TECHNIUM
SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL

www.techniumscience.com

Vol. 73/2025

A New Decade for Social Changes

PLUS COMMUNICATION
International Communication & PR

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 73, 477-488, July, 2025
ISSN: 2668-7798
www.techniumscience.com

Marketing Strategies for Tourism along the Yunnan Section of the China-Laos Railway

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Abstract. As a core corridor of the Pan-Asian Railway, the full operation of the China-Laos Railway has restructured the logistics network of the Indochina Peninsula and reshaped Yunnan's tourism economic landscape, driving the integrated development of cross-border cultural tourism. The railway has significantly enhanced transportation accessibility along Yunnan's route, stimulated short-distance tourism demand, and spurred development in traditionally non-hotspot regions, while facing challenges such as insufficient resource integration and ambiguous branding. This study employs qualitative research methods to examine the current tourism conditions and the optimization of marketing strategies for cities along the Yunnan section of the China-Laos Railway. Findings reveal that the railway has profoundly restructured Yunnan's tourism economic landscape, forming an integrated tourism economic belt that combines natural ecology, cultural heritage, and cross-border resources. Cities along the route, including Kunming, Yuxi, Pu'er, and Xishuangbanna, have experienced varying degrees of tourism development opportunities. The proposed 4P marketing strategies include: a product strategy centered on "high-speed rail + culture" thematic routes; a pricing strategy balancing supply-demand dynamics through dynamic pricing and bundled offers; a channel strategy emphasizing dual-channel coordination between digital platforms and physical service outlets; and a promotion strategy focused on content marketing and precision targeting. These strategies aim to transform the China-Laos Railway from a transportation artery into a "cross-regional cultural tourism economic corridor," injecting new momentum into regional sustainable development.

Keywords. China Laos Railway; Yunnan; Travel 4P; PEST

Introduction

Under the accelerating restructuring of global tourism, the "time-space compression" effect of transportation infrastructure is reshaping regional tourism patterns[1]. With the advent of the high-speed rail era, while people enjoy enhanced transportation convenience, they are also actively pursuing higher standards of living quality. This shift in perceptions, elevation of consumption hierarchies, and changes in demand have driven rapid development in tourism economies. Southeast Asia, as one of the fastest-growing tourism regions globally, is witnessing the reshaping of the geopolitical-economic landscape of the Indochina Peninsula through the advancement of the Pan-Asian Railway network. The China-Laos Railway, a critical

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 73, 477-488, July, 2025
ISSN: 2668-7798
www.techniumscience.com

component of the Pan-Asian Railway corridor, integrates tourism, passenger, and freight transportation functions.

On April 30, 2019, Chinese and Lao leaders signed the Action Plan on Building a China-Laos Community with a Shared Future in Beijing, committing to five strategic actions: political and economic cooperation, connectivity, security and stability, cultural and tourism exchanges, and green and sustainable development [2]. On November 15, 2020, 15 Asia-Pacific nations, including China and Laos, formally ratified the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement [3], expanding trade cooperation across agriculture, industry, and technology. Following its full operation in December 2021, the railway's role as an international corridor has not only restructured the logistics network of the Indochina Peninsula but also facilitated cross-border mobility and cultural exchanges through "railway diplomacy." Under China's dual-circulation development strategy, tourism has been positioned as a strategic pillar industry. The China-Laos Railway, leveraging ecological resources, ethnic cultures, and geopolitical advantages along its route, has become a key testing ground for transitioning from a national corridor economy to a cultural tourism economy [4]. On June 23, 2022, the railway launched its first dedicated tourist train.

As a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative, the 1,035-kilometer China-Laos Railway stretches from Kunming in Yunnan Province, China, to Vientiane, the capital of Laos, traversing tropical rainforests, plateau mountains, and cross-border economic corridors. It is the first railway connecting China and Southeast Asia primarily financed and constructed by China, adhering entirely to Chinese technical standards[5] . For Yunnan Province, the railway has activated the locational advantages of cities along its route, including Yuxi, Pu'er, and Xishuangbanna, transforming Yunnan from China's southwestern frontier into a strategic gateway facing South and Southeast Asia, injecting new momentum into regional tourism development.

