

# Research Progress on Sports Tourism Competitiveness: a Chinese Literature Review from 2000–2020

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**Abstract:** *In recent years, the scale and development potential of China's sports tourism market have been widely concerned by the academic circle. However, compared with the development of China's sports tourism market, the domestic academic research on the competitiveness of sports tourism is obviously insufficient. Based on a systematic review of 122 papers on sports tourism competitiveness published in Chinese journals from 2000 to 2020, this paper finds that the academic circles in China have paid increasing attention to sports tourism, and the number of literatures is growing. The area of study is mainly in the eastern coastal areas of China and research topics represent a trend of diversification. The measurement of sports tourism competitiveness has been the most studied topics, including Diamond Model, New Diamond Model and Evaluation Index System of China's Sports Tourism Industry Competitiveness. Finally, combined with the current situation of China's sports tourism development, this paper puts forward some suggestions to improve the competitiveness of China's sports tourism from the perspectives of government, enterprises, market, related industries and production elements.*

**Keywords:** *Sports tourism, Competitiveness, Literature review*

## 1. Introduction

With the staggering step of the great health and great tourism era, sports tourism, as a product of the combination of sports and tourism, has become an imperative approach for people to pursue health and leisure diversification. [1] In some foreign countries, sports tourism has been a mainstream trend in the development of tourism, since people in developed countries are of sufficient economic foundation and decent care for health. Nevertheless, with the steady advancement of Chinese economy, as well as people's awareness on health being raised, the sports tourism industry has been winning increasing attention. [2]

With the over whelming growth of the sports tourism industry, sports tourism has become a research hotspot in academia. The theoretical system of sports tourism has progressively formed. Compared with foreign countries, domestic sports tourism research started rather late. It was not until 2020 that the number of research papers on sports tourism slowly rose. What is more, the early papers mainly draw on the theories and models of related foreign research, with few studies on the competitiveness of sports tourism. In terms of research topics, domestic scholars are largely concentrated in the field of sports. Yet, the integration and cooperation of the two disciplines of sports and tourism is still lacking. [3] Therefore, at this accelerating stage of the sports tourism development, it is crucial to focus on related research on sports tourism competitiveness and enrich the theoretical system of sports tourism, so as to provide guidance for industry practice.

Given the background above, the main views and theories on sports tourism competitiveness in the Chinese literature from 2000 to 2020 are systematically sorts out in this paper. It is expected to provide a reference for China's sports tourism to enhance its competitiveness, enrich and improve the knowledge system of sports tourism competitiveness research thereby helpful.

## 2. Literature Review

Over the years, many scholars have defined the sports tourism in various perspectives. As early as 1987, foreign scholar Ruskin has pointed out that “sports tourism is a sports tourism activity that involves participation and spectating during vacations”. [4] The beginning of domestic research on

sports tourism was comparatively late. Around the 1990s, research on sports tourism was introduced to China and developed on the basis of foreign research experience and fundamental tourism theories. Jiang Fugao elaborated on sports tourism from the perspective of tourists. He believes that sports tourism is a variety of social and cultural education activities that people take advantage of leisure time to leave their place of residence temporarily, relying on various sports methods on the premise of non-profit. [5]

Competitiveness can be understood as the degree of advantage that has been achieved in a specific field. [6] The competitiveness of sports tourism destinations refers to the combination of sports tourism resources possessed by sports tourism destinations and their ability to transform sports tourism resources into sports tourism products and market them to obtain economic, environmental, and ecological benefits. [7] As tourism has gradually become a pillar industry for promoting economic growth in many countries, ever more studies have focused on how to evaluate the competitiveness of tourist destinations.

### 3. Data and Methods

#### 3.1 Data

With the intention of ensuring the representativeness and authority of the selected literature, the subject terms “sports tourism” and “competitiveness” within the period between 2000 and 2020 are searched in the core database of the CNKI. Ultimately, 122 valid literatures are left after analyzing the abstracts of the papers and removing irrelevant ones. These 122 valid data are derived as the data samples for the measurement and visualization analysis of this paper.

