Research on tourism industry development strategy of Tai'an City in post-epidemic era

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Abstract: At the end of 2022, the Chinese government implemented the new measures of "managing Covid-19 with measures against Class B infectious diseases", so that China has entered the post-epidemic era. And the tourism industry is of great importance to stimulate the national economy after the epidemic. By comparing the relevant data of the past five years, this paper analyzes the impact of the epidemic on the tourism industry of Tai'an City from three aspects: tourists, tourism enterprises and tourism practitioners. Then it analyzes the future development direction of Tai'an's tourism industry from two aspects of opportunities and challenges in the post-epidemic era, and puts forward targeted development strategies.

Keywords: post-epidemic era, tourism industry, development strategy, Tai'an City

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

On January 26, 2020, the General Office of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism issued the *Urgent Notice on Suspending the Operation of Tourism Enterprises on the Prevention and Control of Novel Coronavirus Infection and Pneumonia*, and various measures were taken across the country to reduce the flow of people. Since then, the development of the tourism industry has declined sharply, causing serious damage to China's economy. Since the introduction of the new policy on epidemic prevention at the end of 2022, various regions in China have actively committed to economic recovery, and the tourism industry has played a very important role in promoting economic development, and the tourism industry has been developed in various ways. For example, the directors of local cultural and tourism bureaus have played various roles in promoting local tourism by shooting short videos online; In order to develop tourism, many local governments have also introduced the policy of free admission to local scenic spots.

As a tourist city, the development of Taian's tourism industry has played a vital role in its economy. In the post-epidemic era, it is urgent to revive the tourism industry. The tourism industry is an important part of the economy of Tai'an city. If the tourism industry of Tai'an city is not developed in the critical period of the post-epidemic era, it will not only directly affect the development of the tourism industry of Tai'an City, but also cause various economic contradictions and problems, which will directly affect the economic development of Tai'an City.

1.2 Research Review

1.2.1 Definition of related concepts

Domestic and foreign scholars have different connotations and definitions of "post-epidemic era". Among them, Bi Hongyin (2021) systematically explains the concept of "post-epidemic era" from three dimensions of historical narrative, structural narrative and psychological narrative based on the vision of public opinion and the changing trend of social environment^[1]. The "post-epidemic era" in this paper refers to the *General Plan for the Implementation of Managing Covid-19 with Measures against Class B Infectious Diseases* issued by the National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China on December 26, 2022 as the starting point, and the research data are concentrated in the six months after the release of the document.

Ding Yuxin et al. (2020) studied hotels, scenic spots and travel agencies as the three key parts of the tourism industry in the correlation study on the efficiency of the tourism industry and its subdivisions^[2]. Similarly, the study in this paper focuses on the three major industries of hotel, scenic spot and travel

agencies, and the tourists and tourism practitioners related to the three major industries are also included in the research.

1.2.2 Research status

In the past three years, the development of the tourism industry affected by the epidemic has been worrying. In order to restore the development of the tourism industry as soon as possible, domestic scholars have conducted various studies on the development of the tourism industry in the post-epidemic era. Liu Shuying et al. (2022) used CNKI Chinese academic journals' literature related to tourism under COVID-19 as the database, and with the help of CiteSpace visualization tool, analyzed the research hotspots and development trends of tourism under COVID-19, and put forward research prospects from the aspects of tourism's response mechanism to COVID-19, training of high-quality talents, and reform of cultural and tourism industry. It provides reference for future research on sustainable development of tourism^[3]. Wu Heng et al. (2022) believe that the epidemic has had an impact on the hotel industry in terms of cash flow disruption, sudden decline in occupancy rate, difficulty in online services, etc. For those problems, they put forward strategies for hotels to upgrade traditional marketing methods, optimize marketing channels, explore new media marketing methods, and establish a full-link communication mechanism^[4]. Wu Peiye and Wang Hui (2022) took Liaoning Comfort Travel Agency as an example to analyze the impact of COVID-19 on travel agencies and their employees from three aspects: enterprise, employees' work and life, and employees' psychological impact, and put forward corresponding suggestions for restoring tourism development based on the results^[5]. Wang Jiale (2021) analyzed the recovery and development of the tourism industry of scenic spots in the post-epidemic era and proposed feasible solutions to promote their recovery and development^[6]. Sun Gennian et al. (2021) used the test model of road, railway and air passenger volume as the alternative index of tourism popularity combined with the Logistic growth curve to predict the recovery of passenger volume in Hainan Province, Hubei Province, Shanghai and Beijing, providing basic data reference for the transportation industry in the postepidemic era^[7].