Yunnan, one of China's most resource-rich tourism provinces, has long held a prominent position in the national tourism industry due to its unique natural landscapes (e.g., Lijiang Ancient Town, Shangri-La, tropical rainforests), diverse ethnic cultures (25 indigenous ethnic groups), and cross-border geographical advantages. In 2024, Yunnan received over 1.2 billion tourists, ranking second nationally in both tourist arrivals (12.1 billion) and tourism revenue (¥1.14 trillion)[6]. However, traditional tourism models face multiple challenges: homogeneous resource development, over-reliance on natural landscapes and ethnic cultural displays, and transportation bottlenecks limiting accessibility to remote areas, resulting in tourist concentration in traditional hotspots like Kunming, Dali, and Lijiang. Yunnan must innovate its marketing strategies to rebuild competitiveness.

The China-Laos Railway has significantly improved transportation accessibility in Yunnan's Regions along the route. For example, travel time from Kunming to Xishuangbanna was reduced from 10 hours by road to 3.5 hours by rail, greatly stimulating short-distance tourism demand[7] . During the 2025 Spring Festival travel season alone, the Mohan Railway Port processed 42,000 inbound and outbound tourists, marking a 49% year-on-year increase [8]. Previously non-popular destinations along the railway, such as Pu'er City and Mojiang County, have begun attracting tourists. Nevertheless, tourism marketing along the route still faces challenges such as fragmented resource integration and ambiguous branding, necessitating systematic strategic optimization.

Focusing on the Yunnan section, this study aims to uncover new characteristics and demands in the tourism market driven by the China-Laos Railway, construct an innovative

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Vol. 73, 477-488, July, 2025
ISSN: 2668-7798
www.techniumscience.com

marketing strategy framework, and provide theoretical and practical guidance for high-quality regional tourism development.

2 Literature Review

2.1 The impact of transportation on tourism

The impact of transportation on tourism manifests in two primary dimensions: destination development and tourist behavioral patterns. Early academic inquiries demonstrated limited attention to transportation infrastructure, as exemplified by Gilbert's (1933) seminal work which acknowledged its significance without systematic exploration, while Butler's (1980) tourism area life cycle theory notably omitted substantive consideration of transport dynamics [9]. Subsequent research progressively unveiled transportation's pivotal role: Kaul's (1985) empirical analysis confirmed transportation systems' capacity to drive comprehensive tourism development across destination lifecycles, including revitalization of declining attractions. Cooper et al.'s "transportation-tourism symbiosis theory" posited modernized transport infrastructure as a prerequisite for destination evolution, a proposition empirically validated through aviation studies by Raguraman (1998) and Abeyratne (1999)[10].Transportation infrastructure not only dictates attraction development and management strategies, but also significantly influences tourist satisfaction through service quality perceptions, with comfort attributes demonstrating greater explanatory power than traditional efficiency and safety metrics. At the behavioral level, technological innovations in transport modalities have spawned diversified travel typologies, with nine distinct transportation modes (ranging from conventional rail/automobile to high-speed rail and cruise ships) generating differential temporal costs and consumer sensitivity thresholds. Route selection mechanisms have further engendered varied mobility patterns including leisure itineraries and recreational circuits, while destination quantity configurations have crystallized five distinct travel configurations ranging from single-destination to multi-nodal structures.Connell and Page's (2008) Scottish case study illustrates how technological advancements amplify transportation's behavioral modification effects, revealing that tourists dynamically adjust subsequent choices based on real-time evaluations of transport service performance. This dual capacity for market influence and behavioral shaping establishes transportation infrastructure as the central axis permeating the entire tourism experience continuum [11].

