

Current Market Development Status, Competition Pattern and Optimization Path of the "Shenwu Gorge" International Ecological-Cultural Tourism Route

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Abstract: Developed based on three World Heritage sites, namely Wudang Mountain, Shennongjia, and Tangya Tusi City, as well as multiple 5A-level scenic spots, the "Shenwu Gorge" International Ecological-Cultural Tourism Route serves as a core carrier for Hubei Province to build world-class cultural and tourism brands. Based on field investigations, tourist reviews and industrial statistical data from 2023 to 2025, this paper systematically analyzes the development status of the route from four dimensions: brand influence, passenger-flow characteristics, competitive landscape and consumption preferences. The study reveals that the route boasts scarce world-class heritage resource advantages, yet it is confronted with several challenges, including low international recognition of the fully-integrated regional brand, poor inter-regional transportation connectivity, inadequate foreign-related service supporting facilities, and a homogeneous experiential product system. At present, its international tourist sources are mainly from nearby markets such as Japan, South Korea and Southeast Asia, while the proportion of high-end long-haul tourists from Europe and America remains low. Meanwhile, the route faces fierce competition from high-quality cultural-tourism routes both at home and abroad. Targeting the existing bottlenecks in development, this paper puts forward optimization strategies from five perspectives: integrated brand communication, transportation and service upgrading, differentiated product development, targeted marketing via overseas new-media platforms, and improvement of infrastructure quality. It provides theoretical support and practical references for constructing the route into an international ecological-cultural tourism destination.

Keywords: Shenwu Gorge; ecological-cultural tourism; World Heritage; cultural-tourism integration; international tourist sources; market competitiveness

1. Introduction

World Heritage sites represent top-tier scarce resources for the cultural-tourism industry, and the linked development of multi-heritage clusters has become a mainstream paradigm for high-quality global cultural-tourism development. Hubei Province possesses three world-class heritage sites: Wudang Mountain, Shennongjia and Tangya Tusi City Site, covering both natural and cultural categories. Home to 60 percent of the province's 5A-level scenic spots, it has formed a distinctive resource system featuring overlapping Taoist culture, primeval ecosystems, water conservancy projects, karst landforms and Tusi folk customs, endowing it with inherent advantages for developing cross-border long-haul international cultural-tourism products. In April 2025, Hubei launched the integrated "Shenwu Gorge" International Ecological-Cultural Tourism Route. This initiative addresses fragmented cultural-tourism resources and disjointed marketing across four regions in western Hubei, establishes an integrated development model with holistic regional coordination and multi-heritage linkage, and strives to build an iconic ecological-cultural tourism brand with global recognition.

In the post-pandemic era, global inbound tourism has kept recovering, and cultural-tourism consumption at home and abroad has shifted comprehensively toward in-depth experiences and quality vacations[1]. Overseas tourists show markedly rising demand for long-haul products that combine natural wonders with indigenous Eastern cultures. Nevertheless, competition in the cultural-tourism market has grown increasingly fierce. Internationally renowned tourism destinations as well as well-established domestic routes such as Western Sichuan, Western Yunnan and Huangshan keep diverting tourist flows, and competition for high-end inbound visitors has intensified dramatically.

Against such a backdrop, identifying the developmental characteristics of the "Shenwu Gorge" Route, distinguishing its strengths and weaknesses, and building differentiated competitive advantages constitute the key for western Hubei's cultural-tourism sector to break through developmental bottlenecks and achieve international transformation.

Existing domestic studies mostly focus on individual heritage sites or single scenic spots, and there is a notable gap in systematic empirical research concerning cross-regional cultural-tourism routes based on integrated multiple heritage sites [2]. Taking "Shenwu Gorge" as a case study, this paper adopts multi-source primary data from 2023 to 2025, combining official statistics, online tourist reviews and survey questionnaires. By employing multiple research methods, it objectively assesses the route's tourist-flow structure, tourist preferences and brand communication status, and sorts out developmental bottlenecks in transportation, foreign-oriented services and product systems. This research can enrich the theoretical system of cross-regional heritage tourism and provide empirical references for the development of similar routes. Furthermore, it offers quantitative support for facility upgrading, overseas marketing and holistic regional planning of the route, helping translate its resource advantages into sustainable international market competitiveness.

