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Analysis on the Integration and Development Path of Hainan Health Tourism and Silver Education Industry

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Abstract: Amid the accelerating trend of population aging and the ongoing transformation of health and lifestyle consumption patterns, wellness tourism and silver education have emerged as crucial components of the modern silver economy. Leveraging its distinctive ecological assets, supportive healthcare policies, and strategic advantages as a free trade port, Hainan demonstrates both a solid practical foundation and significant potential for integrating wellness tourism with silver education services. This study systematically explores the relevant theoretical frameworks and policy environments, providing a comprehensive analysis of the current state and identifying critical challenges in Hainan's integrated development. Persistent constraints include overly homogeneous service offerings, insufficient integration between educational programs and wellness tourism, and underdeveloped mechanisms for collaborative governance across stakeholders. To address these challenges, the paper proposes targeted development strategies, including segmentation of consumer demand, systematic restructuring of service and product offerings, promotion of platform-based multi-stakeholder collaboration, and establishment of standardized governance mechanisms to ensure quality and efficiency. By offering a detailed examination of opportunities and constraints, this study aims to contribute both theoretical insights and practical guidance for promoting high-quality development of Hainan's silver economy, enhancing the attractiveness of its wellness tourism sector, and positioning the region as a competitive international hub for education and health-oriented consumption. These findings not only highlight the strategic pathways for integrating health, education, and tourism resources but also provide a framework for other regions seeking to optimize their silver economy development in a sustainable and market-responsive manner.

Keywords: wellness tourism; silver education; industrial integration; Hainan Free Trade Port; silver economy

Received: 25 March 2025

Revised: 12 May 2025

Accepted: 26 May 2025

Published: 31 May 2025



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1. Introduction

With the continuous growth of China's aging population, elderly individuals are presenting increasingly diverse and sophisticated demands in areas such as health management, cultural participation, spiritual engagement, and social interaction [1]. Traditional service models, which primarily focus on basic pension provision and routine medical care, are gradually proving insufficient to satisfy seniors' expectations for a high-quality, fulfilling life. In response to this gap, wellness tourism has emerged as a rapidly developing sector that integrates health-oriented services with travel experiences, offering opportunities not only for recreation but also for preventive health maintenance and lifestyle enhancement. This emerging industry has become an important driver for upgrading the cultural tourism sector and stimulating broader economic activity associated with aging populations [2].

Concurrently, the widespread promotion of lifelong learning has elevated senior education from a marginal social service to a central component of the public education system. Silver education programs contribute to the improvement of knowledge, practical skills, and cultural literacy among older adults, while also fostering positive health behaviors, reinforcing social networks, and mitigating the decline of physical and cognitive functions [1]. Despite these benefits, in practice, wellness tourism and silver education often operate in isolation, with limited coordination or structured integration, which restricts their potential synergies and limits the overall value they can deliver to the elderly population [3].

Hainan, as China's only free trade port, offers distinctive advantages in terms of ecological resources, open healthcare policies, and growing opportunities for international education consumption [4]. These features provide a strong foundation for exploring integrated development pathways that combine wellness tourism with silver education. Investigating such integration is not only practically significant for enhancing the well-being and life quality of older adults, but also theoretically valuable for advancing the study of the silver economy, informing policy design, and expanding sustainable models for the wellness and tourism industries [5]. By systematically analyzing both the opportunities and challenges inherent in Hainan's context, this study seeks to identify strategies for promoting coordinated, high-quality development, thereby contributing to a more diversified, resilient, and innovative approach to senior-oriented economic growth.

2. Theoretical and Policy Foundations for the Integrated Development of Wellness Tourism and Silver Education

2.1. Development Connotation and Evolution Trend of Wellness Tourism

Wellness tourism has increasingly been recognized as a composite industry model that integrates healthcare services, preventive health management, and tourism experiences, with the overarching objectives of promoting physical and mental well-being, preventing disease, and supporting rehabilitation [6]. Traditionally, wellness tourism relied heavily on natural resources, climatic conditions, and scenic environments to attract participants. However, as the sector matures, it is entering a high-quality development phase characterized by the integration of professional medical services, systematic health management, and comprehensive experiential design [7]. This evolution requires not only the expansion and diversification of service chains-ranging from accommodation and nutrition to exercise and rehabilitation programs-but also the enrichment of knowledge-based content, professional staffing, and personalized service offerings. The modern wellness tourism industry thus emphasizes scientific health guidance, preventive healthcare, and immersive experiences that address both the physical and psychological needs of participants, reflecting a shift from resource-dependent models to service- and experience-driven models [8].