2.2 Research on the Impact of Railways on Tourism Development

Since the inauguration of Japan’s first high-speed railway (Shinkansen) in 1964, high-speed rail (HSR) technology has progressively emerged as a critical driver of regional tourism economic restructuring. Early studies predominantly focused on HSR’s impacts on transportation hubs, industrial layouts, and population mobility, while systematic explorations of its tourism implications lagged. HSR has fundamentally reshaped tourism behavior patterns through its time-space compression effect: Japan’s Shinkansen reduced travel time between Tokyo and Osaka from 7 hours to 2.5 hours, generating an annual time-economic value of ¥379.731 billion [12]. This not only stimulated business and leisure travel demand but also reconfigured transportation market competition, exemplified by Spain’s AVE HSR diverting 32% of air passengers [13]. Simultaneously, HSR exerts dual impacts on destination economies: hourly economic circles enable same-day return trips, reducing accommodation demand, while extended stays enhance tourism consumption utility, driving local economic and employment growth.

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ISSN: 2668-7798
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From a regional spatial perspective, HSR restructures urban hierarchies by improving accessibility between small-medium cities and central hubs. For instance, China's HSR network has amplified the "corridor effect" in tourism hinterlands of core cities, fostering cross-provincial tourism economic zones. Studies demonstrate HSR's catalytic role in regional tourism collaboration, such as resource integration and service upgrades facilitated by HSR connectivity among Guangdong, Guangxi, and Guizhou provinces. HSR's tourism impacts exhibit heterogeneity: Sweden's Svealand Line increased regional rail passenger flows sevenfold, while Spain's HSR boosted tourism in Madrid's peripheral cities without significantly altering Madrid's destination appeal. Quantitative analyses using generalized travel time models and logistic regression reveal HSR's dominance in medium-to-long-distance markets, though uncertainties in economic returns necessitate cautious evaluation [14].

Scholars emphasize HSR's role in facilitating factor mobility and industrial clustering. For example, the Beijing-Shanghai HSR promoted tourism integration within metropolitan regions, while the Yangtze River Delta HSR network enhanced tourism economic connectivity by 23% through improved accessibility. However, HSR effects exhibit phased characteristics, with initial impacts being modest and amplifying as networks mature. A scholarly consensus posits that HSR transcends mere transportation, functioning as a critical mediator of tourism space production, requiring infrastructure synergy, brand development, and policy optimization to maximize benefits. Current research gaps persist in micro-level behavioral mechanisms and long-term impact assessments, necessitating further multidisciplinary, multi-scale empirical exploration.

2.3 PEST Analysis

The PEST analysis method serves as a critical tool for enterprises in external environmental analysis and strategic management. PEST analysis refers to the examination of macro-environmental factors, specifically Politics, Economy, Society, and Technology [15]. The macro-environment, also termed the general environment, encompasses overarching factors that influence all industries and enterprises. While the specific analytical focus may vary across industries and enterprises depending on their unique characteristics and operational needs, it generally involves four major external environmental factors: political, economic, social, and technological.

Key economic elements include the level of economic development, economic scale, economic growth rate, government fiscal balance, and inflation rate [16]. Political elements encompass government policies, national industrial policies, and relevant laws and regulations. Social factors include population demographics, values, and ethical standards. Technological elements primarily involve high-tech innovations, process technologies, and significant advancements in fundamental scientific research. By systematically analyzing these four dimensions—political, economic, social, and technological—the PEST framework enables organizations to comprehensively understand the macro-environment and evaluate its implications for strategic objectives and decision-making.

2.4 4P Theory

In the mid-to-late 20th century, McCarthy's 4P marketing mix theory—centered on product, price, place, and promotion—emerged as a classical framework in the marketing domain [17]. While this theory has spawned derivatives such as the 7P service marketing model and 4V marketing theory through the integration of practical applications and theoretical analysis, its universal applicability ensures its continued widespread adoption. This study employs the 4P framework to examine tourism marketing strategies.

