

Research on the Strategic Path of Ecological Development of Shaoguan's Silver Economy: Based on the AHP-SWOT Model

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Abstract: This study is based on the realistic background that the aging rate in Shaoguan City is higher than the average level in Guangdong Province, and combined with the positioning of the ecological development zone in northern Guangdong, an AHP-SWOT analysis model is constructed. The research found that Shaoguan City has advantages such as superior ecological environment, rich cultural, tourism and health resources, and enhanced regional policy support, but it also faces challenges such as weak silver industry chain, lack of professional talents, and intensified regional competition. Based on this, this article proposes that precise policy guidance should be strengthened, regional cooperation should be deepened, especially integrated into the “health and tourism” system of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, rely on ecological advantages to develop characteristic health and wellness industries, strengthen the training and introduction of professional talents, and improve the supply of multi-level elderly care services, and ultimately build a sustainable development mechanism of “policy support-industry upgrading-stimulating consumption”, providing theoretical reference and practical paths for the ecological development zone in northern Guangdong to cope with the challenges of aging and cultivate new economic momentum.

Keywords: Silver economy; ecological development; AHP-SWOT model; ecological health care

1. Introduction

Under the wave of global and national population aging, Shaoguan City, located in the mountainous area of northern Guangdong, is also facing a profound population structure transformation. As of the end of 2023, the proportion of elderly people aged 60 and above in Shaoguan City accounted for 20.17%^[1]. The aging degree of Shaoguan registered population is higher than the average level in Guangdong Province and is showing an accelerated trend. While aging brings challenges such as social security pressure and changes in labor supply, it has also given birth to a new blue ocean of “silver economy” with the needs of the elderly as the core. The development of the silver economy is not only an inevitable requirement for Shaoguan City to actively respond to population aging and improve the welfare of the elderly, but also an important opportunity for it to give full play to its ecological advantages, promote industrial transformation and upgrading, and achieve high-quality development. It is of remarkable significance for activate the local consumer market, create jobs, especially absorbing local labor and attracting professional talents to return.

As an important ecological barrier and tourist destination in Guangdong Province, Shaoguan City has unique natural and humanistic resources such as the “Danxia Mountain” World Natural Heritage, and has the innate advantages of developing ecological health care and cultural tourism-based silver hair economy. In 2025, Guangdong Province issued the “Guangdong Province Implementation Plan for Promoting High-Quality Development of Silver Economy and Enhancement of the Welfare of the Elderly”, fully revitalizing and leveraging the resource advantages of forests, hot springs, rivers and lakes, medical facilities, and creating a “world-class forest hot spring health destination” around the “two mountains” demonstration zone^[2]. However, compared with the developed regions of the Pearl River Delta, Shaoguan City’s silver-family economy is still in its infancy overall, with problems such as imperfect industrial chain, shortage of professional service talents, and unbalanced urban and rural development. Without scientific and systematic strategic planning, it is difficult to effectively integrate resources, give full play to the latecomer advantages, and may even miss development opportunities.

The existing research generally agrees that the high-quality development of the silver economy requires multiple rounds of driving of policies, systems, industries, talents and demand. In terms of policy and system driving: Peng Xizhe and Chen Qian proposed to give full play to the leading role of the government and public sectors in the development of the silver economy by strengthening policy support and standard construction^[3]. Lin Bao proposed to issue a statistical catalog of silver-family economics as soon as possible, and monitor the development trends of silver-family economics in resumes^[4]. In terms of industry driving: Cai Fang believes that in the case of my country’s weak industrial foundation and insufficient potential consumption power of the service targets, the “big promotion” of the development of related industries can achieve

the expected results^[5]. Zhang Ge proposed to promote the scale, branding and convenient development of the silver industry through the systematic coupling logic between the elderly care service system and the silver economy^[6]. In terms of talent driving: Wu Yushao and Li Haozhen proposed that the selection of elderly care service talents should break the restrictions on education, age, identity, and region, actively absorb retired doctors and nurses to elderly care service institutions, and widely cultivate a team of elderly service volunteers^[7]. Zhuang Rulong proposed to give full play to the role of talent team building in providing high-quality elderly care services and cultivate more complex elderly care service talents^[8]. Demand-driven aspect: Wang Shaohui and Li Fuyou's research found that retirement does not mean a wealth issue for the elderly in China, but gives the elderly more opportunities to enjoy life. Therefore, the consumption decisions of the elderly in my country help develop the consumer market and provide impetus for my country's economic development^[9]. Through empirical research, Gao Yan concluded that the positive promotion effect of platform economy development on the consumption of elderly people in my country showed significant regional heterogeneity in the east and the west, and there was also obvious urban-rural heterogeneity, which had a significant positive promotion effect on the consumption of elderly people in urban areas^[10].