2.2. Function Positioning and Real Value of Silver Education

Silver education serves as a critical component of lifelong learning systems, with the central aim of enhancing the quality of life, cognitive abilities, and social participation of older adults through ongoing educational opportunities [6,9]. Beyond recreational and leisure-based activities, contemporary silver education programs increasingly provide structured learning experiences that integrate health literacy, skills development, and cultural enrichment [7,10]. Evidence indicates that participation in such educational programs can improve health-related knowledge, promote positive psychological adjustment, and strengthen social engagement, thereby supporting overall well-being and active aging [11]. As the concept of active and healthy aging gains prominence, silver education is evolving from simple pastime activities to multifaceted educational services that combine practical skill acquisition, cognitive stimulation, and health promotion,

creating a holistic framework that supports seniors' continued personal development and social involvement.

2.3. The Supporting Role of Policy Environment for Integrated Development

A supportive policy environment is essential for the integrated development of wellness tourism and silver education [12]. At the national level, the ongoing promotion of health-oriented strategies and the construction of inclusive learning systems provide overarching guidance for combining health services with educational programs for seniors. Hainan Province, leveraging its unique ecological and economic advantages, has implemented targeted action plans and institutional innovations to foster the development of health and wellness industries, medical tourism, international education, and service trade. These measures have created favorable conditions for exploring integration models that link wellness tourism with educational initiatives, encouraging innovation in service design, cross-sector collaboration, and sustainable development. The combination of policy support, ecological resources, and market potential positions Hainan as an ideal setting for advancing integrated models that respond to the growing needs of aging populations, while also providing replicable strategies for similar regions seeking to optimize senior-oriented economic and social development [13].

3. The Practical Foundation for the Integrated Development of Hainan's Wellness Tourism and Silver Education

3.1. Resources and Institutional Advantages of the Health and Wellness Tourism Industry

Hainan benefits from a nationally recognized high-quality ecological environment and a distinctive tropical island climate, making it a premier destination for retirement and wellness tourism within China. The region's natural scenery, warm climate, and biodiversity create favorable conditions for health-oriented travel, relaxation, and recuperation. In addition, the establishment of the Boao Lecheng International Medical Tourism Pilot Zone has driven significant progress in the introduction of international pharmaceuticals and advanced medical devices, the application of cutting-edge medical technologies, and the provision of comprehensive rehabilitation services. These developments have facilitated the emergence of an integrated service pattern that links medical care, rehabilitation, nursing, and tourism, providing a robust foundation for the professionalization and high-end development of wellness tourism. Furthermore, the presence of supporting infrastructure, including specialized wellness resorts, rehabilitation centers, and recreational facilities, enhances the capacity for delivering diversified, high-quality wellness experiences to seniors, while also attracting domestic and international visitors seeking health-oriented travel options.

3.2. The Real Situation of Silver Education Development

Silver education in Hainan is primarily implemented through senior universities, community education programs, and informal learning initiatives. Curriculum offerings currently emphasize cultural enrichment, leisure activities, and interest-based learning, reflecting a growing but still limited supply of educational opportunities for the elderly. Despite these efforts, the overall scale, professionalization, and systematic design of these programs remain inadequate. In particular, within health and wellness tourism contexts, educational activities are often temporary or event-based, lacking cohesive course structures, measurable learning objectives, and mechanisms for evaluating learning outcomes. Consequently, there is a need to enhance program quality, integrate health-oriented knowledge into curricula, and establish structured pathways that allow seniors to engage in continuous learning while participating in wellness tourism experiences.