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Vol. 73, 477-488, July, 2025
ISSN: 2668-7798
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The product strategy emphasizes developing tangible goods and intangible services that meet tourist demands, encompassing core products, formal products, and supplementary products. It requires highlighting regional characteristics and designing diversified tourism itineraries [18]. The price strategy formulates flexible pricing schemes by balancing supply-demand relationships, including penetration or skim pricing for new products, differentiated tiered pricing, and seasonal discounts, to mitigate market fluctuations and enhance brand value. The place strategy is divided into direct sales and multi-level indirect distribution, prioritizing short-chain concentrated promotion in domestic markets while leveraging internet platforms and multi-tiered agencies for international market expansion, with digitalization driving vertical channel integration. The promotion strategy disseminates information through media campaigns, festival discounts, anniversary events, and event marketing to stimulate consumption potential and cultivate cultural brand identity. Recognized for its systematic and practical nature, the 4P theory remains a foundational tool in marketing practice.

3.Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, focusing on the current tourism status and marketing strategy optimization in cities along the Yunnan section of the China-Laos Railway. The research objectives are achieved through the integration of multi-source data and theoretical frameworks.

During the data collection phase, three primary methods are employed. First, the literature review method synthesizes policy documents and industry reports, with emphasis on interpreting official texts, while systematically analyzing domestic and international academic works on transportation infrastructure and tourism economies to clarify theoretical frameworks and research gaps. Second, semi-structured in-depth interviews are conducted with 20 key stakeholders, including government cultural and tourism officials (5 participants), tourism enterprise managers (8 participants), and tourists/residents (7 participants). Interview content focuses on post-railway market dynamics, efficacy bottlenecks of existing marketing strategies, and cross-border tourism coordination challenges. Additionally, field observations are performed at critical nodes such as Kunming South Station, Xishuangbanna Station, and Nakeli Town in Pu'er, documenting details including transportation connectivity efficiency, multilingual service facilities, and scenic area marketing activities, resulting in visual-textual field notes.

Data analysis follows a three-tiered approach. First, thematic analysis is applied to code interview transcripts and extract core themes. Second, the PEST framework is utilized to dissect macro-environmental factors across political, economic, social, and technological dimensions. Finally, the 4P theory guides the integration of strategic recommendations, encompassing product innovation, pricing strategies, channel optimization, and promotional models, to construct a targeted strategy matrix.

4.Research Findings

4.1 Analysis of Tourism Industry Status Along the Yunnan Section of the China-Laos Railway

4.1.1China-Laos Railway. On December 3, 2021, the China-Laos Kunming-Vientiane Railway, connecting Yunnan, China, and Vientiane, the capital of Laos, commenced full operation. Stretching 1,035 km from Kunming in Yunnan Province southward through Yuxi City, Pu’er City, Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, and terminating in Vientiane, Laos, the railway’s full opening has brought both challenges and opportunities to tourism

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 73, 477-488, July, 2025
ISSN: 2668-7798
www.techniumscience.com

development in cities along its route, linking two globally significant tourist destinations: Yunnan, China, and Southeast Asia.

The China-Laos Kunming-Vientiane Railway is an international railway directly integrated into China's rail network. Its construction began with a full-line commencement ceremony in Luang Prabang, Laos' ancient capital, on December 25, 2016. After over five years of development, the railway officially opened on December 3, 2021. The route traverses cities such as Kunming, Pu'er, Xishuangbanna, and Luang Prabang—all renowned tourist destinations—making the railway, to some extent, a dedicated tourism corridor. Laos, a landlocked, mountainous country, suffers from underdeveloped transportation infrastructure, with primary connections to neighboring nations relying on low-grade roads and Mekong River waterways, and no direct railway connection with China prior to this project. These transportation limitations have hindered domestic tourism resource development and restricted passenger flows between cities and countries. Within China, before the full operation of the China-Laos Kunming-Vientiane Railway, tourists required half a day to travel by car from Kunming to Pu'er City. Consequently, tourism along the railway corridor historically failed to achieve better and faster development, and the innovative "railway + tourism" model remained underutilized.