Although the existing research provides a macro perspective, the unique path and strategic choice of silver economic development in northern Guangdong, especially cities like Shaoguan City, which have both ecological advantages and development constraints, are still insufficient. This article aims to use the AHP-SWOT model to systematically analyze the internal advantages, disadvantages, external opportunities, and threats of the high-quality development of Shaoguan silver economy, build a strategic model of ecological high-quality development that conforms to its reality, and propose specific implementation paths to provide decision-making reference for Shaoguan city and even similar ecological cities to develop silver economy.

2. SWOT Analysis of the Ecological Development of Shaoguan's Silver Economy

2.1 Strengths

2.1.1 Excellent ecological environment and outstanding health and wellness resource endowment (S1)

Shaoguan City has a forest coverage rate of more than 70%, and its coverage rate has been among the forefront of Guangdong Province for a long time, and its air quality is excellent. It has high-quality ecological tourism resources such as Danxia Mountain and Nanling National Forest Park, and has rich hot spring resources. This provides an unreplicable natural foundation for the development of a high-end silver economy featuring "ecological care", "forest health care" and "hot spring health care", which meets the needs of the elderly to pursue health and get close to nature.

2.1.2 Rich cultural and tourism resources and profound cultural heritage (S2)

As one of the important birthplaces of Lingnan culture, Shaoguan has rich historical and cultural heritage, such as Zhuji Ancient Lane, Meiguan Ancient Road, etc. and unique Hakka and Yao ethnic styles. The profound cultural heritage provides rich materials and experience scenarios for the development of diversified silver-haired economic products such as cultural elderly care, study elderly care, and travel and elderly care.

2.1.3 Regional policy support has been strengthened (S3)

Guangdong Province has included elderly care in people's livelihood projects in recent years, and implemented four major actions: expanding and improving the quality of home and community elderly care services, improving the quality and efficiency of institutional elderly care services, improving the effective supply capacity of elderly care services, and in-depth integration of medical care, nursing care and health care^[11]. In order to actively respond to population aging and promote the development of the silver economy, Shaoguan City has also introduced measures such as optimizing and integrating nursing homes, deep integration of medical and nursing integration, and innovation of rural elderly care services.

2.2 Weaknesses

2.2.1 The silver hair industry chain is weak and low-end (W1)

Shaoguan's existing elderly-related industries are mainly concentrated in basic elderly care services and primary agricultural products supply, and lacks high-value-added elderly products research and development and manufacturing, smart health care, professional rehabilitation care, elderly financial insurance and other mid-to-high-end links. The industrial chain is short and has low correlation, and it has failed to form an industrial cluster effect with ecological health care as the core.

2.2.2 Serious lack of professional talents (W2)

This is one of the core bottlenecks restricting the high-quality development of Shaoguan Yinfa economy. Local higher education resources are limited, and the ability to cultivate professional talents such as elderly care, geriatric medicine, rehabilitation treatment, elderly social worker, and health care management is insufficient. At the same time, due to the level

of economic development and the attractiveness of the city, it is extremely difficult to introduce and retain high-level talents and professional and technical talents in the above fields. The problems of insufficient number of front-line nursing staff, low professionalism and high mobility are particularly prominent.

2.2.3 Improper infrastructure and service system (W3)

The layout of urban and rural elderly care service facilities is unbalanced, and rural areas are particularly weak. The coverage of the aging-friendly transformation is narrow, and the construction of smart elderly care platforms is lagging behind. The depth of medical and nursing integration is not enough, and professional medical institutions and nursing homes are not working smoothly. A multi-level and diversified elderly care service supply system has not yet been formed, and it is difficult to meet the differentiated needs of elderly people with different incomes and health conditions.

