

Driving Forces and Development Strategies of China's Agro-tourism

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Abstract In recent years, agro-tourism has sprung up all over the country, and has gradually become a new form of agricultural business and a new force of tourism development. The development of agro-tourism plays an important role in enriching the agricultural industry forms, increasing farmers' income, promoting the optimization and upgrading of rural industrial structure, and expanding the field of the tourism section. This paper firstly introduces domestic and foreign agro-tourism development and current research situations. Then it analyses the development background of China's agro-tourism from the perspective of market demand, urbanization and transformation of rural economic structure. Based on analysis, it summarizes models of driving force of China's agro-tourism: regional traffic driven, city driven, scenic spot driven, and monopolistic resource-driven. According to these four driving force types, development strategies are put forward: Characteristic product development for regional traffic driven model; in-depth theme development for city driven model; interactive development for scenic spot driven model; brand development for resource driven model; priority development for integrated driven model. It is expected to provide reference and guidance for healthy and sustainable development of China's agro-tourism.

Key words Agro-tourism, Driving factors, Development measures

Agro-tourism is a form of tourism that refers to agricultural resources and rural landscape as a tourism resource, and integrates the agronomic demonstration, pastoral scenery viewing, folk experience, leisure travel and holiday entertainment together through the planning and development of tourism connotation^[1]. Agro-tourism appeared in developed countries and regions (such as USA, UK, Japan, and the Netherlands) as early as the 1970s. Later, it rapidly developed in other developed countries and regions^[2]. Since the National Tourism Administration advocated industrial and agricultural tourism in the beginning of 2001, China has sprang up a lot of agro-tourism scenic spots and obtained

considerable economic and social benefits, and agro-tourism takes on a powerful development trend^[3]. Currently, there are 359 agro-tourism demonstration sites (as listed in Table 1) approved by the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Tourism Administration. China now has 1.5 million farm stays and 18 000 large scale agricultural parks. In 2010, agro-tourism received 400 million person-times, realized operating income of 120 billion yuan, and provided jobs for 15 million farmers. Development of agro-tourism plays a positive role in increasing farmers' income, shifting rural surplus labor, expanding the field of agricultural industry, and promoting construction of new socialist countryside.

Table 1 Distribution of agro-tourism demonstration sites in every province and region of China

Provinces	Demonstration sites	Percentage %	Provinces	Demonstration sites	Percentage %	Provinces	Demonstration sites	Percentage %
Shandong	55	15.32	Guangxi	11	3.06	Tianjin	4	1.11
Jiangsu	43	11.98	Inner Mongolia	10	2.79	Jilin	3	0.84
Liaoning	34	9.47	Xinjiang	10	2.79	Shaanxi	3	0.84
Guizhou	18	5.01	Heilongjiang	9	2.51	Hunan	3	0.84
Sichuan	17	4.74	Chongqing	9	2.51	Hainan	2	0.56
Anhui	17	4.74	Beijing	7	1.95	Fujian	2	0.56
Hebei	15	4.18	Gansu	7	1.95	Ningxia	2	0.56
Zhejiang	14	3.90	Hubei	6	1.67	Qinghai	2	0.56
Guangdong	14	3.90	Yunnan	6	1.67	Tibet	1	0.28
Shanxi	13	3.62	Shanghai	5	1.39			
Henan	12	3.34	Jiangxi	5	1.39			

The above data is issued by the National Tourism Administration.

1 Background of China's agro-tourism development

1.1 Growing tourism demand of residents and constant development of tourism industry

Since the reform and opening-up, China's economy has been developing stably, and residents'

income has rapidly increased. In 2010, the disposable income of urban residents reached 19 109 yuan, consumption structure of residents become gradually reasonable, people are not satisfied with basic necessities of life any more, but start to seek relaxing or broaden field of vision through traveling. Besides, with progress of science and technology and development of productivity, residents' leisure time gradually increases. Now, China's working class has a total of 115 holidays every year, which greatly increases travelling opportunity. In 2010, three largest markets of China's tourism

Received: September 12, 2012 Accepted: December 20, 2012

Supported by Special Project of Basic Scientific and Technological Research of the State Ministry of Science and Technology (Grant No. : 2008FY110300).

