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# Preliminary Study of Ancient Town Protection and Rural Tourism Development of Caoshi Town in Hengdong County, Hunan Province

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**Abstract** The typical style and features of mountains and waters in Caoshi Ancient Town, have hitherto been well preserved. Caoshi Ancient Town boasts superior base of the natural eco-environment and deep-rooted background of regional culture, where mountains, waters, shoals, towns and other landscape elements are merged harmoniously, the transportation and geographical conditions have been fundamentally changed. Ancient towns, old temples, ancient forests, ancient wells and ancient piers are unique in different ways, with characteristics of tourism resources such as long history and ancient folklore. It should seize the historical opportunity of China vigorously developing rural tourism based on the construction of the new socialist countryside, to make characteristic agricultural economy gain ground; assume the leading role to drive the development of tourism economy in surrounding areas; correctly handle the relationship between development and protection to walk the path of sustainable development of tourism.

**Key words** Hengdong County, Caoshi Ancient Town, Tourism development

In 2009, *Opinions of the State Council on Speeding up Tourism Development* pointed out, "We will implement the project of enriching people in rural areas, and build villages and towns with characteristic landscape". This is the affirmation of 4 batches of 251 national-level famous historical and cultural villages and towns, selected and named by China<sup>[1]</sup>. Hunan Province takes the lead, to select and announce 2 batches of 27 provincial-level famous historical and cultural villages and towns. In 2010, the General Office of Hunan Provincial People's Government communicated *Implementation Plan of "3521" Rural Tourism Construction Project in Hunan Province*, and promulgated *Announcement on Participating in the Construction of Strong Tourist Counties, Famous Special Tourist Towns (Townships) and Famous Special Tourist Villages in Hunan Province*<sup>[2]</sup>. The party and government have attached great importance to excellent traditional cultural heritage and the rural tourism development in China. In this article, we give our opinions on the protection and rural tourism development in Caoshi Ancient Town of Hengdong County enjoying the fame as "South Hunan Furong Town".

## 1 Geographical environment background of the rural tourism development in Caoshi Ancient Town

### 1.1 Superior base of the natural eco-environment Heng-

dong County in Hunan Province is named due to its location in the east of Hengshan Mountain. It is in the northeast of the Hengyang hills and basin, and the slope tilting from the eastern Hunan and southern Hunan mountains to the Xiangjiang River valley and plain. 70% of the land area is hilly and the rest of land is hillock and plain. The terrain is high in the southeast and low in the northwest. Xiangjiang River runs through the west side from south to north, and its tributary Mishui River runs from southeast to northwest, flowing into the Xiangjiang River. Under typical environment of a subtropical monsoon climate, the average annual precipitation is 1 336 mm; the annual average temperature is 18 °C; the frost-free period is 290 days, rainy and hot seasons overlapping each other. There is no severely cold winter and sizzling summer, with mild and humid climate all the year around, and there is plenty of river water in four seasons. The geological structure is complex, composed of diverse rock types. Granite landscape, karst caves, Danxia scenery, and other scenic landscapes abound; the zonal vegetation is subtropical green broad-leaved forest with complex structure, showing characteristics of complex regional composition, rich substrate resources and various types. The forest coverage rate reaches 72%, with approximately 900 kinds of wild plants and over 300 kinds of wild animals. Caoshi Ancient Town is located at one intermontane basin, southeastern part of the county, with the best natural eco-environment and most typical landscape features.

**1.2 Deep-rooted background of regional culture** Hengdong County boasts the aura of the Nanyue mountains, a place propitious for giving birth to great men, with thriving tradition and culture from time immemorial. Early in ancient times, Emperor Yan, one of primogenitors of the Chinese, tripped to the