4.1.2Cities along the Yunnan Section of the China-Laos Railway.

Figure 1 illustrates the key locations traversed by the China-Laos Railway

Note: The data is sourced from the Chinese government website, and the image was created by the author

The China-Laos Railway traverses primarily Kunming City, Yuxi City, Pu'er City, and Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province, China, as well as Luang Namtha Province, Oudomxay Province, Luang Prabang Province, and Vientiane City in Vientiane Province, Laos. The Chinese section is divided into the Kunming-Yuxi Section (from Kunming to Yuxi) and the Yuxi-Mohan Section (from Yuxi to Mohan in Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture). The Lao section, termed the Mohan-Vientiane Section, spans from Boten in Luang Namtha Province to Vientiane City in Vientiane Province. This study focuses on the major Yunnan cities along the route: Kunming, Yuxi, Pu'er, and Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture.

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*4.1.3Urban tourism along China Laos Railway in Yunnan.*Since its operational launch in 2021, the China-Laos Railway has significantly reshaped the tourism economic landscape along its Yunnan corridor. This transportation artery connects Kunming City, Yuxi City, Pu'er City, and Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, forming a composite tourism economic belt integrating natural ecology, cultural heritage, and cross-border resources.

Kunming City, as the railway's starting point and regional hub, has attracted substantial cross-border tourists and health-oriented travelers through its perennial spring-like climate and positioning as an "International Health City." By co-managing the Mohan Port to jointly build an international port city, Kunming has strengthened its role as a gateway radiating to South and Southeast Asia while introducing new formats such as high-end medical tourism and cross-border convention and exhibition activities, solidifying its status as the core distribution center for domestic and international tourists entering Yunnan.

Yuxi City has leveraged the railway's "one-hour economic circle" advantage to transform from a traditional industrial city into a hotspot for short-term leisure travel. Combining historical relics of the Yunnan-Vietnam Railway with plateau lakes and modern agricultural tourism, it has attracted a surge of family-oriented and educational tourists, with weekend visitor numbers increasing by nearly 40% compared to pre-railway levels.

Pu'er City, ending its history of lacking rail access, has experienced explosive tourism growth. Capitalizing on the best-preserved primitive forests along the Tropic of Cancer and millennia-old tea-horse culture, Pu'er launched immersive "tea-tourism integration" programs. During the 2025 Spring Festival period, customized tour bookings surged over tenfold year-on-year, establishing Pu'er as an ecotourism benchmark along the railway.

Xishuangbanna has benefited from ASEAN nations' 144-hour visa-free policies and cross-border train services, hosting 932,400 overnight international tourists in Q1 2025—a 77.9% year-on-year increase. The Mohan Port recorded over 5,000 daily cross-border travelers, with tropical rainforest trekking, Dai ethnic intangible cultural heritage villages, and multi-destination itineraries linking Laos' Luang Prabang emerging as top-selling products [19].

The railway's operations, coupled with policy incentives, have injected robust momentum into regional tourism. Progressive implementation of visa facilitation policies—from 144-hour to 240-hour transit visa exemptions, and the 144-hour visa-free entry for ASEAN tourist groups in Xishuangbanna—culminated on February 20, 2025, when the first 14-member ASEAN tourist group entered Xishuangbanna via Mohan Railway Port under the new policy (Zhang Yanqun, 2025). Institutionally, the Mohan Border Inspection Station enhanced cross-border tourism convenience through 17 systemic measures, including optimized clearance procedures and multilingual service counters. These upgrades transformed Mohan from a frontier port into a "golden hub" connecting China and ASEAN. According to Mohan Border Inspection statistics (2024), the port processed over 730,000 ASEAN travelers (30%+ of total cross-border traffic, up 55% YoY), including 5,200 ASEAN tourist groups (65,000+ travelers), marking 108% and 44% YoY growth respectively. Mohan has become Yunnan's busiest national land port for ASEAN travelers[20].

