

Research on the Historical and Cultural Connotations and Tourism Development Strategies of the Huai'an Prefecture in Jiangsu Province

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Abstract: Ancient architecture represents a vital tourism resource for travel destinations, offering visitors a dual experience of visual aesthetics and spiritual pleasure through its architectural artistry and humanistic historical connotations. Huai'an City boasts a long history of urban establishment and is rich in ancient architectural resources, including significant ancient architectural relics such as Hexia Ancient Town, the Ruins of the Water Transport Governor's Office, Qingyan Garden, and the Huai'an Prefecture. Among them, the Huai'an Prefecture is one of the two surviving original buildings of prefectural government offices in China, imbued with rich historical and cultural connotations and significant potential for the development of ancient architectural tourism. However, compared to similar scenic spots in Huai'an City, its popularity and tourism conditions do not match, presenting issues such as a lack of synergy with related scenic spots, a single tourism product offering, and insufficient promotion and publicity. In light of this, this paper discusses the problems encountered during the development of ancient architectural tourism at the Huai'an Prefecture and proposes corresponding tourism revitalization strategies, aiming to promote the development of the ancient architectural tourism industry in Huai'an City.

Keywords: Huai'an Prefecture; Ancient architectural tourism; Tourism revitalization; Huai'an City

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1. Introduction

The art of ancient Chinese architecture is splendid and time-honored, with architectural relics found in many regions, serving as significant historical, cultural, and tourism resources. With the continuous development of the tourism industry and the ongoing integration of culture and tourism, the market for ancient architectural tourism has been heating up, prompting regions with ancient architectural relics to place greater emphasis on harnessing the potential of ancient architectural tourism. Huai'an City boasts a long history of urban development and rich tourism resources in ancient architecture. Ancient architectural attractions such as Hexia Ancient Town, the Ruins of the Water Transport Governor's Office, Qingyan Garden, and Huai'an Prefecture continue to exude vitality in

tourism. However, there are significant disparities in visitor numbers among these attractions, particularly Huai'an Prefecture, whose tourism popularity does not align with its inherent tourism conditions. The academic community has long taken an interest in Huai'an Prefecture, with scholars such as Guo Huayu studying its architectural form, and Wang Jianian specifically exploring the cultural aspects of Huai'an's prefectural government offices^[1-2]. However, few studies have focused on the tourism development of the Huai'an Prefecture Government Office. Therefore, this paper will take the Huai'an Prefecture Government Office as the research object, sort out its historical and cultural connotations, analyze potential issues that may arise during its tourism development, and explore corresponding paths for tourism revitalization, with the aim of promoting the development of the ancient architecture tourism industry in Huai'an City.

2. Historical and cultural connotations of Huai'an Prefecture

The prefectural government office, also known as the prefectural yamen, was the official residence and administrative center of prefectural-level administrative units in ancient China. Although there are currently multiple architectural relics of yamen buildings nationwide, only two original ancient prefectural government offices remain: Huai'an Prefecture and Nanyang Prefectural Government Office. Located in Huai'an District, Huai'an City, Jiangsu Province, Huai'an Prefecture is a national key cultural relic protection unit. Its architectural history can be traced back to the Wutong Temple during the Southern Song Dynasty. In the third year of the Hongwu reign in the Ming Dynasty (1370), Yao Bin, the then-prefect, constructed a new Huai'an Prefecture using the Wutong Temple and the Yuan Dynasty's Yitan Military Governor's Office as the architectural foundation. This office remained in use until the end of the Qing Dynasty, undergoing multiple repairs and renovations over the years. The main building has been well-preserved to this day, "serving as a symbol and witness to Huai'an's historical status" and embodying rich historical and cultural connotations^[3].