2. Analysis on the market development status of the "Shenwu Gorge" international ecological-cultural tourism route

2.1 Brand influence: Solid resource foundation yet nascent integrated brand communication

Brand influence consists of four dimensions: resource foundation, communication channels, marketing activities and tourist reputation. The "Shenwu Gorge" Route exhibits a structural problem whereby individual scenic spots boast well-established brands while the overall integrated regional brand remains weak. Endowed with a globally scarce high-density cluster of World Heritage sites, the route covers three natural and cultural World Heritage sites including Wudang Mountain, Shennongjia and Tangya Tusi City Site, integrates 60 percent of 5A-level scenic spots in the province, and assembles diverse resources such as ancient architectural culture, primeval ecology, water conservancy projects, karst landforms and ethnic folk customs, building an irreplicable top-tier resource-based competitive barrier.

In terms of brand communication, overseas popularity varies greatly among different scenic spots. Wudang Mountain and the Three Gorges Dam enjoy steady international fame; Shennongjia has gained basic recognition in overseas ecological-tourism circles; while Enshi Grand Canyon mainly targets the domestic market. Since the launch of the unified "Shenwu Gorge" brand in 2025, industrial awareness has been enhanced through international exhibitions and overseas business-tourism inspections. Nevertheless, the general overseas public has very low recognition of the complete tourist route. Long-term fragmented marketing has led to fragmented tourist perception, and a comprehensive regional communication system is yet to take shape. Various thematic festivals are held by individual scenic spots without unified brand logos, resulting in limited effects of joint communication.

Platform data indicates that the four core scenic spots show prominent differentiation in tourist reputation with generally high positive reviews, and overseas tourist groups present distinct preferences. European and American tourists favor combined natural and cultural resources; Japanese and South Korean tourists prefer health-preservation cultural products; tourists from Southeast Asia attach great importance to travel cost-performance. Meanwhile, obvious deficiencies exist in the international supporting facilities of the route. Defective inter-regional transportation connections, insufficient multilingual services and low standards of foreign-oriented facilities have become core bottlenecks restricting the brand reputation and international development of the route.

2.2 Tourist-flow market characteristics: Sustained total-volume growth yet imbalanced inbound tourist structure

The scale of tourist flow serves as a core quantitative indicator reflecting the market vitality of cultural-tourism routes [3]. From three dimensions including the temporal evolution of regional tourist flow, the recovery rhythm of inbound tourist sources, and the radiation-driving effect of core scenic spots, this section systematically characterizes the operation and evolution rules of tourist flow along the "Shenwu Gorge" Route.

From 2023 to 2025, the total tourist reception volume and total tourism revenue of areas covered by

the route maintained steady positive growth. Market growth momentum was further unleashed after the integrated route brand was promoted externally in 2025. The time-series data reveal notable features: the annual growth rate of total tourism revenue consistently outpaces that of tourist arrivals, indicating that the regional tourism industry is gradually breaking away from reliance on ticket-driven economy, and tourists' per-capita consumption level rises steadily. The market penetration rate of high-value-added cultural-tourism products such as health-oriented residential tourism, customized in-depth tours, intangible-cultural-heritage study tours and mountain hiking has increased year by year, highlighting the upgrading trend of regional cultural-tourism consumption. To intuitively demonstrate the dynamic evolution of tourist flow and tourism-economic scale, key regional operational indicators from 2023 to 2025 are summarized in below, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Core operational indicators for the "Shenwu Gorge" comprehensive tourism development project (2023–2025)

A particular year	Total number of visitors to the entire tourism sector (100 million visits)	Year-on-year growth rate	Total all-for-one tourism revenue (RMB million)	Year-on-year growth rate	Average per capita tourist spending (Yuan/person)
2023	1.26	23.15%	1586.32	28.62%	1259.00
2024	1.48	17.46%	1968.75	24.11%	1330.24
2025	1.72	16.22%	2452.68	24.58%	1425.98

In the post-pandemic era, China's inbound tourism has shown a phased recovery. Restricted by flight routes and visa requirements in 2023, tourist flow recovered moderately. In 2024, with more cross-border air routes and optimized visa-exemption policies, the growth rate of inbound tourist arrivals rose markedly. Driven by special overseas promotion campaigns in 2025, the reception scale achieved rapid growth; nevertheless, the overall volume has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels.