Taking Bhutan as an example, Tamang ST et al. (2021) pointed out that the COVID-19 epidemic had a huge impact on all aspects of the country, especially the tourism industry. They also introduced measures to deal with the COVID-19 epidemic, and discussed the direction of tourism after vaccination^[8]. Yang Y et al. (2021) analyzed the tool named "COVID-19 Tourism Index". As a powerful digital and visual tool, the index provides important information related to the potential recovery of travel and tourism at global, regional and national levels, and provides reliable data for the recovery of tourism after the epidemic^[9]. Lee, Woong-Kyu et al. (2020) explored possible innovative policies for tourism development in the post-epidemic era^[10].

1.2.3 References review

In the context of relaxed epidemic prevention and control measures, the research on the development of tourism industry in the post-epidemic era is an issue that cannot be ignored. Scholars at home and abroad have conducted research on this issue, but compared with foreign research, domestic research on the development of tourism industry in the post-epidemic era is more extensive. Chinese scholars have made a detailed analysis of the development of the tourism industry in the post-epidemic era. In the process of collecting references, we found that the research of Chinese scholars on the development of tourism industry combined culture, health, sports and other aspects, making content more comprehensive. Most foreign scholars have studied the combination of tourism and medical treatment, and few have studied the development of tourism industry in the post-epidemic era, and domestic and foreign scholars have provided distinctive suggestions for the development of tourism industry in the post-epidemic era. However, most of these studies were conducted before the epidemic prevention and control measures were released at the end of 2022, and the development of the tourism industry in the post-epidemic era needs in-depth discussion.

2. The impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry of Tai'an City

2.1 The impact on tourists

Before the outbreak of the epidemic, China's economic situation showed a trend of continuous growth, and national income was also on the rise. People's pursuit of high quality of life is not only material satisfaction, but also spiritual satisfaction. With the development of economy, tourism has gradually become an important part of consumers' spiritual pursuit. However, due to the arrival of the epidemic, it

has caused a certain degree of impact on tourists and dealt a huge blow to the previously promising tourism industry. By collecting data, we studied the impact of the epidemic on tourists' willingness to travel and consumption demand.

As to travel intention, the impact of the epidemic is the primary constraint on tourists' willingness to travel. During the epidemic, the relevant epidemic prevention and control measures issued by the government limited the travel of residents and residents themselves rarely went out out of concern for their own health. In the early stage of the epidemic, people were confined to their homes and could not go out, which they could not adapt to in the short term. However, due to the expansion of the epidemic scale, people began to worry about their health and their willingness to travel weakened^[11]. According to *The Blue Book of China's Tourism Economy (NO.15)* released by China Tourism Academy, from 2018 to 2022, the index of residents' willingness to travel in 2018 and 2015 was above 100, and the index of residents' willingness to travel continued to decline from the end of 2019 to the first quarter of 2021. In the following three quarters, the index of residents' willingness to travel was above 100 but did not return to the index before the epidemic. And in 2022, due to the increase in the number of new infected people and the wide spread of the epidemic, the index of residents' willingness to travel intention index affected by the Covid-19 epidemic is not high, and residents' didn't want to go out for travel^[12].

As to tourism consumption demand, tourism consumption refers to the higher level consumption needs after people's basic life needs are satisfied. Tourism consumption includes six elements of "food, accommodation, transportation, travel, shopping and entertainment", involving travel agencies, accommodation industry, transportation industry, catering industry, sightseeing and entertainment industry, tourism supplies and souvenir sales industry. We studied the impact of the epidemic on tourism consumption demand by collecting relevant data of per capita disposable income and tourism consumption from 2018 to 2022.