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(traffic, hotel and travel agency) realized overall and rapid restoration and growth. The total revenue of tourism industry was up to 1 570 billion yuan, having a growth of 21.7%. In the Eleventh Five – Year – Plan period, the gross income of national tourism industry realized average annual growth of 15%, and China has become the fourth largest tourist receiving country in the world and the largest tourist generating country in Asia^[4]. Agro-tourism, as a new field and driving force of China's tourism industry, has developed rapidly in recent years.

1.2 Acceleration of urbanization and "returning to nature" becoming a trend Urbanization is the physical growth of urban areas as a result of rural migration and even suburban concentration into cities, particularly the very largest ones, mainly manifested as rural population changing to urban population and constant development and improvement of cities. In 2010, the urbanization level in China reached 46%. In the past 30 years, China realized annual growth rate of 3.2%^[5]. Rapid urbanization brings more and more agricultural population to migrate to cities. However, along with acceleration of urbanization, there are also serious problems, such as traffic jam, environmental pollution, food pollution, and tense living tempo, greatly restricting improvement of living conditions of urban residents. People start to miss the past living style, and be eager to return to rural areas, and returning to nature becomes a trend. In this situation, agro-tourism with farm stay, agricultural picking garden and private pasture as representatives is greatly favored.

1.3 Agro-tourism becoming a breakthrough point in the transformation of rural economic structure The key to China's successful reform and opening up and modernization construction lies in the issue concerning agriculture, rural area and farmers. To solve this issue, it should transform rural economic structure, change traditional backward agricultural production mode, seek diversified development approaches, and foster economic growth fields suitable for market demands, having high efficiency and comprehensive benefits. As a cross field of agriculture and tourism, the agro-tourism plays a significant role in shifting rural surplus labor, expanding the field of agricultural industry, integrating urban and rural development, and promoting construction of new socialist countryside. Thus, it has become an important breakthrough point in the transformation of rural economic structure. In recent years, Chinese government at all levels pays close attention to agro-tourism development. The National Tourism Administration has put forward many slogans about agro-tourism in China's Tourist Year, such as "recovering the simple and returning to the nature" (1999), "new countryside, new tourism, new experience and new fashion" (2006), "charming rural areas" (2007), to promote development of agro-tourism.

2 Current research situations of agro-tourism and its development models

Both domestic and foreign scholars have made comprehensive researches on agro-tourism. Foreign researches have carried out a lot

of theoretical and empirical researches on female participation^[6], diversified management^[7], multi-functional and agricultural cultural heritage tourism^[8,9], influence of climate change on agro-tourism and sustainable development of agro-tourism^[10,11]; domestic scholars mainly focus on agro-tourism concept^[12], development situations and countermeasures^[13,18], agro-tourism influence^[19,20], and holiday tourism^[21]. Domestic scholars have conducted a lot of researches on agro-tourism development models in different size and areas from different perspectives (listed in Table 2). Many researchers classified and summarized rural tourism development model from geographical space, tourism product items, development, operation and resource characteristics. Through researches and summary of agro-tourism development models, it is able to accumulate agro-tourism development experience and lesson, to guide comprehensive and rapid development of China's agro-tourism. However, there are no researches from the perspective of driving factors.

3 Development model of China's agro-tourism

Driving factors refer to internal or external favorable conditions promoting agro-tourism development. Analyzing development model of China's agro-tourism from driving factors can catch the root of development of agricultural tourist sites, and formulate development countermeasures in accordance with local conditions. Considering development realities and characteristics of China's agro-tourism, we divide China's agro-tourism into five development models and discuss these models from the perspective of driving factors.

