

Integrating Animal Husbandry and Cultural Tourism in China: Pathways, Challenges, and Strategies for High-Quality Rural Revitalization

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Abstract: With the in-depth implementation of the rural revitalization strategy and the rapid development of the cultural tourism industry, traditional animal husbandry is facing significant opportunities for transformation and upgrading. Integrating animal husbandry with the cultural tourism industry is not only a practical requirement for promoting supply-side structural reforms in agriculture but also an important pathway to diversify the rural economy and promote comprehensive social revitalization in farming and pastoral areas. This study approaches animal husbandry not merely as an economic or industrial activity, but as a cultural practice rooted in nomadic traditions, values, rituals, and identity. This article systematically explores the practical approaches and optimization strategies for the integrated development of China's animal husbandry and cultural tourism industries, focusing on addressing key issues in the integration process such as homogenization of business formats, short industrial chains, weak infrastructure, insufficient cultural connotation, and tightening ecological constraints. By combining multiple case analyses, policy document reviews, and field investigations, the study provides an in-depth analysis of the integration models, achievements, and bottlenecks in typical regions such as Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Bashang in Hebei. The findings indicate that, although emerging business formats like ecological ranch sightseeing and livestock cultural experiences have been established, common challenges remain, including lack of brand characteristics, insufficient industrial chain extension, and lagging service systems. Strengthening top-level design, highlighting regional characteristics, extending industrial chains, deepening cultural empowerment, and promoting digital transformation are effective strategies to enhance industrial synergy and added value, achieving coordinated economic, ecological, and social benefits. Future integration should adhere to a multi-dimensional collaborative mechanism of "government guidance—market-driven—farmers and herders as the main body—technology support," promoting the industrial shift from extensive expansion toward high-quality, differentiated, and sustainable development, providing practical pathways and theoretical references for rural revitalization and agricultural modernization.

Keywords: Integration of animal husbandry and cultural tourism, industrial synergy, sustainable development, policy optimization, rural revitalization.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the integration of the livestock industry with cultural and tourism industries has become an important pathway for promoting rural revitalization and agricultural modernization. Since 2025, national and local governments have successively introduced a series of policy documents, providing clear guidance and strong momentum for the deep integration of these two sectors. These policies not only reflect the strategic orientation of top-level design but also embody practical exploration of regional characteristics. Under national strategic guidance, local governments have actively responded by implementing specific action plans. In May 2025, the Party Committee and Government of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region issued the "Implementation Opinions on Further Deepening Rural and Pastoral Reforms to Solidly Promote Comprehensive Rural Revitalization," which explicitly proposed to "accelerate the deep integration of agriculture and animal

husbandry with tourism, culture, health, sports, and other industries," planning to promote 14 models of courtyard economies, driving more than 700,000 farmers and herders to develop courtyard economies, under-forest economies, and homestay economies, and establishing 200 "My Promise with the Grassland" cultural tourism product stores. The document also highlighted the importance of deepening rural cultural development by organizing mass cultural and sports activities such as the "Ulan Muqir Ten Thousand Villages Performance Tour," grassland "village volleyball," "village evening shows," and "village basketball tournaments" to enhance cultural vitality. Against the backdrop of this intensive policy-driven environment, the integration of the livestock industry with cultural and tourism industries has become a key pathway to boost rural industry revitalization and promote agricultural transformation and upgrading. Practically, such integration not only injects new growth vitality into traditional livestock sectors but also generates richer sources of income for farmers and herders through industry chain extension and value addition. Inner Mongolia plans to use the courtyard economy to benefit over 700,000 farmers and herders, while Guangdong aims to cultivate hundreds of

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specialty livestock brands with valuations exceeding one billion yuan, all indicating the great potential inherent in the integration of livestock and cultural tourism. It is important to note that such integration should not be viewed solely through an economic lens; rather, it represents a process wherein traditional pastoral culture—encompassing nomadic lifestyles, ecological wisdom, rituals, and collective identity—is reinterpreted, performed, and transformed within the framework of contemporary cultural tourism.

In terms of industrial integration and green development, international research generally emphasizes the combination of market-driven approaches and ecological certification. European scholars Barbieri and Tew (2012), through a survey of American ranchers, pointed out that one of the main motivations for developing tourism operations is to realize the added value of ecological farming, transforming production standards such as organic farming and animal welfare into unique tourism attractions, thereby obtaining higher market premiums. Furthermore, Sznajder (2019), in his review of global agritourism, suggested that successful ranch tourism relies on establishing a credible "from production to experience" green narrative, such as by offering open ranch tours and cheese-making workshop experiences, which visually demonstrate environmentally friendly production methods to consumers.

In exploring the path of ecological efficiency and sustainable development, foreign studies pay particular attention to quantitative assessment and precise management. Australian scholar Beeton (2011) emphasized the potential pressures of tourism on rural ecological environments, especially water resources and soil, advocating that a scientific ecological carrying capacity assessment must be conducted before developing ranch tourism projects. Marshall and Smaigl (2013) examined how Australian ranchers, in the context of frequent droughts, use adaptive tourism (such as seasonal stargazing and geological field studies) to diversify climate risks associated with pure livestock operations. This approach provides a highly valuable reference model for the transformation of pastoral areas in western China facing similar ecological challenges.