2.1. Architectural and cultural connotations

As a remnant of ancient government office architecture, the Huai'an Prefecture holds significant value in the study of ancient architecture, serving as a unique cultural carrier of ancient architectural heritage. The Huai'an Prefecture boasts a considerable scale, covering an area exceeding 50,000 square meters. It comprises over 50 buildings with more than 600 rooms, neatly arranged and orderly. The layout can be broadly divided into three sections: east, central, and west, with the most important buildings located in the central section. The central section is further divided into front and rear segments. The front segment includes the Ceremonial Door, Main Hall, Six Sections, and the Secondary Hall, while the rear segment serves as the residence for the prefect and his family. The west section houses the Military and Police Office, featuring administrative bodies such as the Waiting Room, Torture Room, Forensics Court, the table for cutting the body of the criminal in two at the waist, Leather Field Temple, Warehouse, and Fire Fighting Bureau. The east section is primarily used for welcoming guests and hosting banquets, with structures like the Stage, Zanhou Temple, and Bao Han Tang, distinguishing it from other solemn office spaces. Additionally, the Main Hall of the prefectural government office, covering over 500 square meters, is the largest among all prefectural government offices nationwide. The architectural complex of the prefectural government office not only embodies local characteristics of Huai'an but also reflects the regulatory requirements for prefectural government architecture during the Ming and Qing dynasties. "Studying it aids in our understanding and mastery of the types, patterns, and form characteristics of ancient Chinese architecture, as well

as the architectural culture and technology influenced by Huai'an's unique geographical location”^[4].

2.2. Political and cultural connotations

The Huai'an Prefecture was an important administrative institution in ancient northern Jiangsu, boasting the largest jurisdiction in the province. The buildings within the prefectural government premises served different administrative functions, offering insights into the connotations of traditional political culture in ancient times. For instance, the main hall was where the prefect issued decrees, held significant ceremonies, and conducted public trials; the secondary hall was used for preliminary case hearings or handling other affairs. The Six Departments were located in the front section of the central path mentioned earlier. The Department of Personnel oversaw the selection and transfer of officials; the Department of Revenue managed household registration, land taxes, finance, and taxation; the Department of Rites was responsible for education, examinations, sacrifices, and propaganda; the Department of War handled military affairs, public security, and military examinations; the Department of Punishments dealt with justice and penal affairs; and the Department of Works oversaw construction projects. The various institutions within the Military and Police Office provided detailed insights into the ancient penal system, offering valuable references for studying the daily operations and administrative functions of ancient prefectural governments. Additionally, the Huai'an Prefecture preserved numerous couplets related to officialdom, such as the couplet on the Holy Edict Stone Archway: “Your salary and benefits come from the sweat and blood of the people; the common folk are easy to oppress, but Heaven is hard to deceive”, and the couplet inside the secondary hall: “Only by having a connection with the common people do I come here; I hope to have a clear conscience and not let the people down.” These provide unique insights into the culture and political culture of prefectural governments during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

2.3. Folk cultural connotations

The Huai'an Prefecture is rich in historical stories and cultural legends. For example, the famous Yuan Dynasty play *The Injustice to Dou E* by Guan Hanqing is set in Chuzhou, which is present-day Huai'an, and the trial of Dou E took place at the Huai'an Prefecture. Today, there is a Dou E Lane to the north of the Huai'an Prefecture, which, according to local legend, is where Dou E once lived, and the lane is named in her honor. Another example is that the Huai'an Prefecture was also the site where the Li Yuchang famine relief case, one of the four great mysteries of the Qing Dynasty, was tried. In the 13th year of the Jiaqing reign of the Qing Dynasty (1808), a flood occurred in Huai'an, and Li Yuchang was sent by Tiebao, the governor-general of the Two Jiangs, to investigate famine relief in Shanyang County, Huai'an. He was brutally murdered by Wang Shenhan, the corrupt county magistrate of Shanyang, who embezzled famine relief funds. Wang Gu, the then-prefect of Huai'an, was bribed and ruled that Li Yuchang had committed suicide, hastily closing the case. Later, Li Yuchang's uncle, Li Taiqing, went to the capital to expose the suspicious case, and Li Yuchang's name was finally cleared. This case had a tremendous impact at that time and in the years that followed. People not only detested the corrupt and evil deeds of the corrupt officials but also admired Li Yuchang's integrity and uprightness. Even today, literary and film and television works based on this case continue to emerge. These historical stories that took place in the Huai'an Prefecture had a significant impact on the people, becoming a part of folk culture and adding more historical and cultural connotations to the Huai'an Prefecture.