3.1 Regional traffic driven model In real world, material flow (including people, material and information flow) is completed through various traffic routes. Tourism is also like this. Tourists travel on foot, by bike, by bus, train, ship or by air through highway, railway, or air line. Therefore, areas along the traffic line, especially traffic hubs, become the only way or temporary stopover place of tourists. This drives rise and development of rural tourism. At the early stage, primary agro-tourism forms take shape, including farmstay, farm hotel, native and special products store, *etc.* Since the reform and opening-up, China's highway and railway have been developing rapidly. By the end of 2010, total railway operation mileage had reached 91 000 km, ranking the second in the world; the total mileage open to traffic of highway was up to 3.984 million km, rising to second position from the 7th place in the world; inland navigable mileage ranks the first; in western regions, total highway mileage, expressway, inland navigable mileage and deep-water berth of coastal ports multiplied^[33]. Development of transport and communication and increase of traffic routes bring much flow of people, drive rapid development of agro-tourism, and accordingly this model becomes an important agro-tourism model in China. This model features short stay and various types of tourists, and there are few repeat tourists.

3.2 City driven model With popularization of five-day work system, one-day or two-day excursion at weekends has gradually been favored by urban residents. Limited by time, one-day or two-

day excursion is mainly in suburban areas, where rural scene, delicious food, beautiful environment and easy lifestyle satisfy demands of urban residents for getting rid of urban congestion, tense and tedious life. Driven by cities, a lot of agro-tourism scenic spots and reception facilities emerge in surrounding areas. All areas develop suitable agro-tourism products according to local agricultural characteristics, from primary farmstay and picking garden to existing high sci-tech agricultural industrial park, agricultural demonstration park, and recreational village, *etc.* This model is mainly distributed around cities. But the specific spatial distribu-

tion varies with natural conditions, development strategy and cultural characteristics of each city. For example, agro-tourism surrounding Shanghai extends to western areas due to topographical limitation, while in Beijing, agro-tourism scenic spots are many more in northern part than in southern part. The development degree is generally in direct proportion to overall scale and development level of the city; tourists have higher demands for hygiene and accommodation, higher purchasing power for agricultural products and local and special products, and repeat tourists are more; most tourists drive by themselves at weekends.

Table 2 Researches of domestic scholars on Chinese agro-tourism models

Perspective	Agro-tourism models	Researchers	Research area
Geographical space	Village, urban, suburban, scenic spot, and commercial distributing center models Rural model, urban model Water conservation and forest protection at mountain top, fruit tree zone at half way up the mountain, and characteristic water zone at bottom of mountain	Yin Hong <i>et al.</i> ^[22] Wang Zhaoli <i>et al.</i> ^[23] Yan Xianchun <i>et al.</i> ^[16]	National Agro-tourism Demonstration Site Jinggangshan, Zhuhai Jialing River sloping cultivated land
Tourism products	Traditional sightseeing model, urban scientific model and recreational model Agricultural theme park, Agricultural popular science education base, large agricultural production base, farm tour Natural eco-tourism, rural recreation trip, agricultural sightseeing, farmhouse tour, folk custom tourism, and agricultural economy and trade tourism	Jia Shuangfeng <i>et al.</i> ^[24] Yu Meizhu <i>et al.</i> ^[25] Shen Hejiang <i>et al.</i> ^[26]	Foreign countries Hangzhou City
Development and operation	"Company + base + farmer" model, "renting and subcontracting" model, "autonomous building and management" model, "resource recycling" model, "party branch + cooperatives + farmer" model Crop cultivation and aquaculture complex model, marsh gas based model, front hotel and behind garden eco-tourism model, multi-level eco-chain linking model Company + farmer development model, corporation model, shareholding model, government + company model, government + village committee + enterprise + farmer model	Yu Peifa <i>et al.</i> ^[27] Wei Li <i>et al.</i> ^[28] Chen Wen <i>et al.</i> ^[29]	Nanchong City Ecological agro-tourism park Hunan Province
Characteristics of resources	Pastoral agro-tourism, folk custom tour, farmstay, new countryside sightseeing, recreational tour, popular science and education and agricultural industrial tour Pastoral model, rural model, scientific and technological model, agricultural trade model	Qin Yanpei ^[30] Ding Shuiying <i>et al.</i> ^[31]	Henan Province Shanghai
Comprehensive	Government support model, NGO model, industrial association model, ecological living model, resident participating model	Zhang Bei, <i>et al.</i> ^[32]	France, Japan, Australia, <i>etc</i>