Regarding the integration of animal husbandry with culture and tourism, Zhou (2023) proposed that the green development of animal husbandry on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau should be promoted in multiple aspects through the following approaches: developing

green products and building the "Qinghai-Tibet Plateau Grassland Animal Husbandry" green brand; establishing green institutional arrangements and supporting policies in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau region to safeguard green animal husbandry; developing green tourism to further promote the integrated development of animal husbandry, culture and tourism; and expanding the opening-up of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau to increase the sales of green products and boost the development of the green economy. These countermeasures and suggestions are of great significance for relevant government departments to further advance and implement ecological protection in ethnic regions, strengthen the structural adjustment of animal husbandry, ultimately promote the high-quality economic development of ethnic regions, and consolidate national unity. Zhang (2025) pointed out that for Chinese-style agricultural modernization, the green development of ecological animal husbandry is an important engine for achieving the organic unification of economic and ecological benefits and advancing Chinese-style modernization. Against the backdrop of Chinese-style agricultural modernization, China's legal protection system for animal husbandry has been increasingly improved, the intelligent transformation of livestock and poultry breeding has continued to deepen, and ecological recycling breeding models have been constantly enriched, laying a solid foundation for the green development of ecological animal husbandry. Based on this, efforts should be made to pool the synergy of key entities and build an operation and management platform for ecological animal husbandry; develop specialized credit products and improve the financial service mechanism for ecological animal husbandry; and enrich risk management tools and construct an intelligent risk control system for ecological animal husbandry, so as to promote financial technology to better support the green development of ecological animal husbandry and serve the process of Chinese-style agricultural modernization. A study by Zhang *et al.* (2023) showed that the total factor productivity of animal husbandry in Northeast China showed fluctuating growth under the constraint of carbon emissions, and the improvement of technical efficiency was the key driving force, but there were obvious regional differences. This reveals that in promoting the integrated development of animal husbandry with culture and tourism, efforts should be made to combine regional resource endowments, integrate green breeding technology, ecological pasture construction with tourism experiences, and realize the coordinated improvement of ecological and economic benefits.

In terms of green development in animal husbandry, Wei *et al.* (2025) emphasize the need to integrate green technologies such as ecological farming and pollution prevention into ranch construction, and to leverage regional resource endowments to create differentiated, low-pollution ecological tourism experiences. This not only enhances the total factor productivity of animal husbandry but also represents a key path to achieving the coordinated advancement of economic, ecological, and social benefits. Pu and Yang (2025) argue that the core lies in fully implementing the principles of pollution reduction and carbon mitigation, by promoting large-scale farming and strengthening the resource utilization of livestock manure, among other concrete pathways, to achieve ecological farming. This approach can not only effectively resolve the pollution problems of animal husbandry itself, but also transform the resulting clean environment and circular agricultural models into unique cultural and tourism landscapes and experiences, ultimately achieving a synergistic enhancement of economic, ecological, and tourism value. Tian *et al.* (2025) identify traditional pollution-heavy and inefficient animal husbandry practices as major constraints. Therefore, promoting the ecological transformation of animal husbandry towards large-scale, healthy farming and resource utilization can not only address environmental bottlenecks but also convert green ranches themselves into distinctive cultural and tourism resources, thereby realizing a win-win outcome for ecological benefits and tourism economy.

However, the process of industry integration also faces many complex challenges. The termination of the Tianmu Lake Animal Kingdom project revealed the inherent tension between ecological protection and tourism development; the research report from Taizhou City directly pointed out common issues such as “insufficient utilization of cultural resources, inadequate deep integration” and “a lack of high-quality, distinctive

projects, with obvious homogenization.” These phenomena indicate that the integration of animal husbandry and the cultural tourism industry is still at an early stage and urgently requires systematic theoretical guidance and practical innovation. Although existing research has begun to pay attention to this intersecting field, it mostly remains at the level of case descriptions or macro-level strategies, with the discussion on core topics such as integration mechanisms, influencing factors, and efficiency evaluation still lacking depth. In particular, there are significant research gaps in key areas such as designing regionally differentiated pathways, models of digital empowerment, and ecologically sustainable integration. This is precisely the starting point and entry point of this thesis. Against this background, this study will deeply explore the theoretical foundations, practical models, and development paths of integrating animal husbandry with the cultural tourism industry, aiming to construct a systematic analytical framework, identify key factors affecting deep integration between the two industries, and propose differentiated development strategies suitable for different regions. The research results will provide references for policy formulation, guidance for practical implementation, and promote the integration of animal husbandry and cultural tourism from policy-driven to innovation-driven development, and from homogeneous competition to distinctive development.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION OF ANIMAL HUSBANDRY AND CULTURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

2.1. The Integration of Industries is Beginning to Show Results

Based on the resources of the main pastoral areas in our country, efforts have been made to actively explore differentiated integration paths, resulting in several development models with regional characteristics. As shown in Table 1, these models

Table 1: Comparison of the Integration Models of Animal Husbandry and Cultural Tourism in Major Regions

Region	Core Fusion Model	Special Cultural and Tourism Activities and Projects	Characteristics of Industrial Transformation
Grassland pastoral areas of Inner Mongolia	Ecological Ranch and Tourist Ranch	Horse riding experience, milking activity, prairie scenery photography, staying in a yurt	Transforming from traditional pastoral production to a 'production-ecological experience' hybrid model
Xinjiang region	Animal Husbandry ports Tourism	Horse Culture Tourism Festival, horse racing shows, traditional wrestling, and special equestrian experiences	Transitioning from single livestock farming to a distinctive brand of 'livestock culture and sports competition'
Bashang area in Hebei	Cattle Farming Leisure Vacation	Summer getaway, ranch sightseeing, dairy processing experience, parent-child ranch activities	Transitioning from large-scale dairy farming to a 'farming and leisure vacation' value chain model

signify a fundamental shift in animal husbandry from a purely production-oriented approach to a composite experiential one.

In addition to the typical models mentioned above, academic research also supports this trend. Studies on the pastoral areas of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau indicate that the region has successfully developed a model integrating highland ecological tourism, Tibetan cultural experiences, and the consumption of specialty livestock products by creating IPs such as the "Yak Culture Festival," effectively increasing the added value of the industry. The "tourist ranch" model in Inner Mongolia not only generates tourism revenue, but more importantly, it promotes the standardization and ecological development of animal husbandry through the tourism experience, forming a positive cycle of "promoting animal husbandry through tourism."