According to the data of the National Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the growth rate of per capita disposable income increased year by year in 2018 and 2019. Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 in 2020, the growth rate of per capita disposable income in the country is not stable, especially in 2020 and 2022. Due to the large-scale outbreak of the epidemic, per capita disposable income is growing at a slower rate than before the pandemic. In the past five years, the per capita tourism expenditure of national residents has also changed with the change of per capita disposable income.

From Figure 1 and Figure 2, per capita tourism consumption is closely related to per capita disposable income. Before the epidemic, per capita disposable income and tourism consumption have shown a growing trend every year. However, since the outbreak of the epidemic, per capita disposable income has decreased at the same time as tourism consumption. In 2021, when the epidemic becomes normal, per capita disposable income and tourism consumption will both increase. However, tourism consumption did not recover to the level before the epidemic, and the large-scale outbreak of the epidemic in 2022 reduced tourism consumption again. In general, the epidemic has reduced the demand for tourism consumption.

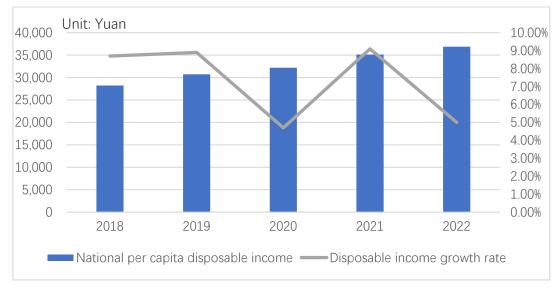


Figure 1 National per capita disposable income from 2018 to 2022

Academic Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences ISSN 2616-5783 Vol.6, Issue 22: 108-115, DOI: 10.25236/AJHSS.2023.062219

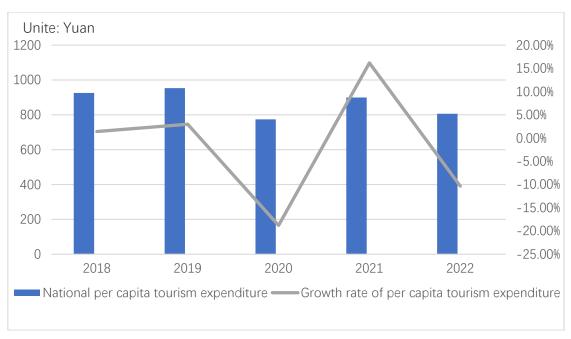


Figure 2 Per capita tourism consumption expenditure of national residents during 2018-2022

2.2 The impact on tourism enterprises

At the beginning of the epidemic, Tai'an City suspended the opening of public cultural and entertainment venues and tourist attractions from January 25, 2020, and urged the suspension of group Tours and other tourism products of travel agencies. Therefore, relevant measures had a certain impact on the operation of relevant enterprises. Under the normalization of epidemic prevention and control, some public cultural and entertainment places and scenic spots have gradually begun to open to the outside world to receive tourists, but due to the instability of the epidemic, the operation of tourism enterprises is facing huge challenges.

As to operating income, according to the relevant data of Tai'an Municipal Bureau of Statistics, the total tourism revenue of Tai'an City has been growing every year before the epidemic. During the epidemic period, the number of tourists traveling has decreased, resulting in a sharp drop in demand. Taking 2020 as an example, compared with 2019, the number of tourists and the total tourism revenue in 2020 have decreased. The reduction of market demand has reduced the business scope of tourism enterprises and reduced the operating income of tourism enterprises. The supply of tourism enterprises has shrunk significantly. Some small and medium-sized tourism enterprises are facing bankruptcy due to insufficient funds and staff turnover.

As for operating costs, before the epidemic, the operating costs of tourism enterprises mainly came from the consumption of tourists. During the epidemic period, the number of tourists traveling decreased and their consumption decreased. Although the operating costs of tourism enterprises decreased compared with before, the ratio of cost to income increased, and the cost of some small and mediumsized enterprises was higher than the income. The epidemic has reduced the number of tourists received by tourism enterprises, and the daily fixed expenses have not stopped spending because of the decrease in the number of tourists, such as the purchase of hotel supplies, the maintenance of public transport vehicles, and the daily cleaning of scenic spots. The prevention and control of epidemic situations and the spread of epidemics have become routine, and the temperature detection equipment, disinfection supplies and masks purchased by tourism companies have increased the cost of protection and health costs.