4.2 PEST Environmental Analysis of Tourism Marketing for the China-Laos Railway

*4.2.1 Political Environment.*As a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative, the construction and operation of the China-Laos Railway hold profound political implications. With the deepening of the Belt and Road Initiative, China and Laos have strengthened policy coordination and infrastructure connectivity, providing institutional safeguards for cross-border tourism along the railway.

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ISSN: 2668-7798
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Regarding visa and entry policies, China implements a 30-day visa exemption for tourist groups from ASEAN countries, including Laos, Thailand, and Malaysia, while Laos reciprocates with visa-free entry for Chinese tourists, establishing a bilateral mutual-benefit mechanism. Furthermore, Yunnan Province has expanded the 144-hour transit visa exemption policy from Kunming to nine cities/prefectures, including Xishuangbanna and Pu'er, and incorporated the Mohan Railway Port into applicable ports. This allows short-term visa-free stays for travelers from 54 countries, significantly enhancing entry willingness among Southeast Asian, European, and American visitors.

In service optimization, railway authorities have developed comprehensive facilitation facilities addressing cross-border passenger needs. The Mohan Port introduced the "Four Assistance Services": self-service travel consultation, customs clearance assistance, cross-border communication support, and medical emergency guarantees. It deploys trilingual service teams (Chinese, Lao, and English) with Dai language interpreters to address linguistic barriers. For international passenger trains, railway departments collaborate with cultural tourism and customs agencies to launch the "Starlight Lancang-Mekong" tourist trains, integrating the China-Laos Railway with the China-Europe Railway Express to establish a "railway + cultural tourism" intermodal model.

Tourism authorities, enterprises, associations, and research institutions along the railway corridor have enhanced coordination to jointly formulate the Master Plan for the International Cultural Tourism Economic Belt of the China-Laos Railway. This framework guides orderly development of tourism resources, regulated tourist flows within the belt, and promotes coordinated tourism development across and beyond the region.

4.2.2Economic Environment.The operational launch of the China-Laos Railway has significantly boosted tourism economies in cities along the route. Tourist arrivals in Kunming, Pu'er, and Xishuangbanna have surged continuously, with domestic segment daily passenger volume reaching 58,000 during the 2025 Spring Festival travel season. The railway has driven cluster development of industries along the corridor, evidenced by logistics enterprises increasing to 147, facilitating the transition from a "corridor economy" to a "hub economy." Concurrently, surging cross-border tourism demand has maintained long-term seat saturation on international trains, with 2024 freight volume exceeding 45 million tons and cargo categories expanding to over 2,900 types, forming a dual "tourism + logistics" economic cycle. Cities along the route have developed distinctive tourism products leveraging railway connectivity, such as Xishuangbanna's Wild Elephant Valley camping programs and Luang Prabang Buddhist cultural experiences, creating new consumption growth points.

To reduce travel costs, diversified ticket discounts have been introduced. The 10-trip periodic ticket price for Kunming-Dali routes was reduced to 1,199 yuan, saving 251 yuan compared to single purchases, while the Kunming-Dali-Lijiang tourism multi-ride ticket price was adjusted from 398 to 359 yuan, further stimulating short-to-medium-haul travel demand. Cross-border international trains increased seating capacity from 300 to 390, with peak daily cross-border passenger flows reaching 1,300, effectively alleviating peak-season capacity constraints.

*4.2.3Social Environment.*The China-Laos Railway interconnects Yunnan and Laos' rich cultural heritage and natural landscapes, activating tourism appeal through multicultural integration.