2.2. Cultural Resources are Gradually being Explored

Culture is the core soul driving the deep integration of animal husbandry and cultural tourism. Its development paradigm has gradually evolved from the initial display of cultural elements to a stage of systematic, dynamic inheritance and innovation. This transformation is reflected in multiple dimensions, including festival brand building, revitalization of intangible cultural heritage skills, and the recreation of folk life scenes, promoting the shift of pastoral culture from static resources to living tourism assets, and injecting sustained endogenous momentum into rural industrial revitalization.

In terms of festival activities, branded operations have become a key way to enhance cultural influence. A series of festivals rooted in local animal husbandry traditions, such as the 'Naadam Festival' in Inner Mongolia, the 'Yak Culture Festival' in Qinghai, and the 'Yak Racing' event in Tibet, have successfully upgraded from regional folk events to cultural tourism brands with national and even international influence. These branded events not only attract large crowds, but also significantly drive the growth of the local economy's entire chain by integrating consumption elements such as food, accommodation, transportation, sightseeing, shopping, and entertainment, achieving a dual enhancement of cultural dissemination and economic benefits.

The integration of intangible cultural heritage into tourism provides differentiated and engaging experiences for the fusion of culture and tourism. In

many places, traditional crafts such as Mongolian dairy production, leather painting and carving, and rope-making from cowhair have been transformed into participatory and experiential tourism projects by establishing heritage workshops and opening immersive nomadic culture experience areas. This mode of living heritage transmission not only frees traditional skills from the limitations of mere display but also enables a virtuous cycle and win-win outcome for both cultural and economic value in the tourism market.

In addition, immersive experiences of folk life are becoming increasingly popular, enhancing the interactivity and appeal of culture. Many traditional folk activities, such as the Kazakh customs of 'Guniang Chasing' and 'Sheep Grabbing' in Xinjiang, have evolved from stage performances into tourist products that visitors can regularly participate in and experience. By creating folk scenarios shared between hosts and guests, tourists can appreciate the unique charm of pastoral culture through firsthand experience, greatly promoting the dissemination and recognition of local culture, and laying a solid foundation for the sustainable development of cultural tourism integration.

2.3. The policy Environment is Gradually Improving

At the national level, a series of key policies have laid a strategic foundation for the integration of animal husbandry with cultural tourism. The General Office of the State Council issued the 'Several Measures to Unlock Tourism Consumption Potential and Promote High-Quality Development of the Tourism Industry,' which explicitly proposes advancing the deep integration of culture and tourism. It particularly emphasizes the implementation of actions to improve the quality and efficiency of rural tourism, aiming to develop key villages, towns, and routes with distinctive regional cultural characteristics. This provides direct policy support for incorporating animal husbandry resources into the tourism system. At the same time, initiatives jointly promoted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism for integrating agriculture, culture, and tourism aim to connect production, processing, and sales while integrating agriculture with cultural tourism. One of their core objectives is to expand agriculture's functions in ecological conservation, leisure experiences, and cultural heritage, creating new formats and scenarios for 'leisure agriculture.'

Under the guidance of national-level policies, regions have introduced more practical local

regulations and support measures based on their own resource endowments, ensuring precise implementation of policies. For example, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, in the "Implementation Opinions on Further Deepening Rural Pastoral Reform and Steadily Promoting Comprehensive Rural Revitalization," explicitly proposes to "accelerate the deep integration of agriculture and animal husbandry with tourism, culture, health, sports, and other industries," and has specifically deployed measures such as promoting courtyard economies and establishing cultural tourism product stores under the theme "I Have an Appointment with the Grasslands." It provides one-time construction subsidies to star-rated sightseeing ranches, which is a typical example of reducing investment costs for market participants and stimulating industrial upgrading. Similarly, Guangdong Province issued the "Action Plan for Empowering Guangdong's Livestock Industry with Media for High-Quality Development (2025-2027)," setting specific targets for the large-scale development of projects integrating livestock and cultural tourism, and implementing nine major actions, including brand building and production-sales matching, providing a clear path for the integration of regional livestock and cultural tourism. Sichuan Province has also introduced special policies to support the high-quality development of rural tourism from multiple aspects such as project funding, land guarantees, development of specialty products, and talent cultivation, creating favorable conditions for livestock and cultural tourism projects.

A notable feature of the current policy is the increasing emphasis on the coordinated advancement of ecological protection and industrial development. In some provinces, when implementing subsidy and reward policies for grassland ecological protection, they innovatively list 'participation in eco-tourism' as one of the alternative livelihoods for herders transitioning from traditional herding. This mechanism guides herders, under the premise of adhering to ecological protection requirements such as maintaining the balance between grass and livestock and practicing rotational grazing, to benefit from the cultural tourism industry through operating herder guesthouses, providing eco-guiding services, and showcasing traditional pastoral culture. This initiative not only embodies the central government's concept that 'lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets,' as highlighted in the guidance from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs emphasizing 'the protection of ecological resources and local culture,' but also preliminarily explores a feasible path to achieve a harmonious

balance between economic and ecological benefits in ecologically sensitive areas.

3. PROBLEMS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANIMAL HUSBANDRY AND CULTURAL TOURISM

Although the integration of animal husbandry with cultural tourism shows a positive trend, it still faces the following prominent issues:

3.1. Business Formats are becoming Homogenized, Lacking Distinctive Brand Characteristics

At present, many livestock-related cultural and tourism projects in various regions are mainly focused on conventional activities such as ranch sightseeing, horse riding experiences, and dairy product tasting. They lack uniqueness and in-depth development, resulting in serious homogenized competition. Tourist experiences tend to be similar, making it difficult to generate strong market appeal.

Firstly, products and services are becoming homogenized, resulting in a low-quality visitor experience. Currently, most livestock-related projects in China are still confined to the basic model of "pasture sightseeing + horse riding and photo taking + dairy and meat tasting," failing to deeply explore and showcase their unique regional culture and the essence of livestock production. For example, the livestock tourism experience in Hemu Kanas Township, Xinjiang, overly relies on horse caravans, with a limited range of activities. This mirrors the problems faced in Inner Mongolia, such as "monotonous tourism products" and "lack of historical and cultural elements." This homogenization of business formats and the single-mode development of livestock cultural tourism leads to shallow development, making visitor experiences feel "the same in every village," and making it difficult to establish lasting appeal and market differentiation.