2.3 The impact on tourism practitioners

Affected by the COVID-19 epidemic, some tourism enterprises have seen their benefits decline or even go out of business, and some frontline tourism practitioners have reduced their salaries or even changed their careers, which has had an impact on the growth of tourism practitioners and the sustainable development of the tourism industry^[13].

As for the quality of tourism practitioners. Quality includes psychological quality, physical quality, cultural quality and spiritual quality ^[14]. We studied the impact of the epidemic on tourism workers in both psychological and physical aspects. Psychological quality is a synthesis of psychological potential, energy, characteristics, quality and behavior that is gradually developed and formed through the interaction between subject and object in practical activities based on physiological quality^[15]. The acquired environment will affect people's psychological quality. The epidemic will have a certain impact on the psychology of tourism practitioners. For example, some practitioners will not find new jobs immediately after losing their jobs. During the epidemic, people have been unable to go out to find jobs at home and have no source of income for the time being, which has an impact on their life and psychology. Tourism practitioners who are still on the job will have negative psychology about engaging in the tourism industry because of salary reduction. The development of the tourism industry in Tai'an mainly depends on Mount Tai, and the main purpose of tourists coming to Tai'an is to climb Mount Tai. Good physical fitness is the basic condition for tourism practitioners in mountain tourism destinations. During the epidemic period, tourism practitioners cannot go out at home, and exercise is reduced, especially the physical fitness of tour guides has decreased significantly.

The number of newly entered tourism practitioners has a negative growth, and the vocational skills of stock personnel are weak. As a vulnerable industry, tourism has already shown at the beginning of the epidemic that many students will not sign up for tourism-related majors after the college entrance examination, and even those who have signed up for tourism-related majors will change their majors during the study period, greatly reducing the number of tourism talents. The epidemic has reduced the demand for tourism talents, and most of the students majoring in tourism will not engage in their professional work after graduation, and the training of tourism talents in colleges and universities is derailed from the talents needed in today's society^[16]. During the epidemic period, tourism enterprises are unwilling to pay time and economic costs for the training of tourism practitioners, the number of training organizations is relatively reduced, and the training curriculum is still the mode before the epidemic period is not significant. In addition, the demand of tourism enterprises and tourists is not close to the actual investigation of the epidemic situation, and the substantive guiding role of training is limited, resulting in low participation of the trained personnel, and tourism enterprises cannot achieve the ideal effect even if they pay the cost^[17].

3. Opportunities and challenges faced by Tai'an's tourism industry in the post-epidemic era

In early 2023, the Covid-19 infection that lasted for three years began to implement the " managing Covid-19 with measures against Class B infectious diseases " program, which basically brought the epidemic under control, and economic and trade exchanges between different regions are slowly recovering. People's health concepts, consumption habits, and psychological quality have changed accordingly, and the tourism industry has greatly enhanced its ability to cope with the impact of the epidemic, respond to health emergencies, and its awareness of epidemic prevention and control. The tourism industry of Tai'an City is facing challenges and opportunities in the post-epidemic era.

3.1 Opportunities

3.1.1 Large-scale recovery of tourism enterprises

Under the normalization of the epidemic, the tourist carrying capacity controlled by the tourist attraction of Tai'an City is 30% of the previous level. Many businesses in the tourist attraction are closed, and the number of tourist groups received by travel agencies drops sharply. After the state announced the implementation of "managing Covid-19 with measures against Class B infectious diseases", the tourist attraction began to slowly recover the tourist carrying capacity of the tourist attraction. Travel agencies and hotels have resumed their reception for tourists. In order to attract more tourists, the Shandong Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism issued the "*Notice on the implementation of State-owned Scenic Spot Ticket Reduction and Exemption*", of which 8 scenic spots in Tai'an 2023 from January 21 to March 31 conduct free tickets. When scenic spots attracting tourists, travel agencies, hotels, catering and other enterprises actively take various measures to attract tourists for spending.