Xishuangbanna created 12,000 new tourism-related jobs, with local residents increasing incomes through homestay operations, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) handicraft

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sales, and cross-border tour guide services. Some villages derive over 60% of total income from tourism. Pu'er Station established a "Mobile Tea-Horse Road Museum," organizing tea farmers in railway-themed cultural tourism activities that integrate Pu'er tea cultural experiences with rail travel, boosting added value in the tea industry by 28% along the corridor.

The route links nine UNESCO natural heritage sites, including Pu'er tea culture and Xishuangbanna tropical rainforests. Themed trains like "Starlight Lancang-Mekong" employ digital displays and ICH live demonstrations, revitalizing the millennia-old Tea-Horse Road culture in modern railway contexts. The Mohan Port Cultural Corridor incorporates Dai brocade and Lao traditional dance elements into station designs, creating "mobile cultural exhibition halls."

Sino-Laos joint working groups regularly host cultural tourism forums, co-developing the Construction Plan for the International Cultural Tourism Economic Belt of the China-Laos Railway to coordinate ecological conservation and development across 565 attractions. The Mohan Port implements intelligent "passenger-cargo separation" clearance systems, while a cross-border tourism dispute mediation mechanism covers nine cities/prefectures along the route, achieving 97% satisfaction in handling cross-border consumer complaints in 2024. Enhanced regional governance collaboration—including cross-border policing and emergency response coordination—has emerged following railway integration with the "New-Malaysia-Thailand" visa-free zone.

*4.2.4Technological Environment.*The technological environment along the Yunnan section of the China-Laos Railway centers on smart services and transportation technologies, substantially improving tourism efficiency and experiences.

For cross-border services, the Mohan Railway Port utilizes an integrated "customs-inspection-railway" data-sharing system enabling one-stop declaration, reducing international passenger clearance to 15 minutes. Phase I smart port infrastructure—including electronic gates and facial recognition technology—facilitates "contactless clearance."

In tourism service digitization, scenic areas along the route fully implement e-ticketing systems. For instance, Xishuangbanna's Wild Elephant Valley and Dai Ethnic Park employ automated "ID binding + ticket verification" processes, where electronic railway tickets automatically trigger admission discounts. Cross-border tourism supply chains leverage cold-chain logistics technologies via the "Lancang-Mekong Express+" freight trains, ensuring rapid transportation of regional specialties (e.g., Pu'er tea, tropical fruits) to support "high-speed rail + specialty shopping" tourism models.

Regarding marketing and information interaction, social media platforms collaborate with attractions to launch the "China-Laos Railway Tourism Map" mini-program, integrating real-time train schedules, digital guides, and multilingual interpretation. The platform recorded over 3 million visits during the 2025 Spring Festival period. Additionally, 5G network coverage and smart translation devices deployed at stations meet international tourists' instant communication and cultural exchange needs.

4.3 4P Marketing Strategies

*4.3.1 Product Strategy.*Leveraging natural and cultural resources along the China-Laos Railway corridor, themed "high-speed rail + culture" itineraries have been designed, such as the "Pu'er Tea Culture Exploration Special Train" (Kunming-Pu'er) and the "Tropical Rainforest & Dai Ethnic Immersion Tour" (Xishuangbanna-Luang Prabang). These integrate differentiated experiences including tea-making workshops and Wild Elephant Valley ecological research programs.

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ISSN: 2668-7798
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The "High-speed Railway Fresh Express" brand has been launched utilizing cold-chain logistics technology, enabling direct rail delivery of regional specialties (e.g., Pu'er coffee, Xishuangbanna tropical fruits) to scenic area shopping centers. This establishes a "on-board reservation, station pickup" shopping model.

*4.3.2Price Strategy.*For international tourists, "early-bird tickets + visa-free packages" are offered, providing 30% discounts on combined rail and attraction tickets for bookings made 30 days in advance. Domestic tourists receive bundled "rail + homestay" discounts, granting 20% reductions at partnered hotels along the route with valid tickets.