Second, there is a weak sense of innovation and low industrial integration. The root cause of the homogeneous competition in the development of the livestock and cultural tourism industries lies in insufficient innovation-driven momentum. Some projects lack foresight and uniqueness in their planning and development, simply copying successful cases, which leads to repetitive construction and low-level competition within the region. As pointed out by research on the development of the cultural tourism industry, Hemu Village in Kanas Township, Xinjiang, exhibits a "lag in innovation," with "single and slowly updated cultural tourism products," and low integration

between tourism and livestock industries. New business formats and in-depth product development based on local characteristics have not yet been formed, leaving the overall industry at an initial stage of "integration without depth, products without brand."

3.2. The Industrial Chain is Short, and the Products have Low Added Value

Recently, most domestic projects integrating animal husbandry with cultural tourism have remained at an early stage, with short livestock product processing chains and insufficient development of livestock-related cultural and creative products. For example, dairy products such as cow's milk and goat's milk are mainly sold as fresh milk or simple dairy products, and have not been fully developed into high value-added products such as cultural creative foods, health and wellness products, or branded beverages. At the same time, the lack of a complete industrial chain limits the impact of cultural tourism on the livestock industry, preventing full utilization of resource potential and restricting both industry efficiency and herders' income growth.

First, product processing remains at a primary level, with a severe lack of advanced processing and branding. In most regions, livestock products are still sold in their original form or as minimally processed products, and there is little transformation into high value-added cultural and tourism products. A particularly typical case is Zhenglan Banner in Inner Mongolia. Although there are many local dairy processing enterprises (12 dairy processing enterprises, 3 cooperatives, and more than 100 individual businesses in the banner), they generally face the development dilemma of 'too many brands that are scattered, making industrialized and large-scale production impossible.' Products largely remain in traditional forms such as milk tofu and milk skin, and have not leveraged high-quality cultural heritage sites like Yuanshangdu to develop highly distinctive cultural tourism products. Similarly, tourism goods in Hemu Kanas Township, Xinjiang, remain at the 'ethnic handicrafts and dried meat' level, lacking unified standards and branded packaging, resulting in 'tourism products that are low-end and lack local characteristics,' making it difficult to enhance the value of the industry chain.

Second, the level of industry integration is shallow, and a mutually reinforcing 'livestock-tourism' development mechanism has not been established.

Currently, the development of cultural tourism in animal husbandry is mainly limited to providing primary food ingredients or simple experiences, failing to build an integrated industry chain of 'production-processing-experience-sales.' For example, research on Qinghai Province points out that its leisure agriculture and animal husbandry face the problem of 'low integration among primary, secondary, and tertiary industries,' with evident seasonality and a single type of business. Further analysis of the integration mechanism in Hemu Kanas Township, Xinjiang, shows that although tourism and animal husbandry intersect in the six major areas of 'eating, accommodation, transportation, tourism, shopping, and entertainment,' the 'level of integration is shallow.' Currently, only horse trekking has formed a large-scale industry, while tourism product manufacturing based on animal products, deep experience workshops, and other sectors have yet to emerge, indicating a serious lack of industry chain extension.

Third, the mechanism for linking interests is not well-established, and the value-added income of herders is limited. Due to the short industry chains and low level of integration, most herders still act as raw material suppliers, making it difficult for them to gain higher returns from the cultural tourism market. In Inner Mongolia, agricultural and pastoral professional cooperatives have 'poor scale efficiency' and 'weak driving capacity,' resulting in low participation of herders in the industry chain; similarly, in Hemu Kanas Township, Xinjiang, the lack of standardized management and deep processing means that local residents are less competitive in the tourism market, with part of the economic benefits going to external operators. This fragile mechanism for linking interests weakens the intrinsic momentum and sustainability of integrated industry development.

3.3. Weak Basic Protection and Low Service Efficiency

In practical areas of livestock farming and cultural tourism development, especially in pastoral regions such as Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, inconvenient transportation, underdeveloped infrastructure, and weak visitor service capabilities have become prominent shortcomings that restrict local cultural tourism development and industrial upgrading, specifically manifested as:

First, poor transportation connectivity and inadequate supporting infrastructure severely constrain

accessibility and the tourist experience. Remote pastoral areas in China generally face the dual challenge of inconvenient external transport and insufficient internal facilities. Research on Hemu Kanas Township in Xinjiang indicates that local transportation conditions are underdeveloped, infrastructure is poor, and basic service facilities such as public toilets, seating, Wi-Fi, and shopping venues are insufficient. Moreover, "currently there are only two roads leading into Hemu Village," which greatly limits the area's capacity to accommodate tourists and expand the cultural tourism market. Similarly, surveys in Qinghai Province show that lagging rail transportation construction is a key factor hindering the integrated development of local culture and tourism. The absence of these important facilities directly affects the accessibility of tourist destinations and visitors' willingness to stay.

Second, tourism services are limited in scope and lack professionalism, making it difficult to meet the needs of a diversified market. Currently, most service offerings remain at a basic level, and the quality of personnel is uneven. The situation in Hemu Kanas Township, Xinjiang, is the most representative. Due to 'low educational levels and weak service awareness,' local residents fall behind external operators in the scale, quality, and standard of services such as catering and accommodation, ultimately resulting in 'economic benefits flowing to external operators.' Research in Qinghai also pointed out that 'the cultural level of leisure agriculture operators and staff is relatively low, and they have not received professional skills training,' leading to 'services and activities that are limited and remain at a low consumption level.' This lack of professional services makes it difficult for local cultural and tourism integration to advance toward high-quality and high value-added development.