3.3 Scenic spot driven model Some agro-tourism resources gradually develop due to close to famous scenic spots. We call this agro-tourism development model the scenic spot driven model. These agro-tourism resources develop with the aid of attraction of famous scenic spots.

3.4 Monopolistic resource-driven model Compared with other agro-tourism resources, monopolistic resources have absolute advantages and are irreplaceable. This model is mainly distributed in remote rural areas where there are traditional local characteristic cultivation models and agricultural landscapes. Besides, agro-tourism products of this model can not be reproduced easily and have high competitive power. A typical case is the rapid development of GIAHS agro-tourism. The GIAHS protection project is launched jointly by FAO, UNDP and GEF at the beginning of the 21st century. It plans to set up 100 – 150 important cultural heritage protection sites. At present, among 15 pilot sites already listed, there are four from China, including "Dongxiang rice, fish and duck system" from Jiangxian County of Guizhou Province, "rice and fish intergrowth system" from Qingtian County of Zhejiang Province, "Hani terraced paddy field system" from Honghe County of Yunnan Province and "rice cultural system" from Wannian County of Jiangxi Province. Being one of GIAHS pilot sites

greatly promotes agro-tourism development in the heritage site and makes the agro-tourism become the strategic pillar industry of local economy. Take Qingtian County of Zhejiang Province as an example, since it was listed in GIAHS pilot sites in 2005, its tourism developed rapidly. In 2008, it received 1.18 million domestic tourists, 24.5% over 2007, domestic tourist income reached 760 million yuan, 28.6% over 2007; it received 61 000 entry tourists, 20.9% more than that in 2007, and tourist income was up to 169.557 million USD, 27.9% over 2007^[34].

3.5 Integrated driven model Integrated driven model refers to agro-tourism development model driven by the above two or more factors. For example, an agro-tourism site relies on a famous scenic spot, and it is situated at traffic hub or close to traffic trunk. We call its development model the integrated driven model. Obviously, rural scenic spots driven by several factors have more superior conditions than that with single driving force.

It should be noted that: (1) in market economic conditions, development of agro-tourism needs promotion of both internal and external conditions (in this paper, the division of models is based on driving factors that play leading role in agro-tourism development); (2) with changes of internal and external conditions, leading factors may change, for example, increase or abandonment

of traffic routes.

Table 3 Agro-tourism development models based on driving factors

Development models	Driving factors	Space distribution	Development characteristics	Typical regions
Regional traffic driven model	Position/traffic	Along traffic trunk or hub	Short stay and various types of tourists, and few repeat tourists	Farmstay along highway and at traffic interchange area
City driven model	City	Around cities	Development degree is generally in direct proportion to overall scale and development level of the city; tourists have higher demands for hygiene and accommodation, higher purchasing power for agricultural products and local and special products.	Farmstay, agricultural industrial park, high sci-tech agricultural sightseeing park, and agricultural manor in suburban areas of Beijing and Shanghai
Scenic spot driven model	Famous scenic spot	Remote famous natural scenic spot	Change of dull season and rush season along with scenic spots; little marketing, mainly ordinary sightseeing, simple catering and accommodation services	Surrounding areas or scenic spots of Zhangjiajie, Jiuzhaigou, Namucuo Lake
Monopolistic resource-driven model	Monopolistic resources	Remote rural areas where there are traditional local characteristic cultivation models and agricultural landscape	Agro-tourism products not be reproduced easily and having high competitive power	GIAHS sites
Integrated model	driven The above two or more factors	Combination of the above	Varied with specific driving model	Agro-tourism scenic spots developed in suburban areas and around famous scenic spots

