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Sustainable development strategy of tourism resources offered by regional advantage: Exploring the feasibility of developing an 'exotic culture' resource for Weihai City of China

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Abstract

Tourism resources are the prerequisite and basis for urban tourism development. Unlike mineral products and oil, tourism resources are renewable. How to find, create, manage, and maintain urban tourism resources will determine if they can be used sustainably. As the traditional coastal tourist city of China, Weihai does not have obvious advantages compared with other areas, so Weihai should develop a new tourism resource, an 'exotic culture' resource, offered by regional advantage. The paper will explore the feasibility of developing an 'exotic culture' resource for Weihai tourism in order to fulfil the sustainable utilization and development of tourism resources.

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Keywords: sustainable development; urban tourism; tourism resources; resource utilization; exotic culture; weihai

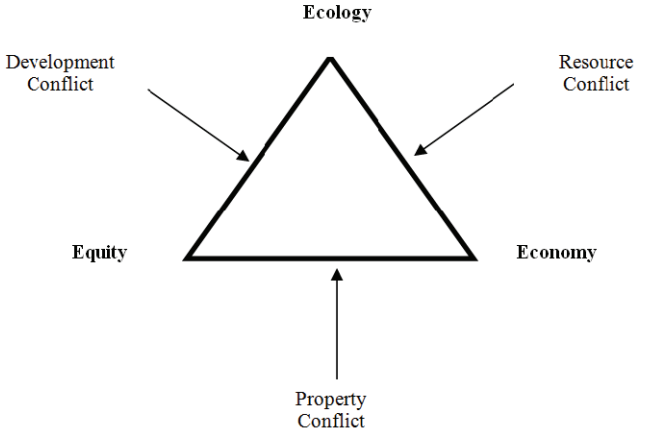
1. Introduction

With the development of society and the progress of technology, the competition among cities and regions grows more and more fierce. In this process, resources can play an important role. Thus, against the globalization background, a city needs to size up the situation from the angle of globalization, utilize new resources; meanwhile, it also needs to develop and create local resource for improving competitiveness[1]. As illustrated in the definition from the report 'Our Common Future'[2]: "Sustainable

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development is development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs". Krized and Power[3] argue that sustainable development was a global vision although it had been taken up by planners in the U.S. and other developed countries. According to Hopwood[4], the concept of sustainable development is seen to be the result of the growing awareness of the global links between mounting environmental problems, socioeconomic issues dealing with poverty and inequality, and concerns about a healthy future for humanity. It does not mean having less economic development, on the contrary, a healthy economy better able to generate the resources to meet people's needs, and new investment and environmental improvement often go hand in hand[5]. In the view of Couch and Dennemann[6], while economic development may be a legitimate policy goal, to be sustainable it must be achieved within the context of reducing the ecological footprint. The central value of sustainable development can be boiled down to a balance among the three 'E's: environment, economy, and equity[7]. As illustrated in Godschalk[8], sustainable development seeks to reconcile the conflicts among economic development, ecological preservation, and intergenerational equity; three conflicts exist among sustainable development value. The 'property conflict' between economic growth and equitable sharing of opportunities arises from competing claims on uses of property as both a private resource and a public good; the 'resource conflict' between economic and ecological utility arises from competing claims on the consumption of natural resources and the preservation of their ability to reproduce; the 'development conflict' between social equity and environmental preservation arises from competing needs to improve a lot of poor people through economic growth while protecting the environment through growth management. (See Fig.1)



Source: Godschalk (2004)

Fig.1. Conflicts among sustainable development values (slightly adapted)

It is clear that resources are a strategic factor in the process of sustainable development and the resource conflict exists between ecology and economy. Some resources, such as mineral products and oil, are non-renewable; they will be used up one day, so it is necessary to find new resources to replace them. By contrast, tourism resources, including natural landscape as well as historical and cultural resources, are renewable and can be redeveloped and utilized if they are well managed, maintained, and developed. As a tertiary industry, the sustainable development of the tourism industry is thought to be of paramount importance for urban development; its development relies mainly upon the sustainable utilization of tourism resources.

Weihai is one of the traditional coastal tourist cities of China, and it does not have obvious advantages compared with other coastal cities. Increasingly, cities and towns behave in logic of competition in a

highly dynamic and complex environment[9], and in such a competitive environment, the policies of local government need to be more market-oriented[10]. To provide Weihai's tourism industry with sustainable development and competitive advantage, a new tourism resource, an 'exotic culture' offered by Weihai's regional advantage of being near Korea, should be developed and utilized by the local government. For this purpose, the article offers a sustainable development strategy for the tourism industry of Weihai by exploring the feasibility of developing 'exotic culture' resources.