In summary, it is evident that the Huai'an Prefecture is rich in historical and cultural connotations and serves as an important physical relic from ancient times. It helps people gain a deeper understanding of the architectural

and cultural connotations of ancient government offices, the political and cultural connotations behind local administrative institutions, as well as related folk cultures. Due to these significant historical and cultural connotations, the Huai'an Prefecture has garnered increasing attention from tourists in recent years. However, compared to other ancient architectural attractions in Huai'an City, the tourism potential of the Huai'an Prefecture still needs to be further developed.

3. Problems in the tourism development of the Huai'an Prefecture

Despite its rich historical and cultural connotations and advantageous tourist location, the Huai'an Prefecture lags in popularity compared to other ancient architectural tourist attractions in Huai'an City. For instance, in 2024, the Huai'an Prefecture received approximately 590,000 visitors throughout the year, while Hexia Ancient Town alone welcomed 607,000 visitors during the National Day holiday in 2024. Another example is Qingyan Garden, a garden with a government office cultural background also located in Huai'an City, which has consistently ranked among the top ten attractions in Huai'an City for the number of visitors during holidays in the past two years, while the Huai'an Prefecture has failed to make it onto the list of popular tourist destinations. From the perspective of urban planning in Huai'an City, the Huai'an Prefecture is situated on the central axis of Huai'an District, connecting southward with the ruins of the Grand Canal Administrative Office and Zhenhuai Tower to form an ancient architectural complex, and facing the Zhou Enlai Memorial Hall one kilometer to the north, located in a popular tourist area. Additionally, with its long history, the Huai'an Prefecture is one of only two complete prefectural government office relics in the country, possessing significant potential for ancient architectural tourism. However, based on relevant tourism data, the Huai'an Prefecture is not considered a "hot" tourist destination in Huai'an City, and its popularity does not match its inherent tourism conditions. The reasons for this may include the following issues.

3.1. Lack of synergy with relevant scenic spots

The synergy among different scenic spots can attract more tourists and enhance tourism popularity. However, the tourism market of the Huai'an Prefecture Government Office is relatively independent, lacking synergy with relevant scenic spots, which makes it difficult to expand the tourist market. Huai'an City boasts numerous tourist attractions. As of 2024, there are 40 national A-level tourist attractions, 21 4A-level tourist attractions, and 1 5A-level tourist attractions in Huai'an City. Many of these attractions have formed effective synergies, achieving mutual benefits and win-win results. For example, the scenic spots under the administration of the Zhou Enlai Memorial Site Management Bureau include three locations: the Zhou Enlai Memorial Hall, Home of Zhou Enlai, and Zhou Enlai's Childhood Reading Office. Although these three scenic spots are located in different places, they are all related to Comrade Zhou Enlai, thus forming a synergy that attracts a large number of tourists to visit them successively. Another example is the China Water Transport Museum, which includes the site park of the Ruins of the Water Transport Governor's Office, also creating a synergistic effect. In contrast, Huai'an Prefecture Government Office has failed to jointly create a tourism brand for ancient architectural complexes with the nearby site park of the Grand Canal Transport Department and Zhenhuai Tower. It has also not engaged in joint promotion with Qingyan Garden, which shares a similar cultural background to yamen (official residence) culture. Due to the lack of systematic tourism planning, it is "fighting alone" and finds it difficult to generate significant influence in the tourism market.