The tourist-source structure presents obvious regional disparities. Japanese and South Korean tourists prefer experiential activities centered on Taoist Tai-Chi culture, whereas Southeast Asian tourists prioritize alpine eco-tourism and summer-escape products. These two groups constitute the mainstay of the inbound market. The share of high-end long-haul tourists from Europe and America has increased steadily. Characterized by long travel cycles and high consumption capacity, they represent a core potential group for boosting cultural-tourism output value. At present, however, dedicated products and targeted marketing for this demographic remain insufficient, and such tourist sources have not been fully tapped.

The four core scenic spots-Wudang Mountain, Shennongjia, the Three Gorges Dam and Enshi Grand Canyon-act as pivotal tourist hubs for the route and drive revenue growth of related cultural-tourism businesses along the route. Among them, Wudang Mountain and the Three Gorges Dam record the highest share of overseas visitors with well-established international recognition. Although Shennongjia and Enshi Grand Canyon still have a small base of overseas tourists, their overseas visitor numbers have maintained rapid growth for three consecutive years, with rising overseas influence and prominent potential for international-oriented development.

2.3 Competitive landscape: Dual pressure from high-quality global cultural-tourism destinations and visitor diversion by domestic homologous routes

The "Shenwu Gorge" International Ecological-Cultural Tourism Route is subject to dual market competition pressures from well-established international mountain cultural-tourism destinations and domestic cross-regional long-haul cultural-tourism products[4]. Although the route is endowed with scarce top-tier resource endowments, conspicuous shortcomings persist in brand overall planning and operation, comprehensive supporting services and the development of segmented thematic products, which further amplify its competitive disadvantages in the market.

Three types of mature mountain cultural-tourism carriers around the world constitute direct competitors, each equipped with a complete industrial development paradigm. They can serve as a reference system for improving the international quality of this route, as shown in Table 2 below for a comparison of the competitive factors of each competitor.

Table 2. International cultural and tourism destination competitive benchmarking matrix

Benchmark Destination	Core Competitive Advantage	"Shenwu Gorge" – a relative weakness	Developmental reference value
Yellowstone National Park	A century of brand heritage, a comprehensive range of outdoor cultural and tourism products, and a mature ecological conservation narrative framework.	The international promotion of Shennongjia's ecological resources remains inadequate, and there is a lack of standardized outdoor facilities and services.	Develop a specialized product portfolio for ecological research expeditions and field exploration activities, and establish an international narrative for communicating ecological value.
Swiss Alps Resort	Comprehensive integrated transportation network; standardized multilingual service system; tiered high-end resort facility clusters	The cross-regional transportation network is fragmented; the standardization level of international hospitality services remains low; and high-end leisure and residence facilities are scarce.	Establish a comprehensive, interconnected transportation system and develop standardized, end-to-end international service guidelines.
Mount Fuji Cultural and Tourism Circuit, Japan	A comprehensive modern creative transformation system for traditional cultural IPs, coupled with refined, integrated services across all touchpoints, and exceptional travel efficiency for both tourist attractions and urban commuters.	The innovative development of local cultural IP lags behind; there is a shortage of youth-oriented cultural and creative products as well as trendy cultural and tourism content.	Promote the modern reinterpretation of Taoist, Tusi, and Three Gorges cultural symbols, and develop a cultural and tourism content matrix tailored to younger audiences.