#### 3.2 Research Methods

Throughout the specific process, CiteSpace is first utilized to visually analyze the existing research overview. [8] The main content includes literature publication year, research area, published journals, research topics, and research hotspots, etc. Besides, 25 representative literatures on sports tourism competitiveness is selected for intensive reading based on elements such as literature citations and downloads, the research perspectives and theoretical foundations of the literature are systematically combed. Thus, the main viewpoints and development context of sports tourism competitiveness research are revealed.

### 4. Data Analysis

#### 4.1 Year of Publication

As is illustrated by the research, the number of papers published on sports tourism competitiveness has shown an increasing trend from 2000 to 2020. It can be seen from Figure 1 that from 2003 to 2008, the research on the competitiveness of sports tourism presented a relatively stable state, with an average annual number of published papers of 2-4. In 2009, the number of related papers showed a trend of increasing volatility, reaching 14 in 2015 with an average annual growth rate of about 2 papers. The number of literatures dropped from 2015 to 2017, from 14 in 2015 to 2 in 2017, and rebounded rapidly in 2018. Until 2019, the research on the competitiveness of sports tourism peaked at 15 papers, a 66% increase compared to the previous year.

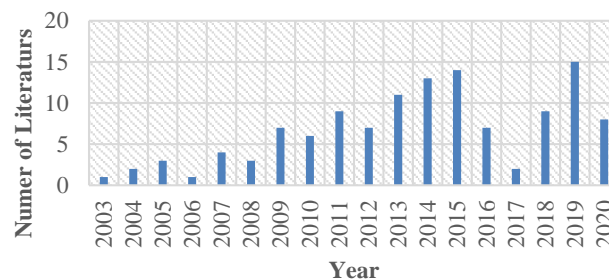


Fig.1 Number of Articles in Each Year from 2000 to 2020

#### 4.2 Published Journals

Published journals can reflect research trends in the research field and indicate the main research disciplines, etc. in the research field. Through CNKI metrology and visualization, there are 32 related literatures in this research field from core sports journals and CSSCI. The most are from the “Journal of Shenyang Physical Education Institute”, which is 5 papers, accounting for 4.10% of the total number. This is followed by “Journal of Shandong Institute of Physical Education” with 3 papers, accounting for 2.46% of the total number. The research subjects are mainly concentrated in tourism, sports, corporate economy, etc. Among them, the largest proportions are related to tourism and sports, with 86 and 78 papers respectively. The main research topics are sports tourism and the competitiveness of the sports industry. It can be noticed that the research disciplines in this research field are relatively single.

#### 4.3 Areal Distribution

The areal distribution and the number of literatures of the existing sports tourism competitiveness research are: 14 in Heilongjiang, 7 in Guangxi, 6 in Hebei, Henan, Jiangsu, and Liaoning, 5 in Guangdong, Guizhou, Hainan, Taiwan, 4 in Fujian, Hubei, Jilin, etc., and 3 in Anhui, Beijing, Gansu, etc. As is indicated by the Table 1, the areal distribution of existing sports tourism competitiveness research is mainly on the eastern coast. Among them, the three northeastern provinces headed by Heilongjiang have attracted the attention of a large number of scholars with ice and snow sports tourism resources.

#### 4.4 Subject Distribution

China's abundant sports tourism resources have given birth to various forms of sports tourism. Among the 122 relevant literatures, the research on sports tourism is the most (75 articles), accounting for 61.5% of the total number, followed by ice and snow sports tourism (13 articles, accounting for 10.7%). There are 9 papers on coastal sports tourism, accounting for 7.4%, 7 papers on ethnic minority traditional sports tourism and leisure sports tourism each, accounting for 5.7% of the total number, and 5 articles on regional sports tourism, accounting for 4.1% of the whole.