3.2. Monotonous tourism products

Currently, Huai'an Prefecture Government Office primarily focuses on architectural appearances and internal displays, emphasizing the use of text to introduce the functions of various buildings and relying mainly on ticket sales for revenue. The tourism products are monotonous and cannot meet the diverse needs of tourists. As an ancient architectural tourist attraction, the Huai'an Prefecture Government Office only provides a brief introduction and a panoramic view of the office in the promotional materials at the scenic spot, informing tourists of the architectural layout of the office. However, it does not provide detailed explanations of the architectural styles, forms, internal structural frameworks, or the connotations of the spatial layouts of various buildings, leaving tourists with only a cursory glance and unable to leave a lasting impression. In terms of displaying items inside the buildings, the focus is on display, lacking interaction with tourists or the creation of situational simulations, resulting in limited entertainment value. The live-action performance programs established in recent years, such as "A Fleeting Dream — Huai'an Prefecture in the Ming Dynasty", represent, to a certain extent, innovations in tourism products. However, they have not yet "broken through" to achieve significant influence, indicating that there is still room for the development of new tourism products in the future.

3.3. Inadequate publicity and promotion efforts

According to relevant data released by the Huai'an Municipal Bureau of Statistics, Huai'an's tourism market has shown a positive development trend over the past two years. In 2023, Huai'an's tourism industry experienced a robust recovery, with total revenue reaching 51.259 billion yuan, marking a 104.9% increase from 2022. The city received 45.045 million domestic and international tourists, an 85.4% increase ^[5]. In 2024, Huai'an's tourism sector continued to heat up, with total revenue reaching 57.513 billion yuan, a 12.2% increase from 2023, and the number of domestic and international tourists reaching 52.2533 million, an 16% increase ^[6]. However, despite the overall growth in Huai'an's tourism sector, the reputation of Huai'an Prefecture Administration is largely confined to the local area, with limited awareness among tourists from outside the region. There remains a significant market of non-local tourists to be tapped into. For instance, during the 2024 New Year's Day holiday, Huai'an received a total of 709,800 tourists, with Huai'an Prefecture Administration only accounting for approximately 4,500 of these visitors. This indicates that Huai'an Prefecture Administration has not yet achieved widespread recognition and influence, highlighting the need for the scenic area to improve its publicity efforts. By seizing the favorable opportunity of the rapid development of the tourism market, it can develop a broader tourist market.

4. Tourism development strategies for Huai'an Prefecture administration

4.1. Strengthen the collaboration between scenic spots and create a tourism brand

Huai'an Prefecture Administration is a traditional Chinese ancient architectural site, attracting primarily enthusiasts of ancient architecture. Leveraging its identity as a destination for ancient architecture tourism, Huai'an Prefecture Administration can enhance its collaboration with nearby attractions such as the China Water Transport Museum (which includes the site park of the Ruins of the Water Transport Governor's Office) and Zhenhuai Tower. Relevant administrative departments should formulate a unified tourism development plan and suitable tourist routes to connect these three attractions, offering a tourism program for ancient architectural complexes. This will increase the attraction for tourists, extend their visiting time in the area, and provide a richer tourism experience. In addition to collaborating with surrounding attractions, Huai'an Prefecture can also focus on the culture of yamen (official residences and offices in ancient China) and collaborate with the two scenic spots imbued with yamen

cultural backgrounds—the Ruins Park of the Office of the Governor-General for Water Transport and the Qingyan Garden. This collaboration can emphasize the promotion of Huai'an's yamen culture, create a more distinct cultural tourism brand, enhance the popularity of Huai'an Prefecture and even Huai'an tourism as a whole, achieve resource complementarity among scenic spots, and foster mutual benefits and win-win outcomes.