The article is composed of six chapters. The next chapter analyzes the production mechanism of the 'exotic culture' resource; in chapter three, the tourism development situation will be reviewed. Through a questionnaire and field survey, the study uncovers some existing problems and illustrates the necessity of sustainable development. Chapter four is mainly concerned with the effect of 'Korean culture' on Weihai. In this chapter, the paper provides an analysis of the development, value, and action of the Korean culture resources of Weihai. Chapter five explores the feasibility of developing the 'Korean culture' source for Weihai and suggests implementation programs; chapter six summarizes the whole article.

2. Production Mechanism of Exotic Culture Resources

There are more than 600 cities in China; their culture resources are not only produced by historical accumulation of their own but also affected by their location factors. As a complex of signs and signification, 'culture' meshes into codes of transmission of social values and meanings that have a 'material effect' on urban growth and decline[11]. Generally speaking, the propagation of culture among regions mainly depends on their communication with each other. Fig.2 illustrates the production mechanism of the 'exotic culture' resource. According to the situation of China, regional relationships can be classified into two types: border-type and approach-type. The cities that have the border-type regional advantage are border cities, such as Dandong city, Ji'an city, Yanji city, and Tumen city; they not only have their local cultures but also fuse exotic cultures. The cities that have the approach-type regional advantage are mostly coastal cities such as Dalian, Qingdao, and Weihai. These cities have built trade relationships with Korea and Japan; companies and factories from those countries locate in these cities, which improves economic development and culture exchanges. However, this kind of 'exotic culture' resource provided by trade connections is easily ignored, although it is actually important. From Fig. 2, it is clear that the exotic culture resource is produced through communication (trade, tourism, culture, business, etc.) between the objective city and foreign cities, but the resource is usually undeveloped. Thus, with the local culture often well utilized in tourism, the exotic culture resource should also be developed so as to make local and exotic cultures combined organically and fulfill the sustainable development of tourism resources.

3. Development Status of Weihai's Tourism

3.1 Introduction to Weihai and its Tourism

As one of the most famous port cities in China, Weihai has built a good trade relationship with Korea. Fig.3 (a) shows the location relationship between Weihai city (China) and Incheon city (Korea). The straight-line distance between the ports of Weihai and Inchon in Korea is only 93 nautical miles, which gives Weihai a regional advantage in trade contacts with Korea compared with other cities. Thus, Weihai has good tourism development opportunities. Many Korean enterprises are located in Weihai, which contributes to economic development and enhances exchanges and cooperation. In addition, Shandong University at Weihai has educated many students who can speak Korean and understand Korean culture well, and Korean enterprises provide these students with employment, which improves the industry-university-research cooperation. These exchanges and cooperation open the way for production of exotic

culture resources.

As a coastal city, Weihai has plenty of tourist resources such as islands, seashore, urban gardens, historic interest, folk customs, and so on. In 1996, Weihai was designated by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as one of the most livable cities around the world. In 1998, it received an award as one of the best tourist cities in China. Weihai has such excellent tourism resources that a large number of domestic and foreign tourists visit there each year, which not only promotes tourism development but also promotes the development of correlated industries.

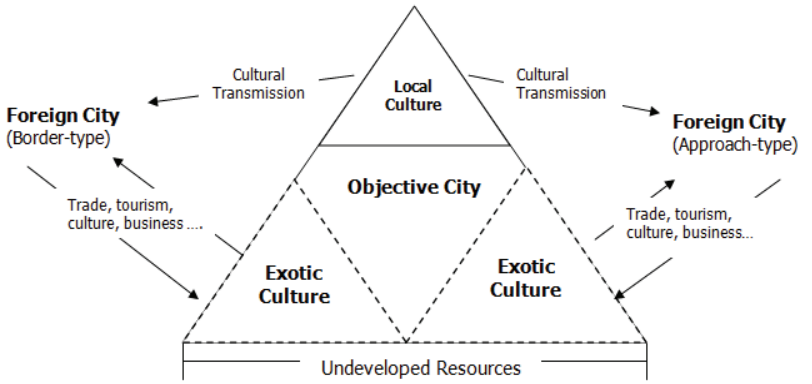


Fig.2. Production Mechanism of Exotic Culture Resources

Fig. 3(b) shows the variable trend of the number of international tourists who visited Weihai from 2000 to 2009. The number of tourists from 2000 to 2003 was, respectively, 91,161, 104,315, 104,322, and 89,230; these numbers do not show an obvious increase. In addition, the number of tourists fell in 2003 due to the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak. However, from 2004 to 2009, the number of tourists skyrocketed, reaching 322,676 in 2009.