3.3. Potential Convergence Points for Integrated Development

From a demand perspective, the elderly population in Hainan demonstrates strong interest in lifelong learning, active aging, and health management, creating a practical foundation for the integration of wellness tourism with silver education. On the supply side, the region possesses comprehensive advantages, including abundant medical resources, advanced tourism facilities, and supportive educational policies, which collectively provide the infrastructure and institutional environment necessary to implement an integrated development model. By leveraging these assets, it is possible to design innovative programs that combine educational content with wellness tourism experiences, such as health workshops, exercise and rehabilitation classes, and culturally enriching activities embedded within travel itineraries. The convergence of these resources offers an opportunity to establish a new model of senior-oriented tourism that simultaneously promotes knowledge acquisition, health maintenance, and social engagement, enhancing the overall well-being and quality of life of older adults while also stimulating the local economy.

4. Main Problems in the Integration of Hainan's Wellness Tourism and Silver Education

4.1. The Product Supply Structure Is Relatively Single

Currently, wellness tourism offerings in Hainan remain predominantly centered on leisure accommodations and basic health preservation activities, with limited integration of educational components. This narrow focus restricts the differentiation and competitiveness of the region's wellness tourism products. Moreover, the absence of systematic collaboration between silver education programs and wellness services often leads to wellness stays being perceived primarily as short-term recreational consumption, rather than as part of a continuous, value-added educational and health experience. To achieve sustainable growth, there is a need to diversify product offerings by combining cultural, educational, and health-focused activities, thereby creating more holistic experiences that address the multifaceted needs of older adults. Developing tiered packages, thematic courses, and experiential programs that integrate learning, exercise, and leisure could enhance the appeal and competitiveness of Hainan's wellness tourism market.

4.2. Insufficient Organizational Coordination and Governance Mechanisms

The management systems for wellness tourism and silver education operate largely independently, resulting in limited coordination and inefficient resource allocation. The lack of structured interdepartmental cooperation increases the cost and complexity of integrating services and inhibits the establishment of a cohesive service network. Furthermore, unified standards, quality supervision frameworks, and risk prevention protocols for both wellness and educational activities are underdeveloped. This gap constrains the sustainability of integrated initiatives, reduces consumer confidence, and hinders the potential for long-term engagement. Strengthening organizational coordination through cross-sector collaboration, standardized service procedures, and joint planning mechanisms is therefore essential to ensure that integrated offerings can operate efficiently, maintain high quality, and respond flexibly to consumer needs.

4.3. Platform-Based Support Capabilities Need to Be Enhanced

Despite the increasing adoption of digital tools in tourism and education, the integration of health management data, learning records, and travel service information remains insufficient. The lack of a comprehensive digital platform for data sharing, service personalization, and long-term relationship management limits the ability to deliver continuous, tailored experiences for senior consumers. Without such capabilities, operators face difficulties in tracking health outcomes, assessing learning progress, and

maintaining customer loyalty, which ultimately undermines the cultivation of a stable and engaged senior consumer base. Enhancing platform-based support through the development of integrated information systems, mobile applications, and data-driven service management can provide a foundation for sustained engagement, personalized offerings, and improved service efficiency, thereby strengthening the long-term viability of Hainan's wellness and silver education integration.

5. Path Selection for the Integrated Development of Hainan Health and Wellness Tourism and Silver Education

5.1. Optimize Service Design Based on Demand Stratification

A fundamental prerequisite for achieving high-quality integration of wellness tourism and silver education is a thorough understanding of the heterogeneous characteristics of elderly populations, including differences in health status, learning motivation, lifestyle preferences, and travel patterns. Recognizing these variations allows for the implementation of stratified and categorized service strategies tailored to distinct demographic segments. Establishing a scientifically grounded user demand assessment system enables the provision of personalized and customized health, wellness, and educational services for different age groups, effectively replacing traditional "one-size-fits-all" models. This demand-oriented service design enhances the precision and relevance of service delivery, improves the efficiency of resource utilization, and elevates user satisfaction. Moreover, it provides a foundation for continuous refinement of service offerings, encourages longer-term engagement, and supports the sustainable development of integrated wellness and educational programs that align with the evolving needs of older adults.