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south, and went into eastern Hunan mountainous areas along the Mishui River, disseminating and developing farming civilization, who were eventually buried in the land of tea. Three Emperor Yan's courtiers, Yangshan, Lingshan and Hongshan, continued to dedicate themselves in taming of the Mishui River flood, who were buried in Wuji, Caoshi and Youxian along the Mishui River, respectively. So, there are Emperor Yan Temple, Yangshan Temple, Lingshan Temple, and the sacrificial activities for the worship of Emperor Yan and his subjects, still remaining today in the Mishui River valley. The Mishui River is also called "Holy River". There is a galaxy of renowned figures in Hengdong County, and the most outstanding figures include He Keming, No. 1 scholar in the Yuan Dynasty; Peng Jun, No. 1 scholar in the Qing Dynasty; Luo Ronghuan, the marshal of the People's Republic of China. In days of yore, Huang Tingjian (the Song Dynasty), Xu Xiake, Li Dongyang (the Ming Dynasty), Zeng Guofan, Zuo Zongtang, Fang Xianjue (the Qing Dynasty), and other famous historical and cultural celebrities, also left footprints here. Hengdong County is also famous "home of the shadow play", "home of paper-cut", "home of Huagu Opera", "home of dragon boat", and "home of dragon and lion". Its local food culture is especially fantastic, and in 2006, China Cuisine Association awarded the only medal of "Famous Local Dish County in China" to Hengdong County<sup>[3]</sup>. Generally speaking, in Hengdong County and the entire Mishui River valley, it is endowed with ancient and rich regional culture. Caoshi Ancient Town is located in the junction of Hengdong County, You County in Zhouzhou City, and Anren County in Chenzhou City, where the ethnic groups are complex, and the local culture savors of legend.

**1.3 Fundamental improvement in modern transportation geographical conditions** Since Caoshi Ancient Town is in the confluence of the Mishui River and its tributary Yongle River, it became an important distribution center of goods in the mountainous areas of southeastern Hunan, by virtue of the advantage of its water transport, in ancient times featuring boats of the south and horses of the north. Especially in the Anti-Japanese War period, there were serried shops, with commercial prosperity, enjoying the reputation of "Small Nanjing". In the period of modern transportation, there is no train passing here, nor it is close to the highways. Together with the barrier arising from the construction of Yangtang, Ganquan, Ronghuan, Riguangyan and other dams for cascade development of water conservancy in the Mishui River, it appears that Caoshi Ancient Town has become a dead end isolated from the world, but it is safe from the brunt of modern construction, still maintaining the charm of antique. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the economy of China has boomed, and Hengyang City which Hengdong County and Caoshi Ancient Town rely on, becomes a big city with millions of people, and one of 50 highway transportation hub cities and 36 rail transportation hub cities in China, determined by the Ministry of Transportation. The Beijing – Zhuhai Expressway, the Hengyang – Zaomupu Expressway, the Hengyang – Shaoyang Expressway, the Hengyang – Dapu Expressway, the Hengyang – Nanyue Expressway, the Hengyang –

Yanling Expressway and Wuhan – Guangzhou high-speed railway, have been open to the traffic. In addition to the construction of the Nanyue airport with high standards, Hengyang is brought into the high-speed times, greatly reducing the temporal and spatial distance from Hengyang to the Pearl River Delta, the Yangtze River Delta, Beijing – Tianjin – Tangshan, Fujian strait economic zone and other developed coastal areas. The Hengyang – Yanling Expressway and Hengyang – Chaling – Ji'an Railway under construction, run through Caoshi Ancient Town, the old mountainous area, so that the temporal and spatial distance from it to Hengyang City, Mount Hengshan (the Southern Mountain of the Five Sacred Mountains), the Changsha – Zhuzhou – Xiangtan area, and Chenzhou City, is within an hour's drive tourism circle.

## 2 Characteristics of tourism resources in Caoshi Ancient Town

**2.1 Mountains, waters, shoals, towns and other landscape elements are merged harmoniously** Caoshi Ancient Town, located in confluence of the Mishui River, the Yongle River, the Jiangdongxi River, and the left side of "Caoshi – Miping" basin with fertile soil and abundant products, is a famous land of milk and honey in the Mishui River valley. Nowadays, Caoshi Ancient Town is determined as county-level commodity grain production base, lean pig breeding base, small fruit development base, and cage fish cultivation base in Ronghuan reservoir area. The basin is surrounded by Mount Zhenzhufeng, Mount Ma'anshan, Mount Yunfeng, Mount Manaozhai, Mount Yuhuyan and other famous local mountains. Caoshi Ancient Town is in the south of Mount Lingshan towering alone in the bank of the Mishui River; the east of wandering Fenghuangshan Mountains; the north of small size of river terrace and lawn; the west of the riverbend of the Mishui River with broad river surface and gentle flow, the middle of which is green lush central bar – Baimaozhou bar, like a skiff, the east of which is fertile Caoshi garden spot. Shiziyan, Dingtouyan and other scenic spots are scattered in Caoshi Ancient Town, together forming fascinating picture scroll of mountains, waters, bars, towns, and other types of landscape, which are combined ingeniously and harmoniously.