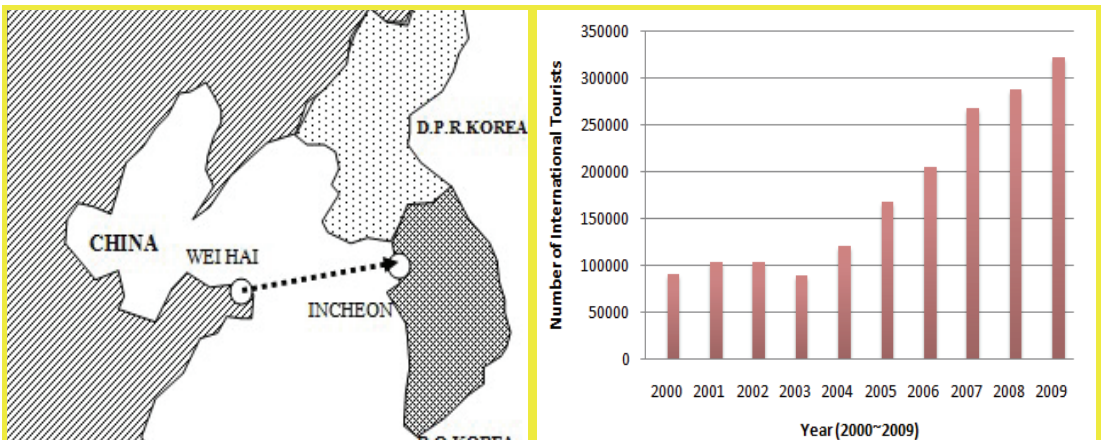


Fig.3. (a) Weihai's Location; (b) Variation Trend of International Tourist Numbers (2000~2009)
Source: Weihai Statistical Yearbook (2010)

The detailed situation of international tourists is shown in Table1. In 2009, the number of Korean tourists visiting Weihai was 255,042, accounting for the biggest proportion of all international tourists, increasing 12.85% from 2008. Japan was second in the number of tourists visiting Weihai in 2009 with 28,775, and Russia was third with 13,009. Obviously, Korean tourists are the main group of international tourists. Because Weihai is near Korea, many Korean enterprises locate in Weihai in order to develop Chinese markets; meanwhile, there are increasing numbers of Korean tourists who would like to travel to Weihai, which is famous as a summer resort. Visits by Korean tourists will not only promote the tourism development, but also improve the cultural communication between China and Korea. This communication produces Weihai's 'exotic culture' resource—Chinese and Korean culture. So it is necessary for the government to make full use of both its regional advantages and the opportunities of trade development between the two countries so as to develop new tourism resources for sustainable development.

Table1. Number of International Tourists in Weihai (2008 & 2009)

Country/Region	2009	2008	% Increase
Japan	28,775	26,529	8.47
Korea	255,042	226,010	12.85
Taiwan	11,291	10,308	9.54
Hong Kong	2,194	2,016	8.83
Macao	550	489	12.47
Russia	13,099	10,438	25.49

Source: Weihai Statistical Yearbook (2010)

3.2 Existing Problems

To investigate the situation of Weihai tourism more thoroughly, the research team developed both a questionnaire and field survey to assess the degree of satisfaction of domestic tourists in Weihai, from December 10, 2010, to February 12, 2011. A full 150 questionnaires were sent and 134 were returned and completed. The survey results are shown in Fig. 4. Obviously, domestic tourists were very satisfied with the environmental level of Weihai. In comparison, they were very dissatisfied with goods; they thought that the convenience and service were just OK; and they were dissatisfied with transportation and facilities. In addition, the respondents thought that Weihai lacked characteristics that set it apart from other coastal cities.