5.2. Deepening Integration through the Restructuring of the Product System

To maximize the synergistic potential of wellness tourism and silver education, the existing product system must be comprehensively restructured to incorporate educational content across multiple dimensions, including health literacy, cultural heritage appreciation, and practical skill development. By embedding structured learning modules into wellness tourism itineraries and establishing clear learning objectives alongside health management indicators, a dynamic feedback loop can be created between educational achievements and improvements in physical and mental well-being. This approach not only enriches the conceptual depth and experiential quality of wellness tourism products, but also strengthens user engagement, loyalty, and overall satisfaction. Additionally, integrating educational and health components enhances the perceived value of offerings, promotes repeated participation, and encourages word-of-mouth dissemination, thereby fostering a sustainable model in which wellness and education mutually reinforce each other at both product and experiential levels.

5.3. Promoting Integrated Development through Platform Collaboration and Standard Governance

The successful integration of wellness tourism and silver education also depends on the establishment of collaborative platforms and standardized governance mechanisms. Cross-industry and cross-departmental cooperation should be promoted to enable resource sharing and coordinated service delivery across healthcare, wellness, education, training, cultural tourism, and related sectors. Implementing unified data interfaces, standardized service processes, and interoperable information systems facilitates modularized program design and delivery, while reducing operational inefficiencies and eliminating barriers between industries. Concurrently, a comprehensive standard system and evaluation framework should be established to cover service specifications, curriculum quality, learning outcomes, and health management results. Such mechanisms enhance transparency, accountability, and credibility, supporting industry self-regulation

and providing safeguards for consumers. Collectively, these measures create a robust institutional foundation and systemic support for long-term, stable, and synergistic development, enabling Hainan to advance as a model region where wellness tourism and silver education are fully integrated and mutually reinforcing.

6. Discussion

The integration of wellness tourism and silver education presents a unique opportunity to reshape the senior-oriented service landscape in Hainan, offering more than just recreation or leisure. Beyond the evident economic benefits, the combined model supports holistic development of older adults by simultaneously promoting physical health, mental well-being, and cognitive engagement. Practical implementation, however, faces several challenges. First, aligning educational curricula with wellness experiences requires careful program design to ensure that learning outcomes are meaningful and measurable. Second, sustaining engagement over time demands continuous innovation in service offerings, as repetitive or fragmented experiences may fail to capture long-term interest. Third, effective integration relies on technological infrastructure and digital platforms capable of consolidating health, learning, and travel data, yet current informatization systems remain underdeveloped. Addressing these issues calls for a coordinated approach that involves service providers, educational institutions, and tourism operators, emphasizing feedback-driven adjustments, participant-centered program design, and data-informed management strategies.

Furthermore, the integrated model provides a framework for evidence-based research. By systematically evaluating the outcomes of educational and wellness interventions, researchers and practitioners can identify best practices, assess program efficacy, and develop scalable models adaptable to other regions with similar demographic and environmental conditions. This approach not only strengthens theoretical understanding of senior-oriented service integration but also enhances the practical value of programs for older adults, ensuring that resources are efficiently allocated and user experiences are optimized.

7. Conclusion

The integration of wellness tourism with silver education represents a strategic pathway for Hainan to enhance the quality and diversity of senior services while promoting sustainable growth of its silver economy. By embedding educational content and learning opportunities into wellness tourism experiences, the province can evolve from traditional leisure-based retirement tourism toward a comprehensive model that combines health promotion, lifelong learning, and cultural engagement. Achieving this vision requires attention to demand segmentation, product system restructuring, platform-based collaboration, and standardized governance to ensure service quality, effectiveness, and user satisfaction.

Looking ahead, empirical research and systematic evaluations are essential for refining program design, validating outcomes, and guiding evidence-based decision-making. Continuous monitoring and assessment will provide robust support for policy optimization and enable the replication of successful models in other regions. Through these efforts, Hainan can establish itself as a leading example of integrated wellness and educational services for older adults, creating sustainable benefits for participants, service providers, and the broader regional economy.

Funding: This article is one of the outcomes of the 2025 Hainan Province Higher Education Science and Technology Research Project "Research on the Path of International Education Development in the Hainan Free Trade Port", Project Number: Hnky2025-68.

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