Dynamic pricing adjusts rail fares based on seasonal demand (e.g., Water Splashing Festival, Spring Festival travel peak), with moderate peak-season increases to balance passenger flow and off-season "weekend special trains" to attract short-haul travelers. Cross-border tickets are priced at 50% discounts for ASEAN students and seniors, reinforcing the Belt and Road Initiative's social benefits in people-to-people connectivity.

*4.3.3Place Strategy.*Online channels achieve full-process digitization through multilingual customer service and AR real-scene navigation, with API integrations to platforms like Ctrip and Fliggy enabling seamless "search-booking-ticket verification" operations.

Offline experiential hubs feature "China-Laos Railway Tourism Service Centers" providing one-stop services including physical ticketing, visa processing, and specialty product sampling. Digital screens display real-time visitor heatmaps of沿线 attractions.

*4.3.4Promotion Strategy.*Collaborative campaigns with Douyin and Instagram launch the "Ride the Rails, Discover China-Laos" short video challenge, inviting travel KOLs to produce "72-hour Transnational Journey" vlogs highlighting contrasts between high-speed connectivity and cultural depth.

At nodes such as the Water Splashing Festival and Pu'er tea picking season, a "festival themed special train" will be opened, with Dai ethnic song and dance performances, tea artist interactions, and other activities embedded in the train carriages, and online audiences will be attracted to participate through live broadcasts..

Big data analytics enable targeted advertisements on WeChat Moments and TikTok, delivering customized content (e.g., "Rail Visa-Free Guides," "Rainforest Family Tours") to specific demographics (domestic young families, ASEAN business travelers), enhancing perceptions of cross-border travel convenience.

5.Research Conclusions

The full operation of the China-Laos Kunming-Vientiane Railway has catalyzed transformative changes and opportunities for tourism development along its route, positively impacting urban tourism between China and Laos. It provides transportation infrastructure critical to building world-class tourism cities, facilitates regional tourism integration, and promotes cross-border tourism development alongside the convergence of cultural and tourism industries.

As the starting point and hub, Kunming has enhanced its radiating influence across South and Southeast Asia while incubating innovative business models. Yuxi has transitioned into a hotspot for short-haul leisure tourism. Pu'er has experienced exponential tourism upgrading, emerging as an exemplar of ecotourism. Xishuangbanna has witnessed a surge in inbound tourists driven by cross-border trains and visa exemption policies. Politically, strengthened policy coordination and infrastructure connectivity between China and Laos have institutionalized cross-border tourism safeguards. Economically, the railway has significantly stimulated tourism economies in corridor cities, driven industrial cluster development, and

established a dual economic cycle integrating tourism and logistics. Socially, it has activated tourism appeal through multicultural convergence, increased local incomes, and enhanced cultural heritage preservation. Technologically, intelligent services and transportation innovations have optimized tourism efficiency and experiential quality.

Building on this analysis, targeted 4P marketing strategies are proposed. Product-wise, "high-speed rail + culture" thematic routes form the core, supported by smart services and specialty merchandise to construct comprehensive "fast travel, slow experience" consumption ecosystems. Pricing mechanisms balance supply-demand through dynamic pricing and bundled discounts, while public welfare fares foster cross-border goodwill alongside market returns. Place strategies leverage digital platforms and physical service networks in dual-channel synergy, breaking sectoral barriers, while the Lancang-Mekong Tourism Cities Cooperation Alliance expands Southeast Asian markets to forge an integrated tourism network. Promotion prioritizes content marketing and precision outreach, utilizing short video challenges and festival-themed train campaigns for viral dissemination, complemented by big data advertising to amplify cross-border travel convenience perceptions. This strategic framework synergizes technology-driven experience enhancement, policy dividend conversion, and cultural IP integration to transform the railway from a transportation artery into a "trans-regional cultural tourism economic corridor." It offers a replicable "high-speed rail + tourism" model for Belt and Road cross-border cooperation while boosting local economies through specialty sales and intangible cultural heritage experiences, ultimately injecting new momentum into regional sustainable development through cultural elevation.

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