Third, the lack of intelligent and modern service elements makes it difficult to support efficient industrial development. In the digital era, pastoral cultural and tourism projects show significant shortcomings in areas such as smart tourism, network coverage, and modern logistics. This not only affects front-end online services like marketing and online booking but also restricts the e-commerce development of specialty livestock products. Although Lanqi County in Inner Mongolia has been approved as a national-level demonstration county for 'E-commerce into Rural Areas' and has begun building a logistics system, this precisely reflects the common deficiency in most pastoral regions in this field. The absence of intelligent elements makes it

difficult for the integration of animal husbandry and cultural tourism to ride the fast track of modern services, limiting its market competitiveness and long-term development potential.

3.4. Superficial Cultural Depth and Insufficient Creative Transformation

Livestock culture possesses rich content and diverse forms of expression, yet development efforts often remain superficial, lacking systematic exploration and creative adaptation. Certain regions remain confined to performance and exhibition levels. For instance, areas such as Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and the Bashang region of Hebei commonly exhibit insufficient depth in cultural excavation within their livestock-based cultural tourism development. They have failed to enhance cultural dissemination and appeal through storytelling or digitalisation, significantly constraining the quality and efficiency of local livestock cultural industry integration.

In Inner Mongolia, despite regions such as Zhenglan Banner possessing profound Mongolian-Yuan cultural heritage, tourism development often remains superficial—manifesting in grassland sightseeing and yurt accommodation—failing to systematically integrate historical and cultural elements into the tourism industry. Visitors struggle to perceive its distinctive nomadic culture and spiritual essence through immersive experiences, resulting in severe homogenisation of tourism products and a lack of differentiated competitiveness.

In Xinjiang, the Hemu-Kanas region possesses immensely rich Tuvan folk traditions and pastoral livestock culture, yet has failed to effectively translate these into profound cultural tourism offerings. Existing cultural displays predominantly centre on performance-based activities, lacking narrative approaches that weave stories and create immersive scenes. Consequently, it has not cultivated culturally distinctive intellectual property with enduring appeal, undermining visitors' emotional resonance and long-term loyalty.

In the Bashang region of Hebei, efforts to integrate animal husbandry with tourism frequently overlook systematic documentation and creative adaptation of local pastoral traditions. Failure to digitally disseminate or experientially recreate traditional breeding techniques and ethnic customs through modern media prevents cultural resources from effectively empowering tourism brand development.

3.5. Ecological Constraints Tighten, Carrying Capacity Pressures Intensify

Cultural and tourism development has led to increased footfall and vehicle traffic, with some regions experiencing issues such as overgrazing of grasslands, waste pollution, and excessive development. These pose significant pressures on ecological carrying capacity and the sustainable development of the livestock industry. Striking a balance between ecological conservation and tourism development remains an urgent challenge requiring resolution.

On the one hand, ecological pressures on grasslands continue to mount. For instance, in areas such as Zhenglan Banner in Inner Mongolia, despite grazing bans being enforced, overgrazing persists in certain regions. Coupled with increased footfall and vehicle traffic from tourism activities, this further exacerbates ecological issues including grassland degradation and desertification. In Ping Shan Hu Mongolian Township, Ganzhou District, Gansu Province—the region's sole purely pastoralist township—grassland desertification is now severe and pasture quality has declined. Should the development of pastoral tourism here proceed without scientific planning, it will further damage local vegetation cover and impair the grassland ecosystem's capacity for self-repair.

On the other hand, environmental pollution caused by pastoral tourism activities has become increasingly prominent. As visitor numbers rise, so does waste generation. Some scenic areas lack adequate waste disposal and sewage treatment facilities, leading to contamination of grasslands and water sources. In popular pastoral tourism destinations such as Kanas Township in Xinjiang's Hemu, waste management faces significant pressure in concentrated visitor areas. Without enhanced oversight, this could inflict long-term detrimental effects on the natural environment upon which local pastoral livelihoods depend.

Furthermore, a conflict exists between the development of cultural and tourism facilities in pastoral areas and ecological conservation. The construction of infrastructure such as tourist roads, accommodation, and viewing platforms occupies grassland or pasture resources, and may even disrupt existing ecological corridors. Simultaneously, in some regions, development proceeds without adequate ecological assessment, resulting in damage to biodiversity and accelerated soil erosion, which in turn undermines the sustainable development of livestock farming.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTEGRATING LIVESTOCK FARMING WITH CULTURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

4.1. Strengthen Top-Level Design and Coordinate Overall Planning and Layout

Firstly, formulate specialised development plans and implement differentiated spatial layouts. Led by provincial or municipal governments, the departments of agriculture and rural affairs shall collaborate with those of culture and tourism, alongside departments such as natural resources and ecological environment, to jointly develop regional plans for the integrated development of livestock farming and cultural tourism. These plans must be grounded in local resource endowments and environmental carrying capacity, clearly defining the functional positioning and development pathways for different areas. For instance, in *ecologically* sensitive zones such as grassland pastoral regions, strictly assess carrying capacity and prioritise the development of eco-tourism and grassland cultural experiences centred on grass-livestock balance. In agricultural zones and intensive farming areas, leverage large-scale, standardised bases to develop educational tourism featuring demonstrations of smart farming and tastings of green livestock products. Through systematic functional zoning, guide the specialised and differentiated development of industries to prevent project duplication and low-level repetitive construction at source.

Secondly, establish a cross-departmental coordination mechanism to integrate policies and standards. Implement a multi-departmental liaison system led by local governments, focusing on resolving systemic obstacles faced by cultural tourism projects in areas such as converting agricultural land for facilities, environmental approvals, and epidemic prevention and safety. Consolidate special funds for agriculture, cultural tourism, and ecological compensation to establish a dedicated development fund for integrating livestock farming with cultural tourism. This fund should provide targeted support to exemplary projects adopting ecological circulation models and showcasing local breed cultures. Concurrently, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs should collaborate with the Department of Culture and Tourism to jointly formulate the Construction and Service Standards for Tourist Farms. This should establish unified standards for critical aspects including visitor flow management, hygiene and disease prevention, manure treatment, and production safety, ensuring tourism activities do

not compromise livestock production safety or the ecological environment.