2.3 Opportunities

2.3.1 Spillover of health care demand in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (O1)

Residents in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area have high income levels and strong health awareness. The demand for high-quality health care and travel and elderly care is strong and continues to grow. With its superior ecological environment, convenient transportation and relatively low costs, Shaoguan is expected to become an important destination for taking over the spillover of high-end health care demand in the Greater Bay Area, with huge market potential.

2.3.2 Continuous release of national and provincial policy dividends (O2)

The national-level “Opinions on Developing the Silver Economy to Enhance the Welfare of the Elderly” and a series of supporting policies in Guangdong Province provide top-level design and specific support measures for the development of the Silver Economy. Especially in supporting the development of ecological health care, forest health care, traditional Chinese medicine health care, etc., the policy orientation is highly consistent with Shaoguan’s advantages. The policies to promote regional coordinated development at the provincial level also provide opportunities for Shaoguan to gain resources.

2.3.3 The consumption concept of the elderly is upgraded (O3)

The consumption capacity of the new generation of elderly people has improved, and the consumption concept has changed from survival to enjoyment and development^[12]. The demand for high-quality services and products such as health management, cultural entertainment, leisure tourism, and smart elderly care has surged, creating a market space for Shaoguan to develop new business formats such as characteristic health care, tourism, and cultural elderly care.

2.3.4 The potential for technology empowerment is huge (O4)

The development of technologies such as the Internet, Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, etc. provides possibilities for telemedicine, health monitoring, intelligent care, convenient services, etc., which will help Shaoguan overcome regional restrictions, improve service efficiency and quality, and make up for the shortcomings of some talents and resources.

2.4 Threats

2.4.1 Regional competition is fierce (T1)

Nationally, especially the neighboring Guangxi, Hunan, Jiangxi, Qingyuan, Heyuan and other places in Guangdong Province, relying on their own resources to vigorously develop health care industries and silver economy. The focus of competition is on customer source competition, project investment, talent attraction, etc. Shaoguan faces severe challenges in brand influence, infrastructure, financial strength, etc.

2.4.2 Siphon effect in developed regions of the Pearl River Delta (T2)

With its strong economic strength, perfect medical education resources, mature elderly care service system and high salary level, the Pearl River Delta region has formed a strong attraction to elderly care professionals, high-end health care project investment, and high consumption capacity elderly groups, and has put significant “siphon” pressure on Shaoguan’s development of the silver hair economy.

2.4.3 Fiscal and social pressure brought about by the acceleration of aging (T3)

Rapid aging continues to increase the financial burden of local social security, medical and health care, and public services, which may squeeze direct investment in the development of the silver economy industry. At the same time, the increased burden on family pension may also curb local consumption vitality.

3. Construction of SWOT-AHP Model for the Ecological and High-Quality Development of Shaoguan’s Silver Economy

3.1 Establishment of AHP model

B Based on the aforementioned SWOT analysis, we identified the target layer, criteria layer (S, W, O, T), and solution

layer (specific factors) for high-quality development of Shaoguan’s silver economy, and established an AHP hierarchical analysis model. The model structure is shown in Figure 1, which clearly demonstrates the hierarchical relationships between factors and their contribution to the overall goal.