Horizontal comparison reveals that the irrevocable international core competitiveness of the "Shenwu Gorge" Route stems from its rare combination of triple World-Heritage clusters and the in-depth integration of natural and humanistic resources. Nevertheless, the route lags far behind international benchmark destinations in terms of global brand exposure, cross-regional transportation support, high-end accommodation hardware, and refined multilingual services.

At the domestic-market level, three well-established long-haul routes the Western Sichuan Grand Loop, the Western Yunnan Cultural-Tourism Corridor, and the Huangshan Huizhou Cultural Tourism Belt-keep diverting middle and high-end tourist sources. Relying on differentiated landscapes and business formats, these routes have formed stable tourist-consumer groups. Compared with domestic competitors, "Shenwu Gorge" boasts three World Heritage sites and nine national 5A-level scenic spots, granting it an overwhelming advantage in resource grade. However, this integrated brand was officially launched only in 2025, resulting in a short market-cultivation cycle and an absence of a unified brand image. By contrast, domestic competing routes have established clear market positioning and loyal consumer groups. Therefore, there remains considerable room for improvement in the research and development of segmented thematic products and the shaping of differentiated brand positioning for the route.

2.4 Consumer preferences: Rising demand for in-depth experiences and new media as the core information channel

Based on questionnaire surveys of overseas tourists and travel agent research data, patterns concerning product preferences, information-acquisition channels and consumption decision making of overseas visitors to the "Shenwu Gorge" Route can be summarized, which provides empirical support for product upgrading and targeted overseas marketing. Tourists show the highest acceptance for the short-duration dual-destination product of "Wudang Mountain + Shennongjia". Taoist cultural study

tours and primeval-ecology exploration offer complementary experiences, matching overseas tourists' demands for spiritual pursuit and natural sightseeing. By contrast, the 8-to-10-day full scope long-haul route records a low market share due to time-consuming cross-regional transfers and physically-demanding mountain hiking. Survey data indicate that 68 percent of tourists prefer short-term products, 22 percent opt for the full-scope long-haul route, and 10 percent visit only a single scenic spot. Accordingly, it is highly market-oriented to develop differentiated product portfolios with varied durations.

Current inbound cultural-tourism consumption has shifted from superficial sightseeing to immersive in-depth experience, and tourist demands vary distinctly among visitors from different countries. European and American tourists favor outdoor in-depth products such as mountain hiking and geological investigation; Japanese and South Korean tourists prioritize Tai-Chi training and Taoist health-preservation programs; family tourists with children show greater preference for study-tour products featuring fauna-and-flora observation and water-conservancy popular science[5]. At present, the route suffers from oversupply of sightseeing-oriented products, whereas immersive and characteristic study-tour products are in conspicuous shortage.

Young overseas tourists mainly obtain travel information through overseas short-video platforms. Original content created by online influencers serves as their primary travel reference, while the effectiveness of conventional promotional approaches keeps declining. Nevertheless, the route has not yet established a mature operation system for overseas new-media outreach and influencer cooperation. When making travel decisions, overseas tourists attach top priority to landscape uniqueness, depth of cultural experience and travel safety, and exhibit low price sensitivity. High-end tourist groups are willing to pay premiums for high-quality experiences. In this context, the route should abandon the low-price competition model, focus on developing high-value-added premium cultural-tourism products, and pursue an international premium-oriented development path.

3. Core contradictions and shortcomings in the market development of the "Shenwu Gorge" international ecological-cultural tourism route

3.1 Contradiction between top-tier resource endowments and the weak integrated brand

Boasting top-tier domestic and globally scarce resources consisting of multiple World Heritage sites and high-density 5A-level scenic spots, the route possesses an unparalleled hardware-resource foundation. Nevertheless, the unified integrated brand of the "Shenwu Gorge" Route has an extremely short operation cycle and enjoys exceedingly low public recognition both at home and abroad. For a long time, scenic spots including Wudang Mountain, Shennongjia, the Three Gorges and Enshi have conducted independent marketing and separate IP building. They fail to translate the well-established popularity of individual scenic spots into brand equity for the holistic route. Overseas tourists cannot form a holistic brand perception that "a single route brings together multiple World Heritage sites", which makes it difficult to convert resource advantages into market-traffic advantages.