During the period of the Taishan Scenic area's free admission, the number of tourists entering the Taishan Scenic area exceeded 2 million, especially in the last three days after the free admission policy ended, the Taishan ticket reservation was full. After Taishan Scenic area attracted tourists, the rest of Tai'an scenic areas in order to attract tourists also launched a variety of activities and preferential policies.

During the May Day, Taian Fangte Happy World held a music festival, invited many band artists, tourists were full, and the hotel's operating income significantly increased, tourism enterprises are slowly recovering development. It can be seen that tourism enterprises seize the critical period to publicize and develop tourism products will bring unexpected effects to the development of Tai'an tourism industry.

3.1.2 Tourists' "retaliatory consumption"

Although various scenic spots in Tai'an were open to the outside world during the three-year period of epidemic containment, the number of open tickets was less than the tourist carrying capacity of the scenic spots before the epidemic. Tourists who want to travel to Tai'an may not be able to book the tickets of the scenic spots in their leisure time. Due to the repetition and uncertainty of the epidemic, even if tickets are booked, tourists may not be able to go to the scenic spot to play.

Residents had few opportunities to travel during the three-year period when the epidemic was severe. In early 2023, the epidemic was controlled and the government of Shandong Province introduced relevant policies to revive the tourism industry. Residents of the neighboring provinces and cities of Tai'an visited Tai'an by means of travel agencies or self-help Tours, and the transportation, accommodation and catering industries of Tai'an quickly recovered. Taking Mount Tai as an example, during the implementation of the ticket free policy, Mount Tai attracted a large number of tourists. Although the ticket is free, but other consumption of Mount Tai scenic area has increased. In addition, after the university campus was unsealed, college students began to go out to play, and Tai'an city became the first choice of college students relying on numerous tourist attractions, which promoted the development of tourism in Tai'an city.

When booking a holiday hotel on Ctrip a month before the "May Day" small holiday, the hotels with a higher cost performance below 450 yuan per night have basically all been booked, and 3 of the 20 hotels with more than 1,000 yuan per night have been all booked. The day before the holiday, high-speed rail tickets from all over the country to Tai'an have been basically booked, and the Taishan scenic area has been restricted several times.

3.2 Challenges

3.2.1 Fierce competition in tourism industry among regions

The epidemic has brought a great impact on the economy of various regions, and it is impossible for the economy to recover in the short term in the post-epidemic era. The development of the tourism industry has a significant role in promoting the local economic growth, and all regions have made every effort to vigorously restore the tourism industry.

In recent years, the rise of short video platforms, since the epidemic has been controlled, the director of the cultural and tourism bureau in various places has made every effort to speak for the local tourism industry and scenic spots with the help of short video platforms, attract passenger flow, and stimulate the recovery and development of the local tourism economy. At the same time, many scenic spots around the country have introduced a ticket-free policy with the help of short video platforms, which has brought fierce competition to Tai'an's tourism industry.

Compared with many well-known tourism cities, the brand awareness of related tourism industry in Tai'an is low. After tourists arrive in Tai'an, people only choose to stay in a few chain hotels and choose the catering services provided near the hotel or attractions. Mount Tai as the main purpose of tourists to Tai'an, Tai'an city is not as well-known as Mount Tai, and many people do not know that Mount Tai lies in Tai'an when talking about Mount Tai. Residents of other provinces and cities come to Tai'an just to climb Mount Tai, and other scenic spots are not the choice of tourists. While attracting tourists to climb Mount Tai after the epidemic, the publicity of the remaining scenic spots needs to be intensified.

3.2.2 Changes in tourists' consumption psychology

Before the epidemic, tourism has become an important part of the life of urban residents, an important way for people to enjoy life, and an important way for urban residents to obtain spiritual satisfaction. In the past three years, the epidemic has greatly affected residents' travel experience. In the post-epidemic era, in addition to the release of tourism consumption demand, the psychological impact of the epidemic has also affected residents' expectations on the quality of tourism services and tourism products to a certain extent.