#### 4.5 Research Hotspots

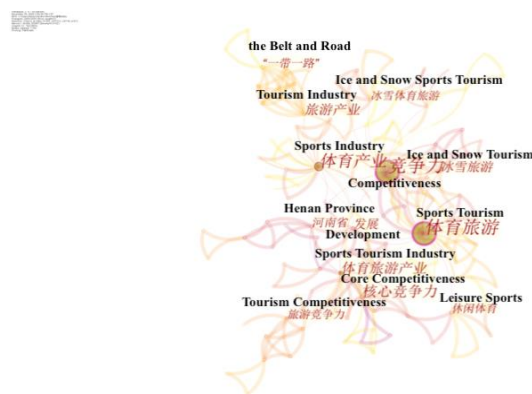


Fig.2 High-Frequency Keywords

The analysis of high-frequency keywords assists to understand the research hotspots in a certain field. [9] As is indicated in the Figure 4, the keywords with higher frequency are sports tourism, competitiveness, sports industry, sports tourism industry, core competitiveness, tourism competitiveness, ice and snow tourism, ice and snow sports tourism, leisure sports, sports tourism destinations, “the Belt and Road”, development, Henan Province, etc. The research objects are mainly concentrated on the measurement of the integration and competitiveness of sports industry and tourism industry. In addition, it can be seen from the figure that in addition to traditional sports tourism, which focuses on sports events, ice and snow sports tourism has received special attention from the academic community. Ice and snow sports tourism is a new type of leisure business that integrates ice and snow sports, ice and snow sightseeing, and ice and snow festivals. It has won the favor of tourists everywhere with its irreplaceable uniqueness, [10] which is one of the reasons why ice and snow sports tourism has won much attention from the academia.



Fig.3 Keywords Cluster

7 clusters are obtained by clustering the high-frequency keywords. According to the Figure 5, they are competitiveness, core competitiveness, blue sports industry, sports industry, development strategies, sports events and regional sports tourism, which respectively represent specific research hotspots of sports tourism competitiveness. Among them, sports events, blue sports industry and area sports tourism are three different forms of sports tourism, which respectively represent the current development trend of sports tourism. From the clustering shown in Figure 5, it can be concluded that domestic research on the competitiveness of sports tourism still lays emphasis on the use of competitiveness measurement models to evaluate the competitiveness of the sports tourism industry.

## 5. Theories and Frame of the Research

### 5.1 Diamond Model

In 1990, American strategic management scientist Michael Porter proposed the Porter Diamond Model, which is the basic element of competitive advantage, including production elements, demand conditions, related and supportive industries, and enterprises strategy, structure, and competition in industry. [11] Additionally, “government” and “opportunity” as external auxiliary elements will also have a significant impact on the strength of industrial competitiveness. [12]

Porter believes that the essence of national competitive advantage is based on the combined effects of the above four basic elements and two auxiliary elements. The basic elements constitute the “diamond” main body of competitiveness, and the auxiliary elements continuously regulate the “diamond” changes at the external end. Hence, the overall optimal dynamic competition system is formed (see in Figure 4).

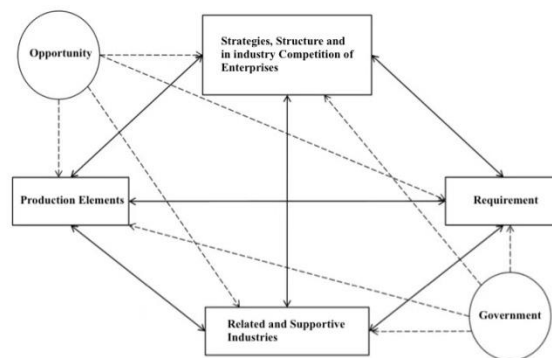


Fig.4 Diamond Model

### 5.2 New Diamond Model

With the development of the sports tourism industry, many scholars continue to explore on the basis of previous studies. Among them, Rui thinks that the core elements of industrial competitiveness are knowledge absorption and innovation abilities. Accordingly, he proposed the New Diamond Model theory of industrial competitiveness. The New Diamond Model adds knowledge absorption and innovation abilities as the core elements of industrial competitiveness on the basis of the diamond model. [13]

### 5.3 Evaluation Index System of Industry Competitiveness

With the development of China's sports tourism, many scholars have constructed evaluation models based on the practice of Chinese sports tourism development. Wang Yuzhen built a model diagram of the competitiveness structure of the sports tourism industry based on the diamond model and other domestic and foreign predecessors. [14] In this model, the five forces of production element supply, market demand, support for related industries, enterprises competitiveness, and government regulation and control work together on the competitiveness of the sports tourism industry.