**2.2 Ancient towns, old temples, ancient forests, ancient wells and ancient piers are unique in different ways** In its heyday, there were once 360 proprietors of shop or restaurant in Caoshi Ancient Town where the deep streets are in a criss-cross fashion; the smooth and glossy road surface is paved by the quartzite; small blue-brick and gray-tile two-storeyed pavilions, and fir trapdoor-style storefronts, have an old-fashioned and antique flavor. When in the third, sixth and ninth day of a lunar month, the streets are crowded with people, which can still show the prosperity of the ancient town in the old days. Mount Lingshan is in the north of the ancient town, where Emperor Yan and the courtiers are buried. The mountain, like bronze bell, towers alone in the shore of the Mishui River, with steep cliff and dangerous crag. As early as in the Tang Dynasty, for commemorating gods in Mount Lingshan, Lingshan

Temple, Lingshan God Palace, coupled with Caoshi old stage, Zhongzhou Academy of Classical Learning founded in the Ming Dynasty, and other ancient buildings, were built in the mountain. So far, a secondary virgin forest is still preserved in the mountain, and there is an ancient Nanmu tree with age as high as 1700 years before Lingshan Temple. At the foot of Mount Lingshan and waterside of the Mishui River, there is a holy spring opening never overflowing and drying all the year around, warm in winter and cool in summer, forming a part of the scenery of the Mount Lingshan resort. In Caoshi Ancient Town, there are "monkeys fishing the moon", "Li Dao yuan's fishing ground", "eight immortals playing chess", "Duofulin Temple", "red tangerines in Zhongzhou", "three rivers mirroring the moon", "Using coin to hoist gourd", etc., 18 scenes in total. In Caoshi Ancient Town, the lune-shaped berth in the ancient wharf, not only strengthens the ship's security and stability, but also broadens the loading and unloading surface of goods, which fully shows the innovation and wisdom of the Caoshi people. The ancient temple, ancient forest, ancient well and ancient wharf in Caoshi Ancient Town are of old features and abundant charm.

**2.3 It boasts long history and ancient folklore** According to the *Annals of the Hengdong County*, in the Ming and Qing dynasties, the patrol and inspection office was once set in Caoshi Ancient Town, which was named Caoshi after the lawn for the military training, and it was renamed Caoshi in 1853. According to some records, the oldest Lingshan Temple was built in the Tang Dynasty; there is an ancient Nanmu tree with age as high as 1700 years before Lingshan Temple; the orange in Caoshi began from the Northern and Southern Dynasties. The birth, development and naming of Caoshi Ancient Town have experienced an evolution process from common place name of "Caoshi" to special place name of "Caoshi". According to some studies, the word "Caoshi" began from the time no later than the Eastern Jin Dynasty, and its emergence in real life and myriad literatures began from the middle Tang Dynasty, or the Song Dynasty<sup>[4]</sup>. Caoshi is relative to official formal city and town. According to the related studies, with the emergence and development of commodity economy, open air markets in the Song Dynasty sprang up, forming the market network of Caoshi Town. 2000 open air markets in Tanzhou (present-day Changsha, Henan Province), are the markets formed in the Southern Song Dynasty<sup>[5]</sup>. Therefore, Hengdong Caoshi Ancient Town is likely to form in the Tang and Song dynasties. Like other ancient towns, Caoshi Ancient Town is migrant town, with diverse and ancient folk custom. The most influential folk custom is "Ganchunshu" emerging in the Ming and Qing dynasties. When the spring equinox comes, it attracts the vendors to come to the fair, who are from Hengshan, Youxian, Anren, even Chaling, Jiangxi and other places. It lasts about a week, and the greatest number of crowd assembling can reach 70 000. The second is the Lingshan sacrificial rites, taking shape in the same period with Lingshan Temple. The thirteen day of the ninth lunar month each year is the birthday of lord Lingshan, and local people will invite the troupe to sing opera

nearly half a month. There are some cultural activities such as "Taigushi", and fair activities. The third is "dragon boat racing" from the first day to the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. During this period, 20–30 dragon boats from the town and surrounding villages can be concentrated in the Mishui River. The rowers race with all their might, and the shore spectators' cheers never cease, with exciting and bustling atmosphere.