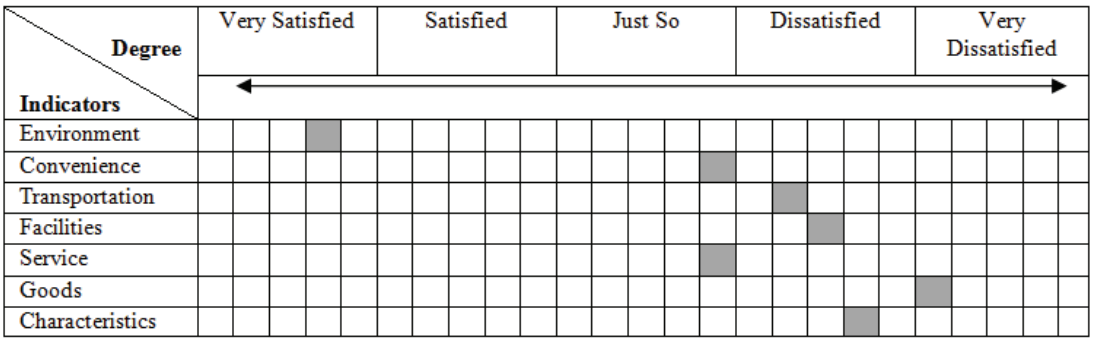


Fig.4. Satisfaction of Domestic Tourists for Related Indicators

The research team also made a field survey of the consumption situation of Korean goods at the Weihai

Korean Commercial Building. It found that the layout of the building's interior was confusing, and the stores seemed to be monotonous; meanwhile, the fire control facilities were not adequate to create a safe shopping environment. In addition, not all the items had price tags, and the price of some products was ten times higher than their value. It was also hard to distinguish between truth and false product claims, which resulted in the information asymmetry between sellers and buyers; the prestige of the commercial building was negatively affected as a result.

From the in-depth survey, the study found the following problems for Weihai's tourism industry. First, Weihai's tourism started relatively late, and the supporting facilities are not sufficient, so its attraction to tourists is limited. Second, Weihai, like other coastal cities, only focuses on the 'sea' as a tourist resource in the process of making a development strategy; the seashore will perhaps attract some tourists but it lacks a characteristic of its own. Third, although there are many tourist spots in Weihai, they are scattered, and the inconvenient transportation system causes inconvenience to visitors. Fourth, the integration and management of tourism are not adequate; as a result, there are few tourism products that have been developed to an adequate scale. Finally, environmental protection in some areas has been ignored, and rich ecological resources are being destroyed in developing tourism resources.

The tourism resources that Weihai has developed are all local ones, such as the seashore and forest. According to the survey, some domestic tourists could feel the Korean culture atmosphere; however, when they examined this more closely, they did not find a big difference. For example, there are some Korean commercial shops and Korean restaurants in Weihai, but their owners mainly focus on profit rather than promoting Korean culture, so their service and marketing seems to be the same as Chinese establishments. Although they have Korean names, they can only be seen as symbols rather than part of the 'exotic culture'. To change the situation, it is necessary for local government to be cognizant of the value of 'Korean culture' as a tourism resource.

4. Analysis on the Value of Korean Culture Resources

Since the opening of diplomatic relations between China and Korea in 1992, trade communication has been strengthened. More and more Korean commodities can be found in Chinese market. Korean accessories of exquisite workmanship, celestial music, and fashion attract young Chinese people. Especially, with the transmission of Korean drama, more Chinese audiences are absorbed by the beauty of Korean architecture in 'Dae Jang Geum' and the fine sentiments of the Korean people in 'Autumn in My Heart Stirring'. These cultural elements, broadcast through TV or the internet, have brought not only happiness but the experience of 'exotic culture' to the Chinese people. Within less than ten years, a large number of Chinese students have gone to Korea to study, and many Korean students have come to China; these academic exchanges have promoted cultural communication between the two countries. Korean culture industry has reached an advanced level in the world; thus Korean culture has a potential value, and it will affect tourism directly. Since Weihai has a regional advantage of being near Korea, if the 'Korean culture' can be developed and utilized in tourism, the city's economic development will be instilled with new vitality.

4.1. Korean Culture Elements

Through a field survey, it was found that there are some Korean culture elements that have not yet been developed and utilized in Weihai. The most representative one is Korean Town, which is composed of several tower buildings based on real Korean apartment design; they all have the high-class type of household and high-quality estate management. Besides, Korean Town is located in the High-tech Development Zone and has convenient transportation. As a Korean-style apartment, it offers the opportunity for citizens to experience the new living style in modern Korea. The survey has shown that many Korean businessmen choose to stay in Korean Town. Meanwhile, a lot of domestic tourists are also

interested in staying there. In Weihai, there are a lot of shops that sell Korean products, and tourists, if they wish, can buy some characteristic goods of Korean culture there.