Finally, promote the joint construction and shared use of infrastructure and service systems. At the local planning level, emphasis should be placed on integrating key livestock-based cultural tourism projects into regional tourism transport networks, upgrading connecting road grades, and improving tourist signage systems. When upgrading environmental protection facilities and waste treatment systems in livestock farming zones, prior consideration should be given to ensuring compatibility with future cultural tourism operational requirements. This will achieve functional integration and cost efficiency between production infrastructure and tourism service facilities, laying a solid foundation for the deep integration and development of the industry.

4.2. Highlighting Regional Characteristics to Shape Brand Differentiation

To address the core issues of severe homogenisation and indistinct brand identity currently plaguing the development of cultural tourism within the livestock sector, localities must abandon the one-size-fits-all development model. Instead, they should leverage their unique resource endowments to thoroughly explore and integrate distinctive natural ecosystems, indigenous breeds, and ethnic cultural assets. This approach will enable differentiated development of cultural tourism products, forging irreplicable brand competitiveness and establishing a new competitive edge characterised by possessing what others lack and excelling where others compete.

Firstly, leveraging local livestock genetic resources to shape core brand values. For instance, in Inner Mongolia, one could capitalise on its vast grasslands and superior local breeds such as the Mongolian horse and Sunite sheep to establish a premium eco-tourism brand centred on immersive nomadic cultural experiences. This would deeply integrate living traditions like the Naadam festival and traditional dairy food production into tourism offerings. In Xinjiang, iconic products like the Tianshan Grassland Sheep and the region's unique oasis ecology can be leveraged to promote Silk Road-themed experiences and premium livestock product traceability tours, allowing visitors to trace the journey from pasture to plate and appreciate the exceptional quality. The Bashang region of Hebei should pursue differentiated development in pastoral cultural tourism. Leveraging its proximity to Beijing and

Tianjin alongside the scenic Grassland Sky Road, it should focus on establishing short-break destinations specialising in ecological summer retreats and grassland leisure. This approach would complement the cultural tourism strengths of Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang through differentiated development.

Secondly, establish a dual system comprising regional public brands and corporate sub-brands. Local governments should spearhead the registration and management of regional public brands such as Pure Land Aba and Bashang Grassland, granting authorisation to production and tourism service providers meeting established standards to foster collective competitive advantage. Concurrently, encourage leading local enterprises and cooperatives to develop distinctive sub-brands and cultural products under the umbrella of the public brand. For instance, integrating ethnic embroidery patterns with leather goods or dairy packaging enhances cultural value-added, facilitating a shift from selling primary products to delivering high-quality cultural experiences.

Finally, we must drive the deep integration of brand narratives with diverse business formats. Unique brand stories should be systematically woven throughout the entire chain of dining, accommodation, transport, sightseeing, shopping and entertainment. For instance, develop exquisitely designed grassland starlight lodgings, offer immersive cultural tourism experiences such as horseback riding, sheep herding, and yurt construction where visitors actively participate, or host distinctive branded festivals like grassland music festivals and equestrian culture celebrations. Through immersive, scenario-based experiences, embed the distinctive brand identity in visitors' minds, ultimately forging formidable market appeal and brand competitiveness.

4.3. Extending the Industrial Chain to Enhance Value

The development of animal husbandry in most regions currently suffers from issues such as short industrial chains and low added value. Efforts should be made to actively promote the deep integration of animal husbandry with industries including food processing, cultural creativity, and experiential tourism, thereby extending industrial chains and enhancing product value. In typical pastoral areas such as Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Qinghai, locally endowed resources can be leveraged to develop integrated industrial models with distinctive regional characteristics.

In Inner Mongolia, leveraging local grassland culture and dairy product strengths, cultural tourism integration projects such as grassland cheese workshops and dairy product DIY experiences can be developed. This transforms traditional dairy processing into tourist experiences, enhancing both the cultural depth of products and consumer engagement. Xinjiang could leverage regional brands like Tianshan Grassland Sheep to develop deep-processing systems for chilled meat precision cutting, cooked food processing, and ready-to-eat products. Complementary sightseeing workshops integrating display, tasting, and sales could be established, driving the transformation of livestock products from raw material exports to branded exports. Qinghai Province, building upon its ecological livestock farming on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, can develop distinctive cultural and creative products such as yak wool handicrafts, highland-specific dried meats, and milk pearls by integrating Tibetan cultural elements. This would establish a series of highland pastoral gifts, enhancing product uniqueness and market competitiveness.

Moreover, efforts should be made to actively develop composite models such as pastoralism combined with educational tours and pastoralism integrated with wellness tourism. For instance, establishing ecological pasture educational bases around Lake Qinghai to offer courses in grassland ecology, herding experiences, and dairy product preparation; or developing pastoral wellness tourism in regions like Ili, Xinjiang, by leveraging resources such as grassland therapy and ethnic medicine to create new forms of pastoral tourism that integrate leisure, wellness, and cultural experiences.

Through horizontal expansion and vertical deepening of the industrial chain, we can not only effectively alleviate the current challenges faced by traditional animal husbandry—such as reliance on raw material sales and limited profit margins—but also contribute to building a diversified, integrated, and resilient modern animal husbandry system. This approach facilitates a virtuous cycle between ecological conservation and economic development.

4.4. Enhancing Facility Services to Strengthen Development Foundations

To address the widespread issues of inadequate infrastructure and insufficient service capacity currently plaguing the development of both the livestock industry and cultural tourism, greater investment should be

directed towards key facilities in pastoral areas, such as transport, communications, and accommodation. This will facilitate the establishment of a standardised service system, thereby enhancing overall reception capacity and visitor experience. For instance, in livestock-rearing regions like Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and the Bashang area of Hebei, differentiated development approaches tailored to local characteristics could be implemented.