3.2 Contradiction between diversified composite resources and homogeneous superficial sightseeing-oriented product system

The route covers five distinctive resource categories: Taoist culture, primeval ecology, modern water conservancy, karst geology and ethnic-minority Tusi culture. Nevertheless, the currently available tourism products are still dominated by basic sightseeing tours, with insufficient supply of immersive thematic products tailored for different tiers and tourist groups. The development of standardized hiking and geological investigation routes for European and American adventure tourists, long-term Tai-Chi health-preservation training camps for Japanese and South Korean visitors, and graded study-tour curricula for young people lags behind. The advantages of resource diversity have not been materialized through differentiated product development, making it difficult to keep pace with the current consumption trend for in-depth experiential cultural-tourism.

3.3 Contradiction between the holistic cross-regional route and fragmented supporting transportation services

Spanning four geographical sectors of Shiyang, Shennongjia, Yichang and Enshi, the route features a large spatial span, yet a holistic integrated transportation system has not yet been established. Inter-city

tourist special trains and scenic-spot shuttle routes operate on sparse schedules, while transfer guidance and real-time traffic information services are absent. Drawing no reference to the “all-region through-ticket” model adopted by internationally mature cultural-tourism belts, the ticketing systems for high-speed railways, tourist coaches and scenic-spot shuttle buses remain isolated from one another, making seamless transfers impossible. Insufficient coverage of multilingual traffic signs and foreign-language customer services greatly increases the time cost for overseas tourists and seriously impairs the experience of long-haul tourism.

3.4 Contradiction between international inbound-market demands and the fragile foreign-oriented service system

Against the continuous recovery of the inbound tourism market, overseas tourist sources have rising demands for standardized foreign-oriented services. Nevertheless, the international upgrading of supporting services along the route falls behind schedule. First, deficiencies exist in language services: small-and medium-sized scenic spots as well as township restaurants and homestays face a severe shortage of multilingual signs in English, Japanese and Korean, together with competent service staff. Second, there are shortcomings in accommodation hardware: the supply of high-end international chain hotels and premium foreign-oriented homestays is inadequate, and some outdated facilities fail to meet the accommodation expectations of overseas tourists. Third, digital foreign-oriented services are absent. No multilingual official tourism service platform has been developed, and channels for overseas tourists regarding online ticket purchase, navigation and emergency consultation remain imperfect.

3.5 Contradiction between competition in the global cultural-tourism market and the monotonous traditional overseas marketing model

Competition among long-haul cultural-tourism routes at home and abroad keeps intensifying. Young overseas tourist groups have fully shifted their information-acquisition channels to overseas short-video social platforms. However, the current overseas promotion of the "Shenwu Gorge" Route still relies mainly on traditional modes such as offline tourism exhibitions and printed promotional materials. Official content on platforms including TikTok and YouTube is updated sporadically. There is a lack of regular cooperation mechanisms with overseas travel influencers and photography bloggers, and user-generated content (UGC) for spontaneous communication has not been sufficiently guided. A marketing system for precise online outreach toward young overseas tourist groups has not yet taken shape.

4. Optimization development paths for the "Shenwu Gorge" international ecological-cultural tourism route

4.1 Integrated holistic-regional brand communication and tiered targeted layout for overseas markets

First, establish an integrated holistic-regional brand identity system. With "Shenwu Gorge" serving as its exclusive overarching external integrated brand, this initiative unifies the visual identity of promotional materials, exhibition booths and domestic-and-international online accounts. Drawing on three mature individual IPs — Wudang Mountain Tai-Chi, Shennongjia golden snub-nosed monkeys, and the Three Gorges Dam — as attraction drivers, it emphasizes the core differentiated selling point of “one route covering three World Heritage Sites” in communication content, gradually shifting tourists’ perception from individual scenic spots to the complete route.