Korean food is highly popular with Chinese consumers because it is considered a delicacy. Weihai has many Korean-style restaurants. Most Korean people are not accustomed to Chinese food, so they usually go to those restaurants for dinner. Moreover, many tourists from other places can also taste delicious food, and it is really a good experience of the exotic culture for them. In addition, the basis of cultural communication is education. Shandong University at Weihai has signed cooperation agreements with many universities in Korea, which has helped further the mutual understanding of the Chinese and Korean people. At present, there are more than 400 Korean students studying in Weihai. There are exchange visits of both professors and students between Weihai and Korea every year. The School of Korean Studies holds 'Korean Culture Month' every April, which is aimed at improving the friendship between Chinese and Korean students. The detailed elements of Korean culture in Weihai are shown in Fig. 5. The existence of Korean culture is a valuable resource for Weihai's tourism. On one hand, Korean culture elements of Weihai are formed naturally with trade, business, and education communication between Weihai and Korea; thus, urban managers only need to recognize their development potential and manage and utilize them effectively. On the other hand, urban managers should know more about the nature of Korean culture rather than just copying its surface.

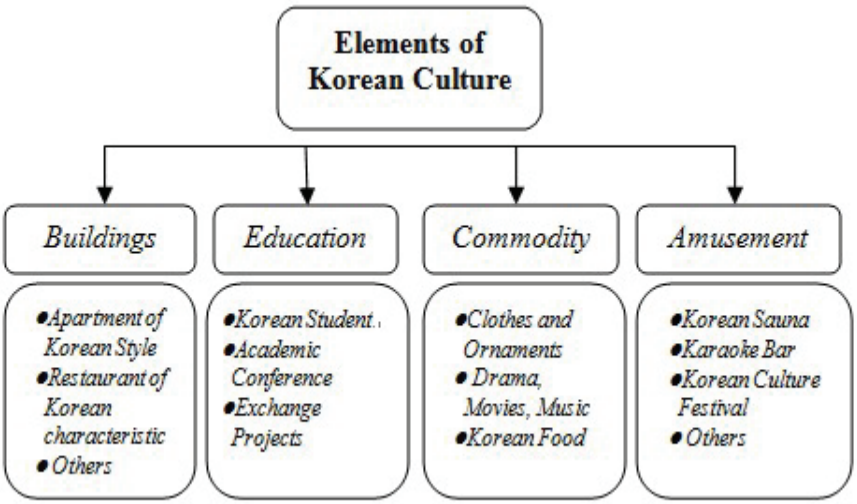


Fig. 5. Korean Culture Elements of Weihai City

4.2. Advantages of Korean Tourism

Through research and surveys on Korean tourism, this article has found some advantages of Korean tourism. First of all, Korean tourism lays great stress on providing quality service and respecting tourists, which can surely brighten tourists' mood. Next, some scenic spots are built up as unique national features for attracting tourists to study their history and culture. In addition, the urban and natural environment of Korea is good enough to make tourists feel relaxed and happy. Meanwhile, the Korean government has paid more attention to building the city image (CI), and almost all cities have their own brand and slogan. Finally, Korea provides the disabled with convenient facilities and services. It is clear that the tourism management model seems to be more important than the tourism resource itself. So Weihai should also

take into account improving service for tourists and optimizing the tourism management model.

5. Detailed Schemes and Suggestions

On the basis of what has been analyzed above, this article suggests that Weihai should utilize its potential tourism resource—Korean culture offered through regional advantage—in order to give its tourism a competitive advantage and sustainable development. Hence, the article proposes the following schemes for Weihai's development of new tourism resources.

- Rational utilization of Korean culture resources

Weihai city government and related organization should establish a specific management system of Korean culture resources and analyze the existing Korean culture resources to make a program to develop and utilize them. Additionally, a new 'Korean culture experience' region should be planned and built near to Korean Town; all the elements of Korean culture will be concentrated there, so that a real Korean culture town that concentrates living, dining, leisure, amusement, and shopping together can be available. In order to mange this town effectively, it is necessary for the government to offer a training program to shop owners of Korean culture town, instructing them on real Korean culture and improving their service level so that the tourists who come there will feel the exotic culture too; this is called 'implantation of cultural core'. On the basis of this scheme, combining Korean culture resources and local tourism resources (nature, environment, history, culture, etc.) will be an important consideration for urban managers because it will maximize the value and utilization of tourism resources.

