities***

As the source of competitive advantage, the core charm index of small and medium-sized tourist cities can be summarized into two aspects: “uniqueness” and “persistence”. The core charm of small and medium-sized tourist cities is unique to the city and difficult to be imitated. It has “uniqueness”, and its unique factors are mainly reflected as follows: (1) Value which is the source of value creation for small and medium-sized tourist cities. It brings benefits and practical value to small and medium-sized tourist cities, and is a valuable ability and resource. (2) Scarcity that is the degree to which small and medium-sized tourist cities reflect a unique ability in the competition. (3) Non-imitability that means small and medium-sized tourist cities have unique features that are different from other tourist cities and are not easy to be imitated, transferred and occupied by competitors. (4) Irreplaceability indicates the city has a special factor, which cannot be replaced by other factors. (5) Extensibility provides new development opportunities for the potential growth points of small and medium-sized tourist cities, and its divergence effect can be extended to various fields.

The core charm of small and medium-sized tourist cities also has the characteristics of “persistence”, which is mainly manifested in: (1) Stability contains the heritage of small and medium-sized tourist cities, which is not fleeting with the trend and the change of time, and can maintain its own characteristics for a long time. (2) Visibility implies the core charm of the city has an unmatched visibility with other resource conditions, which can represent the medium and small enterprises to a certain extent. (3) Agglomeration means the core charm can absorb and optimize various resources, beyond the resource endowment of small and medium-sized tourism cities.

##### ***b. Government management power of small and medium-sized tourist cities***

Judging from the successful experience in the world, the important factor that determines the competitiveness of a region or city is no longer only

Only the factors of production such as capital, technology, talent and infrastructure, to a large extent, are the strength of the government's management ability because a clean and efficient government can create a good environment for all kinds of tangible and intangible tourism <sup>[5]</sup>.

As a necessary function of the government, planning is firstly due to the extensive scope of tourism itself and the normal imbalance between supply and demand. This makes it imperative for the Government to take these factors into account in the medium to long term. Correspondingly, as tourism objects and tourism media enterprises often have a great dependence on the environment, many factors can not be controlled by themselves, can only rely on the coordination of the government. At this time, the role of the government is to solve the problem of information asymmetry in the macro and time series, to prevent one-sided supply growth and supply shortage. The government should actively play a corresponding role in promoting, such as encouraging city residents to treat foreign tourists more friendly, and removing obstacles in reception and traffic control. Due to the excellent ecological environment, many colleges and research institutes have chosen small and medium-sized tourist cities as their locations, high-tech parks and development zones have been integrated together, and universities and enterprise research institutes have formed a huge innovative force. Small and medium-sized tourist cities should take advantage of this advantage, rely on their own scientific and technological advantages to establish science and technology enterprises independently or jointly with the society, achieve positive interaction, form a distinctive local enterprise cluster network, and strengthen cooperation with regional, national and even international enterprises, quickly improve the local technical level and enhance their competitiveness. From the practice of various countries and cities, the functions of planning and promotion are generally performed by all countries and cities, and there are few national differences. Sometimes, however, different city authorities impose different degrees of enforcement on certain planning elements, such as the layout and siting of tourism projects that have an impact on the environment.

##### ***c. Cooperation and competition between regional tourism cities***

Tourist cities are composed of various enterprises, organizations and groups, which are relatively spontaneous combination and carry out various cooperation, but all are driven by self-interest <sup>[6]</sup>. These enterprises and combinations may realize whether their interests can be realized dependent on the interests of the tourist city, in which case, the tourist city and various organizations may interact with each other, communicate with each other, cooperate with each other, and form a consensus on the development prospects of the tourist city. The management of tourist cities will play a key role in the

cooperation between cities and various institutions. In general, the competition and cooperation among relevant institutions with tourist cities as the core will affect the behavior, style and mode of operation of tourist cities. Competition and cooperation are extremely important to the competitiveness of small and medium-sized tourist cities. The reason why cooperation can improve the strength of small and medium-sized tourism cities is that cooperation encourages the relevant institutions to further move towards the common goal, while competition creates a good environment within the small and medium-sized tourism cities to advocate change, encourage improvement of quality, advocate efficiency and pay attention to results.