Second, implement differentiated overseas communication strategies for different tourist-source regions. For European and American markets, this strategy adopts the narrative of “in-depth adventure integrating World Heritage nature and culture”, and emphasizes the scarcity of triple World Heritage sites as well as the value of primeval-forest geological hiking. For Japanese and South Korean markets, it focuses on themes including Wudang Tai-Chi health preservation, Taoist cultural training, and the exploration of ancient-architecture humanities. For Southeast Asian tourist sources, it prioritizes the promotion of alpine summer-escape products in Shennongjia and Enshi, together with affordable short-distance ecological combined routes.

Third, expand international professional exhibitions and overseas offline channels. This strategy maintains in-depth participation in world-class tourism trade fairs including ITB Berlin, WTM London,

and ITB Shanghai. It organizes annual comprehensive full-route inspection tours for overseas travel agents, mainstream foreign media, and international cultural-tourism KOLs. It expands the brand's international exposure via third-party overseas content creators and implements long-term consignment-sales cooperation for the route in overseas markets.

4.2 Constructing a tiered and differentiated themed-product matrix to meet diverse demands of overseas tourist groups

Leveraging the five core resources of the route, four themed product lines shall be developed in zonal arrangement. Meanwhile, two gradient itineraries of short and long durations are designed to adapt to the travel cycles of different overseas tourists:

① Wudang Mountain Cultural Health-preservation Product Line. Targeting cultural enthusiasts from Japan, South Korea, Europe and America, it develops graded 1-to-7-day Tai-Chi experience courses, ancient-architecture study-tour camps and Taoist health-preservation retreat tours, so as to build the core cultural IP product of the route.

② Shennongjia Ecological Study-tour Product Line. Oriented towards family groups with children and international biology enthusiasts, it launches long-duration study-tour products including primeval-forest hiking, golden snub-nosed monkey observation and alpine-plant popular-science activities, supported by professional bilingual study-tour instructors.

③ Three Gorges Project Popular-science Product Line. For engineering and water-conservancy investigation teams as well as youth study-tour groups, it creates immersive popular-science routes featuring professional in-dam interpretation, fixed-point observation of flood-discharge landscapes and visits to the Three Gorges Project History Exhibition Hall.

④ Enshi Karst Geological-adventure Product Line. Aimed at European and American outdoor-hiking enthusiasts, it develops standardized graded cliff boardwalk hiking, canyon camping and karst-land form geological-investigation routes, and improves supporting facilities for outdoor safety.

In terms of itineraries, the 2-to-4-day core short-route of "Wudang Mountain + Shennongjia" and the 8-to-12-day full-scope complete long-route are launched in parallel. Such measures lower the time-cost threshold for overseas tourists and enhance the market adaptability of products.

4.3 Construction of an integrated regional transportation network and improvement of transfer services in line with international benchmarks

Drawing on the all-region transportation operation model of the Swiss Alps, an integrated transportation system shall be established for the "Shenwu Gorge" Route. First, launch an all-in-one combined ticket covering regional transportation and scenic-spot admission. This strategy integrates ticketing services for high-speed railways at transport hubs in Wuhan, Shiyan, Yichang and Enshi, inter-city tourist special trains, and scenic-spot shuttle buses to realize region-wide one-ticket access. It increases the frequency of tourist special trains and direct tourist routes among the four cities to reduce cross-regional travel time.

Second, promote the upgrading of digital transportation services. This strategy develops a multilingual official tourism mini-program and APP equipped with functions including real-time shuttle bus inquiry, online ticket purchase, intelligent transfer navigation, and 24-hour multilingual online customer service.

Third, implement international-oriented renovation for regional transportation nodes. This strategy install trilingual guide signs in English, Japanese and Korean at high-speed-rail hubs, scenic-spot distribution centers and highway service areas, and set up professional foreign-language consultation desks.

4.4 Quality improvement and upgrading of the regional foreign-oriented service system and remediation of internationalization-related supporting shortcomings

First, implement a regional full-coverage multilingual service project. This strategy completes the installation of multilingual guide signs and voice-interpretation devices across all 5A-level scenic spots along the route, key catering clusters, and core hotels. It conducts regular foreign-language skill

training for staff working at scenic spots, homestays and catering enterprises, and establishes a performance-assessment mechanism for international-oriented services.