- Definite market positioning

Because of the lack of publicity, most visitors come to Weihai to avoid the hot summer instead of experiencing exotic culture, which obviously shows that the exotic culture advantage has not yet been fully utilized, nor has the potential value of Korean culture been exploited in Weihai. According to the survey, it was found that many tourists were interested in Korean culture, and they thought that Korea was worth visiting, yet their dream could not come true because of limited time and money. Clearly, the market for Korean culture tourism is huge, and once it is exploited, there will be boundless prospects. According to Kotler[12] and Oh[13], city market is the space where government and visitors communicate with each other, and buyers are the market for urban products. It can be said that people who are interested in tourism products will be the market. So, on the basis of utilizing its local resources, Weihai needs to develop a definite market positioning for its exotic culture resource targeted at those who would like to experience 'Korean culture' and buy 'Korean products'.

- Scientific tourism marketing

Firstly, local government should design a specific image for publicizing Korean culture tourism, and some tourism companies should also participate positively to develop a specific tourism brand for Weihai. This effort should focus more on the 'exotic culture feature', while assiduously propagating traditional tourism items; improve public service facilities so as to make tourists more comfortable; and foster high-quality service to meet the market demand.

Secondly, Weihai should improve the city image by making an attractive slogan, strengthening the publicity of Weihai's Korean culture feature, designing a mascot and souvenirs, and attracting Korean film companies to Weihai.

Lastly, the Weihai city government needs to perform economic functions and standardize the construction of Korean Town, providing high-quality services and facilities using international standards;

strengthen the construction of the greenbelt of urban area and public infrastructures; perfect the transportation network by opening a 'special line' among tourist spots in order to increase passenger capacity and economizing public transportation resources; and hold large-scale commercial exhibitions and economic forums for improving the sustainable development of the tourism economy.

- Cooperation with Korean government

For the sustainable development of tourism of Weihai, it seems important for the city government to cooperate with other Chinese and foreign cities. For developing Korean culture resources, the Weihai city government should concentrate on cooperation with the Korean government in order to deliver tourism resource sharing.

- Building the sustainable development system of urban tourism

The main aim of any plan for sustainable development is the sustainable utilization of resources, which means that if one resource cannot be renewed or redeveloped, it must be replaced by others. As for tourism resources, whether they are used in a sustainable manner or not are the key point. So this study promotes a sustainable development system of urban tourism for Weihai, while offering the above macro suggestions. As shown in Fig. 6, urban resources are generally composed of four kinds: natural resources, historic resources, cultural resources, and other resources. In order to fulfill a sustainable development program, the government needs to protect natural and historic resources. It also needs to combine urban and tourism landscapes for the reasonable utilization of natural resources and to combine general buildings with historic buildings. As an important tourism resource, culture may become the most attractive point for tourists. As Weihai has the regional advantage of being near Korea, the local culture and Korean culture are both the main cultural resources, and the communication of the two kinds of cultures will enable them to develop sustainably. In addition, there are probably other resources that have not been developed yet; perhaps they need to be uncovered and developed by the government in order to provide sustainable development.



Fig. 6. Sustainable Development System of Urban Tourism

6. Conclusions

In order to meet continuous human needs, sustainable development has become the theme of today's world in different fields. Tourism resources, unlike mineral products and oil, are renewable; thus, they should be continuously developed and utilized to contribute to the sustainable development of urban

tourism. This article has taken Weihai city as an example, analyzed the developing state of tourism, and found some existing barriers, using a questionnaire and field survey. The study found that Weihai should develop a new tourism resource, exotic culture, offered by its regional advantage of being near Korea, in order to change the situation of having no competitive tourism advantage compared with other coastal cities in China and achieve sustainable development of urban tourism. For this purpose, the article performed an analysis of the value of Korean culture in Weihai, and it also illustrated the advantages of the Korean tourism model. Through analysis of the Korean culture resource potential in Weihai, this research proposed the following schemes: 1) utilize Korean culture resource reasonably; 2) position the market for Korean culture; 3) make tourism marketing scientific; 4) cooperate with the Korean government in tourism development; and 5) build a sustainable development system of urban tourism, by means of which Weihai's tourism will be able to develop sustainably.

Our research team will keep a close watch on projects related to Korean culture resources promoted by the Weihai city government and distribute questionnaires and field surveys periodically in order to evaluate the situation of Weihai's tourism development of Korean culture resources.

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