4.2. Delving into cultural connotations and enriching tourism products

Huai'an Prefecture boasts rich historical and cultural connotations, with potential for further exploration. For instance, in terms of architectural culture, a professional team specializing in ancient architecture and historical culture research can be organized. By combining architectural artifacts with relevant historical documents, the styles, forms, layout characteristics, and cultural connotations behind each building within the prefectural government office can be clarified. Subsequently, detailed interpretive handbooks or promotional materials on architectural culture can be compiled, enabling visitors to gain a comprehensive understanding and deepen their appreciation of this significant historical and architectural site, thus avoiding a superficial and forgettable experience.

In the realm of political culture, the advantages of Huai'an Prefecture can be leveraged to create situational simulations. For example, visitors can don official robes in the main hall and simulate the trial of cases by the prefectural magistrate, with professional actors portraying the individuals involved to enhance interactivity and realism. Alternatively, based on the functions of the six departments, different situational modes can be designed, allowing visitors to simulate the handling of official duties by ancient officials. Moreover, in the military and police office area, simulations of ancient punishments can be staged, providing visitors with a profound experience through scene reconstruction, prop displays, and explanations that reveal the types, enforcement methods, and underlying legal culture and social perceptions of ancient punishments.

Regarding folk culture, existing live-action performances such as "A Glimpse of Grandeur: Huai'an Prefecture in the Ming Dynasty" can be deeply optimized, with a strong focus on the historical and cultural background of Huai'an Prefecture. Additionally, literary and historical experts can be organized to further unearth historical figures and events related to Huai'an Prefecture, developing new situational performance programs that incorporate more authentic historical events, characters, and cultural elements, making the performances more vivid and rich in content. Simultaneously, enhancing interactions between actors and visitors, such as inviting visitors to participate in certain scenes, play the roles of the crowd, or assist in completing situational tasks, can heighten visitors' sense of participation and immersion.

4.3. Broadening publicity channels and intensifying promotional efforts

To enhance its popularity, Huai'an Prefecture Mansion must broaden its publicity channels and intensify its promotional efforts. In terms of online promotion, social media platforms such as WeChat Official Accounts, Douyin, Weibo, and Xiaohongshu can be utilized for publicity and promotion. High-quality graphic and video content, such as introductions to scenic spots, historical stories, cultural interpretations, and previews of tourism activities, should be regularly published to attract the attention and sharing of tourists. Additionally, collaboration with online travel platforms like Meituan, Ctrip, and Qunar can be pursued. When launching ticket reservation services, efforts should be made to display relevant information about Huai'an Prefecture Mansion prominently on the platform's homepage, recommended pages, etc., to increase the exposure of the attraction and offer appropriate ticket discounts.

In terms of offline promotion, Huai'an Prefecture Mansion should aim to extend its influence from Huai'an to

Jiangsu Province and even nationwide. Within budget constraints, advertisements can be placed in transportation hubs, commercial centers, and other locations in surrounding cities, such as subway platform advertisements, bus stop advertisements, and outdoor billboard advertisements, showcasing the unique attractions, cultural connotations, and travel routes of Huai'an Prefecture Mansion to attract the attention of potential tourists. Furthermore, participation in domestic and international tourism and cultural exchange activities, strengthening cooperation with travel agencies and other tourism enterprises, or inviting media for publicity can be pursued to effectively promote Huai'an Prefecture Mansion, enhance its popularity, and attract tourists to visit.

5. Conclusion

In summary, as an important architectural relic of ancient prefecture mansions, Huai'an Prefecture Mansion possesses rich connotations of architectural culture, political culture, and folk culture, with significant potential for ancient architectural tourism. However, its current popularity is limited, and the tourism market needs to be expanded. The tourism enthusiasm does not match its inherent tourism conditions, with issues such as a lack of synergy with related attractions, a single tourism product offering, and insufficient publicity and promotion. To address the main issues in tourism development, Huai'an Prefecture Mansion can leverage its unique characteristics, strengthen collaboration among attractions, and create a tourism brand; delve deeper into cultural connotations to enrich tourism products; broaden publicity channels and intensify promotional efforts, thereby enhancing its tourism competitiveness and driving the development of the local tourism industry.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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