Based on the competitive awesome structure model of sports tourism industry, Wang Yuzhen constructs the evaluation index system of sports tourism industry competitiveness from five levels, namely, supply power, market demand power, related industry support, enterprise competitiveness, and government regulation and control. The index system includes 5 first level indexes and 35 second level indexes. [14] As shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Evaluation Index System

Overall Target	Primary Indicators	Secondary Indicators
Evaluation Index System of Sports Tourism Industry Competitiveness	Supply power	Abundant degree of sports tourism resources
		The popularity of sports tourism resources
		Taste of Sports Tourism Resources
		Educational level of employees
		Number of people with professional education in sports tourism
	Market demand power	Number of employees
		Accessibility of sports tourism destinations
		The degree of security of sports tourism facilities
		Number of domestic tourists
		Domestic tourism income
Supporting power of related industries	Number of inbound tourists	
	Foreign exchange income from tourism	
	Per capita disposable income of urban residents	
	Motivation of residents to travel	
	Sports population ratio	
Enterprises competitiveness	Per capita sports consumption level	
	Number of sports goods manufacturing companies	
	Products and quality provided by the sporting goods manufacturing industry	
	Number and scale of sports events held	
	Number of sports fitness and entertainment companies	
Government regulation and control power	Number of accommodation and catering companies	
	Degree of grouping of star-rated hotels	
	Concentration of accommodation and catering industry	
	The scale of sports tourism business	
	Sports Tourism Enterprise Marketing Ability	
Government regulation and control power	Market share of sports tourism products	
	Competence of managers of sports tourism enterprises	
	Profitability of Sports Tourism Products	
	Social Responsibility of Sports Tourism Enterprises	
	Sports tourism corporate culture	
Government regulation and control power	Governments at all levels' industrial policies for the development of sports tourism	
	The industrial planning for the development of sports tourism by governments at all levels	
	Safety standards for sports tourism. Professional standards for sports tourism professionals	
	Relevance of various governments to the development of sports tourism	

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the results of previous studies, the following suggestions for enhancing the competitiveness of China's sports tourism are proposed in this paper:

### 6.1 Government

In the process of developing the sports tourism industry, the government should give full play to its functions through formulating scientific and reasonable industrial policies, as well as strengthening the layout and planning of the sports tourism industry. Likewise, government should boost the sports tourism industry by developing infrastructure construction and improving the service system. [10] Management should be strengthened to improve the standards of the sports tourism industry and maintain the order of the market. Thus, the competitive behavior of enterprises would be effectively regulated, in this manner; the healthy and standardized growth of the sports tourism industry could be promoted.

## 6.2 Enterprise

Expanding sports tourism marketing channels requires innovative marketing and publicity methods to make full use of modern information technology represented by network technology. Guiding and encouraging sports tourism companies to build network sales channels could change the current single marketing channel dominated by travel agencies, expand marketing channels and widely promote sports tourism. Improve the structure of sports tourism products and further enrich the product series, strengthen the diversified development of sports tourism products and formulate sports tourism product development strategies that fit individuals to meet the diverse needs of unlike consumers.

## 6.3 Supply

In particular, talents of sports tourism are indispensable in the development of sports tourism. To broadening talent supply channels, colleges and universities should become the main supplier of sports tourism talents. Sports schools across the country should increase sports tourism courses. Likewise, school-enterprise cooperation should be strengthened, so as to timely rely on tourism education and training centers to carry out sports tourism talent training that combines theory and practice. Meanwhile, colleges and universities should deepen their ties with the sports tourism industry base and jointly cultivate talents for sports tourism.

## 6.4 Market

To meet the needs of diversified sports tourism, the sports tourism market should be subdivided. In order to achieve the best sales promotion effect, we should adopt different sales promotion strategies to stimulate the interest of the masses in sports activities. On the international sports tourism market, sports tourism should actively participate in the promotion of international sports tourism. [15] It is also important to highlight the superior products, build the brand advantage, and gradually widen the sales channels of other products.

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