Under such expectations, if the quality of tourism products and services cannot be guaranteed, complaints will be caused. Under the communication of various social media, once these incidents occur

coupled with the insufficient response, it is easy to have negative effects. Therefore, we should pay full attention to the changes in tourist consumption psychology caused by the epidemic, and ensure the safety and service quality of all kinds of tourism consumption.

4. Countermeasures for tourism industry development in Tai'an City in the post-epidemic era

4.1 Government special policy guidance

The government supports and guides the development of the tourism industry. Since March 2023, the popularity of tourism in Zibo has continued to rise, and the matching policy of Zibo Government and Cultural Tourism Bureau is an important driving force. The government and Cultural Tourism Bureau of Tai'an City can learn from the relevant measures of Zibo government and Cultural Tourism Bureau to restore the tourism industry of Tai'an City.

First, we need to improve supporting facilities. Starting from the arrival of tourists in Tai'an, a variety of eye-catching signs will guide tourists offline. The government can also cooperate with Internet companies to produce small programs or application software, so that tourists can have a clearer understanding of the location of Tai'an's catering and scenic spots and better choose travel methods. Secondly, the government supports and guides the tourism enterprises. With the help of government's ability, Mount Tai can be used to promote the image of the city, and join the national well-known tourism enterprises; As for the profit of tourism enterprises, the government can appropriately reduce the tax of enterprises, so that tourism enterprises can carry out various marketing strategies to increase publicity and obtain more profits. At the same time of the arrival of tourists, the government market supervision department has put price management in place, and tries not to appear negative news about rip-off customers. Finally, citizens should be encouraged to participate in tourism services.

4.2 The development of innovative tourism products

In the post-epidemic era, all regions are promoting the restoration of the tourism industry. In order to attract a large number of tourists to Tai'an when vigorously promoting tourism in the country, not only the help of the government is needed, but also the innovation of tourism products to make tourists satisfied with tourism products while tourist attractions and travel agencies carry out publicity to attract tourists.

First of all, residents cannot travel during the epidemic period, so most scenic spots carry out online marketing, manufacture cultural and creative products, and open online stores to sell. In the post-epidemic era, tourism enterprises can continue to promote online and convert online traffic into offline passenger flow. On the basis of "cloud tourism", tourist attractions can cooperate with application software production enterprises to develop electronic scenic navigation functions, saving tourists' time in formulating tourism strategies before departure. The small program or software developed provides tourists with the location of various supporting facilities and the play information of various scenic spots to increase the visiting experience of tourists and retain tourists.

Secondly, in the post-epidemic era, travel enterprises need to innovate their previous tourism products to attract tourists' attention. It is particularly important to develop characteristic tourism projects under the pressure of well-known scenic spots in other provinces and cities. Finally, people pay special attention to their own health after experiencing the epidemic, and health tourism and sports tourism have become the choices of most people. Hotels and scenic spots can develop hot springs, soaking in the hotel hot springs can make visitors eliminate their fatigue after a full day experience. In recent years, with the development of sports tourism, the scenic area and the government jointly held sports competitions near the scenic area. The game personnel come to participate in the games, and there are also many people watching the game, some of whom will visit the scenic areas.

4.3 Training tourism professionals

The epidemic has had a serious impact on the tourism industry. Many employees engaged in the tourism industry have cut their salaries and quit, and many employees have lost interest in the tourism industry. A large proportion of college graduates majoring in tourism management have flowed into other industries, and the enrollment rate of students majoring in tourism management has decreased. After the epidemic, the training of tourism management talents needs the joint efforts of schools and tourism enterprises. First of all, due to the severe trauma suffered by the tourism industry during the epidemic

period, the tourism industry needs fewer employees, fewer talents applying for tourism management majors, and more employees are needed by tourism enterprises in the post-epidemic era. Therefore, colleges and universities can expand enrollment of tourism management majors. Secondly, because some tourism enterprises, such as hotels, scenic spots, cultural and entertainment places receive fewer tourists during the epidemic, the practice opportunities of employees are reduced, and the work skills of employees have declined. In the post-epidemic era, with a sudden increase in tourists, employees cannot quickly change from the working status of the epidemic period. In response to the decline in service quality brought about by the epidemic, tourism enterprises must strengthen targeted training and other measures.

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