At the infrastructure level, priority shall be given to advancing the construction of pastoral tourism stations. Comprehensive service hubs integrating parking, rest facilities, information services, and local product exhibitions shall be established along major tourist routes. These shall be complemented by eco-toilets, wireless networks, and emergency rescue points to enhance the convenience and safety of self-drive travellers. For instance, Xinjiang could integrate solar-storage hybrid projects with pastoral areas to deploy solar power systems in remote pastures, ensuring basic electricity for homestays and scenic viewpoints while establishing cold-chain storage facilities to extend the shelf life of local specialties like beef, mutton, and dairy products. In Hebei's Bashang region, efforts will focus on enhancing grassland scenic routes, refining tourist signage systems, upgrading pastoral homestays, and introducing standardised hygiene and facility management protocols to elevate accommodation quality.

In terms of service system development, efforts should be made to advance standardised demonstration projects integrating pastoral and tourism services, establishing service specifications covering catering, accommodation, guided tours, and experiential activities. For instance, in Hulunbuir, Inner Mongolia, a star-rating system for pastoral households has been implemented, assessing comprehensive criteria including environmental hygiene, cultural display, and service etiquette. In Xinjiang's Nalati Grassland, a pastoralist guide training programme has been rolled out to cultivate local guides proficient in regional ecology, culture, and livestock management. Meanwhile, in Hebei's Bashang region, the role of ranch experience specialists has been established to enhance professional service standards for family educational tours, wellness retreats, and other specialised offerings.

Furthermore, efforts should be intensified to cultivate multi-skilled professionals. Leveraging vocational colleges, targeted training programmes in

pastoral tourism services and management should be established, with curricula encompassing livestock husbandry fundamentals, tourism services, ethnic culture, and ecological conservation. This will provide the human resources necessary for the integrated development of cultural tourism in pastoral regions. By enhancing infrastructure quality and upgrading service capabilities, a seamless, comfortable, and distinctive pastoral tourism environment can be created, thereby driving the genuine deep integration and sustainable development of the livestock industry with the cultural tourism sector.

4.5. Deepening Cultural Significance to Empower Creative Transformation

To address the prevalent issues in the development of cultural tourism within the livestock sector, such as insufficient exploration of cultural substance, limited forms of expression, and a lack of immersive experiences, there is a need to systematically integrate and innovatively utilise local livestock cultural resources. This will facilitate their transformation from raw assets into marketable products, thereby enhancing the cultural added value of cultural-tourism integration. Specific measures are as follows:

Firstly, undertake systematic collation and digital preservation of pastoral cultural resources. Focusing on Inner Mongolia's grassland nomadic culture, Xinjiang's Kazakh pastoral-hunting traditions, and Hebei's Bashang agro-pastoral borderland folk customs, systematically collect, document and organise intangible cultural heritage including herding techniques, ethnic attire, pastoral songs and chants, and ceremonial festivals. Establish a digital repository of pastoral cultural resources, maintaining one archive per locality. Digitalisation will ensure the permanent preservation and efficient management of these cultural resources, laying the groundwork for subsequent creative development.

Secondly, we will advance the transformation of cultural settings into narrative-driven and experiential environments. Leveraging representative pastoral regions, ranches, and ethnic villages, we will create culturally immersive experiences with profound storytelling depth. For instance, establish a Naadam cultural camp in Inner Mongolia where visitors participate in traditional activities like horse racing and archery while learning about the underlying grassland ecological philosophy; develop a transhumance cultural route in Xinjiang that recreates the seasonal migration

wisdom of herders; and construct an agro-pastoral integration cultural workshop in Bashang, Hebei, where folk arts like paper-cutting and shadow puppetry narrate stories of agricultural-pastoral civilisation convergence, enhancing visitors' cultural immersion.

Furthermore, enhance technological empowerment and the development of cultural and creative products. Actively employ modern technologies such as VR, AR, and holographic projection to create immersive pastoral cultural experiences, including virtual ranch tours and AR ethnic costume try-ons. Simultaneously, encourage the development of culturally creative products bearing regional identity, such as handicrafts featuring grassland totems and ethnic motifs, distinctive food packaging, and digital collectibles. This will propel pastoral culture from static display to dynamic dissemination, achieving dual enhancement of cultural and market value.

4.6. Upholding Green Development and Strengthening Ecological Conservation

The current integration of animal husbandry with cultural tourism faces ecological challenges such as increased pressure on environmental carrying capacity and heightened risks of grassland degradation. It is imperative to expedite the establishment of a green development mechanism centred on ecological conservation, thereby promoting the coordinated development of animal husbandry and cultural tourism within ecological carrying capacity limits. Specific countermeasures are as follows:

Firstly, establish a regionally differentiated ecological carrying capacity assessment and dynamic monitoring system. In representative regions such as the Inner Mongolia grasslands, Xinjiang pastoral areas, and the Bashang Plateau in Hebei, real-time monitoring of key indicators—including pasture vegetation coverage, soil moisture levels, and livestock carrying capacity—should be conducted using a combination of remote sensing technology and ground-based observation. Ecological carrying capacity assessments should delineate red lines for tourism development, enabling zoned management. For instance, large-scale tourism infrastructure should be restricted in ecologically sensitive areas, while rotational grazing and rest periods should be implemented in restoration zones to ensure tourism activities remain within ecological thresholds.

Secondly, promote low-carbon, circular pastoralism and tourism facilities. Encourage pastoral areas to

adopt photovoltaic-pastoral integration models, installing solar panels on degraded grasslands to achieve dual benefits of power generation and grazing restriction. Promote the resourceful utilisation of livestock manure by supporting biogas projects and organic fertiliser processing plants, transforming waste into energy and resources for tourism eco-parks. Regarding tourism facilities, promote energy-efficient buildings, rainwater harvesting systems, and low-carbon transport to minimise ecological disturbance to water sources and soil from cultural and tourism activities.