The perfect infrastructure of urban agglomeration has created very favorable conditions for the intensive development of tourism. Internet technology has created a brand new mode of integration of tourism resources for the development of modern tourism. The link function of the Internet can link all relatively scattered tourism attractions in urban agglomerations into a unified organic whole, realizing the diversity and integration of tourism resources and meeting the individual needs of the tourism market [7]; The use of Internet information release function, all-round, full time, multi-perspective release of tourism information, forecast tourism activities, greatly enhance the city's own tourism image [8]; The interactive function of the Internet can timely understand the market demand, so as to study the market and formulate market strategies; Create a new travel sales model. The website uses the e-commerce function of the Internet to provide online booking, selling featured goods and so on.

## 5. Qinhuangdao Tourism City Competitiveness System (Empirical Research)

### *a. Research status of the competitiveness of Qinhuangdao tourism city*

Qinhuangdao city, with a population of 3.1343 million in 2024, is a medium-sized tourism city and a resource-driven tourism city [9]. The competitiveness of Qinhuangdao tourism city means that in a certain competitive environment, Qinhuangdao can improve its attraction to tourists, improve the living standard of residents and obtain the ability of sustainable development through the integration of its tourism, culture, environment, human resources, economy and other resources. The competition spatial characteristics of Qinhuangdao city are as follows: Located in the northeast corner of Hebei Province, it is the combination of North China and Northeast China economic zones, and belongs to the coastal city development axis of the Bohai Economic Zone. Bohai Economic Zone has unique development advantages, and is expected to become the third high-growth region in China after the Yangtze River Delta and the Pearl River Delta. It is adjacent to the two major cities of Beijing and Tianjin, and is clustered with tourist cities in the surrounding areas. From the scale level, Qinhuangdao city belongs to the prefecture-level city and the core city of the regional tourism regional system, which has the corresponding radiation and agglomeration functions. Qinhuangdao tourism city competitiveness system is based on the natural and cultural tourism resources. It is a three-dimensional and multi-level open social complex system with specific structure and function, which is composed of the interrelation, interaction and interpenetration of the subsystems of Qinhuangdao's urban charm, livability and green elements.

### *b. The operation of competitive power system of Qinhuangdao city*

Qinhuangdao Municipal government leads the city construction with scientific planning and tourism concept. The development, reform and finance departments give priority to supporting the construction of tourism projects in major infrastructure investment arrangements, project approval and relevant special fund arrangements, and consider the needs of tourism development in industrial development, project construction and planning [10]. The transportation department emphasizes the construction of tourism transportation infrastructure in the aspects of highway construction planning, construction capital investment, road renovation, etc. When attracting investment, the commercial department is mainly responsible for the implementation and management of service projects such as catering, shopping, accommodation and entertainment. The culture and publicity departments actively strengthen tourism publicity and education, improve the masses' awareness of tourism and the quality of citizens, and create a social environment conducive to tourism development.

Qinhuangdao City places great importance on regional tourism cooperation and competition. The integration of tourism resources in Beijing, Chengde and Qinhuangdao has become a shining "Golden Triangle". Among them, Beijing and Tianjin are ancient capitals with a long history and culture, and Tangshan and Langfang also have a lot of tourism resources, which has laid the foundation for regional tourism cooperation in Qinhuangdao City. By establishing a cooperation mechanism for the Bohai Rim tourism area with Beijing as the center, the three cities of Beijing, Chengde and Qinhuangdao not only

have unique tourism resources, which can form complementary advantages, but also can be called geographically connected and cultural heritage.

## 6. Conclusion and prospect

This study defines the connotation of the competitiveness of small and medium-sized tourism cities, designs the competitiveness system of small and medium-sized tourism cities, and explains the operation mechanism of the competitiveness system of small and medium-sized tourism cities. Finally, it takes Qinhuangdao city as an example to conduct an empirical study on the competitiveness system structure of small and medium-sized tourism cities. The results show that the quality and abundance of natural and cultural tourist attractions is the core charm factor of Qinhuangdao city, and the city managers should strengthen it constantly. The city competitiveness of Qinhuangdao city should be improved in three aspects: charm, livable and green. At first, the city should vigorously develop tourism on the basis of core charm and then raise the level of residents' income, improve the living environment, and build livable cities, meanwhile. It also needs to focus on economic, environmental, social and cultural sustainable development. Finally, regional cooperation should be strengthened by innovating government innovation management capacity to enhance competitiveness. The research on the competitiveness of small and medium-sized tourist cities is a brand new subject. The research in this paper only makes a beneficial exploration in this field, and there are still many important issues to be further studied, such as the influence of the "new economy" driven by globalization and information technology on the competitiveness of tourist cities as well as Specific measures to enhance the competitiveness of different types of small and medium-sized tourist cities. More research and practice in this area are vigorously expected.

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