4 Development countermeasures for driving force based agro-tourism

4.1 Regional traffic driven model: Characteristic product development

At present, agro-tourism products in this model have serious problem of homogeneity, barely can satisfy basic accommodation demand of tourists, product development still remains at primary stage, hard to attract tourists. To get rid of stereotyped difficulty, tourism product development must take the characteristic road. It means developing unique and characteristic products in accordance with local conditions, achieving "having what others have not and different from others". Characteristic product development is realized mainly through external style, specific product form, and content, such as architectural design, propaganda slogan, activities, characteristic products and services. Through taking the road of characteristic products, it can avoid homogeneous competition, achieve coordinated development, and form regional comprehensive appeal.

4.2 City driven model: In-depth theme development

With constant development of China's tourism and gradual mature of tourist source market, urban residents are not satisfied with simple recreational experience, but want to have deeper travelling experience. Therefore, to make breakthrough, the city driven model should further deepen product themes, strengthen participation, interest and culture of products, and expand product types. Modern agro-tourism is not merely limited to traditional rural tour that focuses on natural landscape, but integrates traditional and modern agricultural production, living, culture and rural ecological environment^[22]. In this model, it should actively expand product types, and develop new and high potential products, such as high sci-tech agricultural park, ecological agricultural park, space agricultural garden, and urban flowers and plants.

4.3 Scenic spot driven model: Interactive development

This model should not become accessory or burden of tourist site,

but should become important part of tourist site through clear division of labor and active development, to realize interactive development and win-win objective. For this, agro-tourism scenic spots should make active expansion, integrate the destination system from travelling plan and marketing, and develop tourism products suitable for scenic spots. Besides, it should take the agro-tourism as an energetic driver to enrich agro-tourism product types and strengthen market competitiveness.

4.4 Resource driven model: Brand development

Simply speaking, brand development of agro-tourism is to form its own distinctive brand, to distinguish with competitors. Excellent tourism brand means high market popularity, image identity and tourist loyalty (or repeat travel rate), accordingly higher profit to tourist site. The final development status of this model is agro-tourism destination oriented towards monopolistic agricultural tourism resources. As core appeal, monopolistic agricultural tourism resources should be properly converted into tourism products suitable for market demand. Brand development is the core of tourism resource development and product conversion. In this model, it should establish and improve brand system through tourist site landscape, image, goods and marketing in accordance with its own characteristics and market demand. This is an inevitable way to realize transformation, upgrade and sustainable development of this agro-tourism model.

4.5 Integrated driven model: Priority development

This model generally has optimal development conditions. Thus, in the course of regional tourism development, it should consider multiple driving factors, take the lead in making breakthrough, and promote rapid development of regional agro-tourism and social economy through suiting measures to local conditions, suiting measures to time, and priority development.

In the course of implementing development countermeasures for the above models, it requires interaction between government

and market, mutual participation of tourism managers, business operators, non-enterprise units, and tourist site community farmers, benefit sharing and harmonious development. At the same time of respecting autonomous operation of enterprises and individuals under market law, government should make overall plan and guidance, formulate regional agro-tourism plan, ensure clear key point, and definite time sequence, to promote healthy development of agro-tourism and regional economy.

5 Conclusions

Based on driving factors, we summarize basic development of China's agro-tourism, analyze characteristics and laws of each development model, and put forward corresponding development countermeasures, in the hope of providing guidance for healthy development of China's agro-tourism. There are still weak points in this study. Firstly, it is required to further study longitudinal development law and status of each model and changes of driving factors. Secondly, due to space dimension and data limitation, there is no empirical study of a specific region. This should be further studied in future.

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