Thirdly, refine the ecological compensation and pastoralist participation mechanisms. Establish an ecological compensation system where protectors benefit and users pay, providing financial subsidies or carbon credit revenues to pastoralists implementing grassland-livestock balance and developing eco-tourism. Encourage pastoralists to participate in cultural tourism projects by contributing grassland and labour as equity, transforming them from ecological guardians into green revenue sharers. This fosters a virtuous cycle of ecological conservation, tourism value enhancement, and increased pastoralist income.

4.7. Focusing on Digital Empowerment to Accelerate Smart Upgrades

In the process of integrating livestock farming with cultural tourism, digital technology and intelligent management represent key pathways to address challenges such as fragmented resources, rudimentary management practices, and inefficient market integration. Presently, China's livestock sector continues to grapple with issues including inadequate digital infrastructure, incomplete data-sharing mechanisms, and limited application scenarios for smart technologies. There is an urgent need to leverage digital empowerment to drive industrial upgrading and foster innovative business models.

On the one hand, efforts should be accelerated to establish smart pastures and advance the full digitalisation of livestock production. Through the deployment of IoT sensors, environmental monitoring equipment, and intelligent feeding systems, real-time data on livestock rearing environments and animal health can be collected, thereby enhancing the precision and efficiency of production management. For instance, the pasture-photovoltaic complementary model promoted in regions such as Xinjiang integrates photovoltaic installations with intelligent monitoring

systems on grazing lands, achieving dual benefits of electricity generation and grazing while effectively alleviating pressure on grasslands. Concurrently, big data analytics may be introduced to conduct dynamic assessments and early warnings regarding grassland carrying capacity, grazing intensity, and grass-livestock balance. This provides data support for scientific rotational grazing and rest periods, fostering coordinated development between grassland ecological restoration and livestock production.

On the other hand, establishing a smart tourism platform will advance the intelligent development of cultural tourism services and marketing in pastoral areas. By integrating regional tourism resources, livestock products, and cultural experiences, a digital service platform combining booking, guided tours, consumption, and feedback will be created. For instance, drawing upon Aba Prefecture in Sichuan's experience in advancing digital infrastructure, a prefectural livestock and cultural tourism data centre could be established. This would facilitate online experiential models such as cloud-based livestock management and virtual tourism, enhancing user engagement and brand visibility. By leveraging live-streaming commerce, short-form video promotions, and VR immersive tours, the initiative would broaden visitor markets and elevate product recognition.

Furthermore, efforts should be intensified to enhance data coordination and talent development, promoting the interconnection of multi-source data from livestock farming, ecology, tourism and other sectors. This will cultivate multi-skilled professionals proficient in both livestock production and digital technologies, providing sustained momentum for the integration of smart livestock farming with cultural and tourism sectors. By leveraging digital empowerment to advance intelligent development, we can achieve a transformation from weather-dependent livestock farming to data-driven operations, and from sightseeing tourism to comprehensive smart tourism. This will comprehensively elevate the quality and efficiency of integrated development between the livestock industry and cultural tourism.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND ENLIGHTENMENTS

This paper systematically examines the current challenges and corresponding development pathways and countermeasures for the integrated development of China's livestock industry and cultural tourism. Presently, China's integration of animal husbandry with

cultural tourism has yielded preliminary successes, giving rise to diverse emerging sectors such as ecological ranch tourism, livestock cultural experiences, and pastoral leisure resorts. These developments have injected fresh momentum into rural revitalisation and agricultural modernisation. Nevertheless, the path to integrated development remains beset by practical challenges: severe homogenisation of business models, insufficient extension of industrial chains, inadequate infrastructure and service capabilities, superficial cultural excavation, and intensifying ecological carrying capacity pressures. These constraints impede high-quality development.

To address these challenges, this paper proposes a series of countermeasures from a systemic, collaborative, and sustainable research perspective: - Strengthen top-level design and planning guidance to optimise regional layout and policy coordination; - Emphasise regional distinctiveness and differentiated branding to avoid homogenised competition; - Extend industrial chains and enhance value-added to bolster sector resilience and economic returns; - Improve infrastructure and service systems to elevate visitor experiences and operational efficiency; enhancing product substance and appeal through deepening cultural excavation and creative transformation; alleviating ecological pressures by adhering to green development principles; and injecting innovative momentum into industrial integration by promoting digital empowerment and smart development.

This study enriches cultural studies by articulating three key theoretical insights derived from the integration of animal husbandry and cultural tourism.

First, it elucidates the process through which traditional nomadic culture is reinterpreted and commodified within the tourism sphere. The analysis reveals the complex interplay between cultural heritage and market dynamics, demonstrating how pastoral traditions are selectively staged, repackaged, and consumed. Second, it clarifies the agential role of culture in facilitating modernization, sustainability, and rural revitalization. The research highlights how cultural values, practices, and identities act not merely as background, but as active catalysts that shape and drive socio-economic transformation in pastoral communities. Third, it challenges the conception of cultural heritage as a static repository. Instead, the findings posit heritage as a living, dynamic process that is continuously negotiated, reinterpreted, and reinvented through the interactions of local communities, tourists, and policymakers.

In summary, advancing the deep integration of animal husbandry and cultural tourism constitutes a systemic endeavour encompassing industry, ecology, culture, and technology. Future development must adhere to the principles of government guidance, market leadership, farmer and herder participation, and technological support, coordinating all stakeholders for collaborative advancement. Only thus can the industrial chain for cultural tourism development in animal husbandry be effectively established, cultural distinctiveness be highlighted, ecological burdens be alleviated, and ultimately the organic unity of economic, social, and ecological benefits be achieved. This will lay a solid foundation for comprehensively advancing rural revitalisation and modernising agriculture and rural areas.

ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Not applicable.

CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

All authors agree to the publication of this manuscript.

AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization, Y.S. methodology, software, Y.S. and C.B.Y., validation, Y.S. and C.Y.M. writing—original draft preparation, C.Y.M. and C.B.Y. writing—review and editing, Y.S. All authors agreed to the manuscript.

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