### 3 Ideas for protection and tourism development in Caoshi Ancient Town

#### 3.1 Seizing the historical opportunity of China vigorously developing rural tourism based on the construction of the new socialist countryside, to make characteristic agricultural economy gain ground

Caoshi Ancient Town is a typical distribution center of agricultural materials emerging by virtue of the agricultural economic development in the neighboring areas, and the materials distributed include grain, tea, herbal materials, wood products, cotton, flax, orange fruits, pigs, cattle, sheep, rabbits, chickens, ducks, eggs, vegetables, and many other kinds of dried food, fresh produce, agricultural and sideline product, as well as plow, rake, hoe, sickle and other farming production appliances in the town shops. Because it is related to people's livelihood and close to life, the fair trade here flourishes and never fades away, only differing in terms of the content and scale in different periods. In the modern era of market economy, it should advance with the times, to develop characteristic agricultural economy based on the construction of the new socialist countryside, and promote the development of the commodity economy with the bazaar features. The orange cultivation in Caoshi has had a long history over 1500 years, with characteristics of bright color, thin skin and more juice, crisp flesh, sweet and sour flavor. Especially the Baimaozhou orange, once the royal tribute, was exported to the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries for the state banquet after the founding of new China, praised by Premier Zhou Enlai and foreign guests. It has formed 10 varieties so far, such as Guangyou orange, sweet orange, navel orange, loquat orange, blood orange, Dahongbao orange, and the highest annual output in the town can reach as high as 5 000 tons. But the price is not high, and the advantage is not obvious. Because it has not yet formed characteristic brands, and there is a shortage of deep-processed products. Thus, it must increase investment in science and technology, carefully choose and cultivate characteristic orange brands, integrate "production, supply, marketing", step up efforts in publicity and promotion to expand market share. The herbal material transaction in Caoshi Ancient Town is known for many types and large amount, which enjoys the reputation of "Herb Capital" in the southern Hunan Province. However, it once stressed "taking grain as the key to the national agriculture" and "deforestation", severely damaging herbal resources.

At present, there is a huge demand for traditional Chinese medicinal materials in the international and domestic market, with high price, so it should seize the opportunity to vigorously develop the production of traditional Chinese medicinal materi-

als, revitalizing the herbs merchandise trade market in Caoshi. The Mishui River is originally known as "Tu River", and the ancient tea is called "Tu". The story that Emperor Yan was poisoned by 72 deadly drugs, and detoxified by having "Tu", is amazing and very absorbing. The Mishui River valley has China's unique vine tea, produced in Hengdong. The vine tea has the efficacy of preventing cancer, losing weight, and refreshing oneself, with a vast potential market, so it should expand the production scale, forming brand. Relying on Caoshi Ancient Town, it can develop the orange orchard sightseeing, tea garden tourism, and herbs garden sightseeing, on the basis of characteristic agricultural landscape; "orange cultural festival", "special tea cultural festival", "Caoshi landscape and ecological tourism festival", "Shennong cultural festival", and other tourism festivals, to promote the joint development of rural economy and ancient town economy in Caoshi.

**3.2 Assuming the leading role to drive the development of tourism economy in surrounding areas** The hilly areas southeast to Hengdong and the Mishui River valley, with Caoshi Ancient Town at the core, have Yanglin Ancient Town, Jiangdong Reservoir, Ronghuan Dam, Wangriyan Dam, Lion Rock in Gaotang Township, Mount Dingtouyan, and other scenic spots. In comparison with Caoshi Ancient Town, Yanglin Ancient Town is a ancient town with a history of only 200 years, where the ancient buildings are products of the Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China, with well-preserved ancient style. Because the flooding in the Mishui River is frequent, the residents in the town all move to higher ground, Yanglin new street away from the town only about 200 m, so that in the old street of ancient town, there are only a small number of old people reluctant to leave, coldness and loneliness permeating through the town. But it is a blessing in disguise. The ancient buildings of various periods are well preserved, which have been determined as "immovable cultural relics" by Hengdong County People's Government, becoming the ideal places of the ancient town tourism project.