Second, promote tiered upgrading of accommodation facilities. This strategy introduces high-end international chain hotels at the core transport hubs of Shiyan, Shennongjia, Enshi and Yichang. It supports the development of a number of premium international-oriented homestays tailored for overseas tourist groups, and implements phased hardware renovation for outdated in-scenic-spot accommodation facilities to meet international accommodation standards.

Third, establish a closed-loop tourist-evaluation management mechanism. This strategy regularly collects tourist-review data from platforms including Ctrip and overseas TripAdvisor. It categorizes negative feedback concerning transportation, services and facilities, establishes a time-bound rectification ledger, and continuously optimizes the full-journey travel experience for overseas tourists.

4.5 Innovative overseas new media content marketing and precise outreach toward young international tourist groups

It build a systematic content-communication matrix for overseas social platforms. First, register official multilingual accounts of the "Shenwu Gorge" Route on TikTok, YouTube and Instagram, and continuously produce high-quality short-video and graphic content covering aerial shots of the whole region, Tai-Chi experiences, forest hiking and geological exploration. Second, establish a long-term cooperation mechanism with overseas travel influencers. This strategy launches a global online check-in challenge with the hashtagShenwu Gorge World Heritage Journey, inviting overseas photography bloggers and cultural-tourism influencers to create original on-site travel vlogs. Third, it facilitates secondary UGC user communication. By rolling out incentive policies to encourage domestic and international tourists to share travel content and repurposing high-quality tourist-generated materials for official redistribution, it harnesses social-media traffic to reach the core under-30 overseas tourist demographic.

5. Conclusion

Drawing on field-survey data and network big data from 2023 to 2025, this paper systematically analyzes the market development status, competitive landscape and developmental bottlenecks of the "Shenwu Gorge" International Ecological-Cultural Tourism Route, and proposes optimization paths for its internationalized development.

The study reveals that the route possesses scarce world-class cultural-tourism resources. Combining three World Heritage sites and nine 5A-level scenic spots, it has formed a composite resource advantage of "nature + culture". The four core scenic spots, including Wudang Mountain and Shennongjia, each feature distinctive brand characteristics. Regional tourist reception volume and tourism revenue have increased steadily for three consecutive years, indicating considerable potential for the recovery of inbound tourism. Nevertheless, the integrated brand of the route has been operated for a relatively short period, resulting in low public recognition overseas. The advantages of individual scenic spots can hardly be converted into the core competitiveness of the holistic route.

Currently, the route faces dual competitive pressures at home and abroad. Compared with international mountain cultural-tourism destinations, it exhibits conspicuous shortcomings in regional transportation integration, refined foreign-oriented services and high-end accommodation supporting facilities. Relative to popular domestic cultural-tourism routes such as those in Western Sichuan and Western Yunnan, although it boasts superior resource grades, it lags notably behind in brand integration, development of segmented products and construction of overseas marketing systems. At the consumption-market level, global cultural-tourism consumption has shifted from traditional sightseeing to in-depth experiential models. Overseas tourists prefer the short-route combination of Wudang Mountain and Shennongjia, attach importance to landscape uniqueness and cultural authenticity, and show low price sensitivity. Meanwhile, young overseas tourist groups mainly obtain cultural-tourism information through short-video social platforms, and the effectiveness of traditional offline marketing models keeps weakening.

At present, the development of the route faces five structural contradictions, namely the contradictions between top-tier resources and a weak brand, diversified resources and homogeneous products, long-haul layout and fragmented transportation, inbound demands and a fragile foreign-oriented service system, as well as fierce competition and traditional marketing, all of which

constrain its high-quality internationalized development. Accordingly, Hubei Province should, from a holistic regional perspective, integrate resources, unify brand narratives, develop differentiated in-depth cultural-tourism products, upgrade transportation and foreign-oriented service supporting facilities, build an overseas new-media communication matrix, precisely cultivate tourist markets of multiple countries, and convert resource advantages into stable international market competitiveness.

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