Jiangdong Reservoir is only 7 km far away from Caoshi Ancient Town, which is an irrigation-based reservoir integrating functions of cultivating fish and generating power. The height of this magnificent dam is 44.7 m and the water quality is good, free from pollution; the dam is surrounded by verdant and thick trees and lush bamboos, with quiet environment; Chawang Village and Hetangkou Village at the tail of this reservoir are all China's famous hometown of bamboo and timber, which boast typical pastoral scene, and especially in the summer, the climate there is cool like autumn, therefore, they are just the summer resorts and ideal places for leisure and vacation. Lion Rock and Dingtouding in Gaotang Township, are large forehead-shaped Danxia caves, with peculiar shapes. Inside the cave, there are temples, nunneries and residents' houses. So far, there are still residents piling up firewood in the caves, which can be called peculiar spectacle. Ronghuan dam is low-head power station, and Caoshi Ancient Town is located by the side of reservoir with surging water. Wangriyan dam is in the Yongle River, and an important orange production base is near

the reservoir, with beautiful scenery. These attractions, like a myriad of stars surrounding the moon, cluster around Caoshi Ancient Town. As for the tourism development in this area, we should pay attention to the following four aspects. First, we should take Caoshi Ancient Town as head, integrate scenery with mountains and rivers, famous historical sites, and mountainous countryside in the ancient town for comprehensive development, and highlight the idea of "South Hunan Furong Town". Second, we should combine sightseeing in Yanglin Ancient Town and purchasing agricultural and sideline native products in the new street for development. Third, we should build Jiangdong Reservoir and the surrounding villages into ecological leisure resort. Fourth, we should combine Ronghuan reservoir, Wangriyan reservoir, Danxia scenery and rural pastoral scenes, to carry out comprehensive agricultural sightseeing activities and folk festivals, but it should be based on Caoshi.

**3.3 Correctly handling the relationship between development and protection to walk the path of sustainable development of tourism** As to the development and protection of the ancient town, we can learn from a lot of successful experience at home and abroad. Its general principles should be "protection first, sustainable utilization, rational development, and integrated development". The protection of tourism resources is the prerequisite and basis of tourism development. Protection is for better development, while development can improve tourism resources and environment. And the benefits from tourism development can provide some of the funds for the protection. But tourism development will cause some problems such as the environmental pollution. The key is to strengthen resource protection, and focus on scientific, rational and moderate development of resources, in order to achieve the sustainable use of tourism resources. Many tourism resources in Caoshi Ancient Town have the nature of original ecology, thus they are very precious, and there is great potential for development.

For tourism development in Caoshi Ancient Town, we should focus on the following three aspects. First, we should strengthen the protection awareness of the local government and local residents. Therefore, we must step up publicity efforts to reach consensus on protection, and jointly participate in the protection and development. Second, we should ascertain the actual situation of the resources. So we should organize various high-level experts to conduct comprehensive survey, so as to be familiar with cultural attraction at all levels, historical relics, ancient town style pattern, folk customs, myths and legends, *etc.* Then based on this, we set conservation projects, delimit the scope of protection, and the corresponding targeted protection regulations. Third, we should invite senior planning experts to develop scientific and rational development and conservation planning, so that the development is orderly. Fourth, we should have brand awareness. In order to make its features become more prominent and create a new bright spot of tourism, it is recommended to restore and reconstruct some buildings, such as Lingshan God Palace, Zhongzhou Academy

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of Classical Learning, and martial arts lawn; open up the ferry travel line from Caoshi Ancient Town to Baimaozhou bar, and the boat travel line from Caoshi Ancient Town to the Yongle River<sup>[6]</sup>, the carriage or riding tours line from Caoshi Ancient Town to Jiangdong Reservoir; raise the level of marketing planning, and strengthen the annual "Ganchunshe", "Lingshan sacrificial rites", "dragon boat race in May" and other traditional festivals; establish large business markets, car parks, hotels and other modern facilities, outside the ancient town, in harmony with the ancient town style, reflecting the idea of "environmental protection".

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