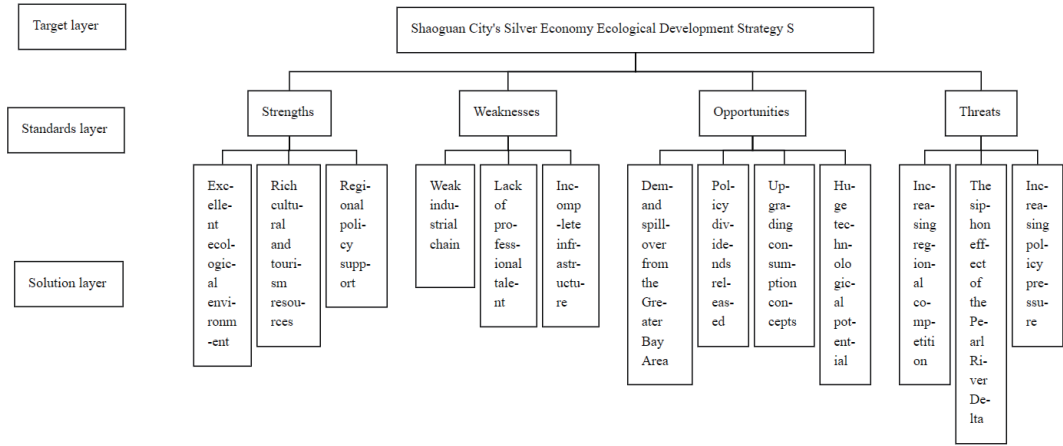


Figure 1. AHP model for ecological development of Shaoguan’s silver economy

3.2 Judgment Matrix Establishment and Consistency Test

In order to clarify the best strategic path for the ecological development of the silver-family economy in Shaoguan City, this article invites 18 experts from the fields of public management, aging industries, tourism planning, human resources, etc. to compare and score the factors of the criterion layer and the plan layer based on the relative importance scale shown in Table 1 to build a judgment matrix. The criterion layer and the plan layer judgment matrix are shown in Table 2 and Table 3. Then, the consistency ratio (CR) of each group of the scheme layer is calculated. According to the results of Table 3, it can be seen that the CR values of each group are less than 0.1. The consistency test is passed and the analysis results are desirable.

Table 1. Importance scale

scale a_{ij}	Scale meaning
$a_{ij}=1\sim9$	Represents the comparison between factor i and factor j, and the different judgment levels of the importance of i compared to the importance of j, ranging from equally important to absolutely important.

Table 2. Criteria layer judgment matrix

SWOT	S	W	O	T	weight	$\lambda_{\max}$	CR	consistency
S	1.000	2.951	1.687	3.231	0.421	4.125	0.046	Pass
W	0.339	1.000	0.401	2.385	0.160			
O	0.593	2.494	1.000	4.064	0.327			
T	0.310	0.419	0.246	1.000	0.092			

Table 3. Scheme level judgment matrix

Project team	Intergroup weights	index	Judgment matrix	Intra-group weights	Combination weights	$\lambda_{\max}$	CR	consistency
Strengths	0.421	S1		0.438	0.184	3.009	0.007	Pass
		S2	1.000 1.508 1.624 S= 0.663 1.000 1.239	0.306	0.129			
		S3	0.616 0.807 1.000	0.257	0.108			
Weaknesses	0.160	W1		0.349	0.056	3.007	0.006	Pass
		W2	1.000 0.798 1.558 W= 1.253 1.000 1.656	0.414	0.066			
		W3	0.642 0.807 1.000	0.237	0.038			

Project team	Intergroup weights	index	Judgment matrix				Intra-group weights	Combination weights	$\lambda_{\max}$	CR	consistency
Opportunities	0.327	O1					0.349	0.114	4.033	0.012	Pass
		O2	1.000	1.476	1.654	1.753	0.256	0.084			
		O3	0.678	1.000	1.319	1.382	0.191	0.062			
		O4	0.605	0.758	1.000	1.382	0.204	0.067			
Threats	0.092	T1	1.000	0.878	0.631		0.272	0.025	3.018	0.016	Pass
			T=1.139	1.000	1.024						
			1.585	0.977	1.000						

3.3 Strategic Quadrangle Drawing

According to the total combined weight value of each influencing factor, it is marked on the corresponding half axis of the coordinate system and is connected in sequence to form the SWOT strategic quadrilateral (Figure 2). Calculate the area of the four quadrant triangles:

$$S_{\triangle SGO} = (\text{Dominance Weight} \times \text{Opportunity Weight}) / 2 = (0.184 \times 0.114) / 2 = 0.011$$

$$S_{\triangle WGO} = (\text{Disadvantage weight} \times \text{Opportunity weight}) / 2 = (0.066 \times 0.114) / 2 = 0.004$$

$$S_{\triangle WGT} = (\text{disadvantage weight} \times \text{threat weight}) / 2 = (0.066 \times 0.035) / 2 = 0.001$$

$$S_{\triangle SGT} = (\text{Dominance Weight} \times \text{Threat Weight}) / 2 = (0.184 \times 0.035) / 2 = 0.003$$

Area sorting: $S_{\triangle SGO} > S_{\triangle WGO} > S_{\triangle SGT} > S_{\triangle WGT}$

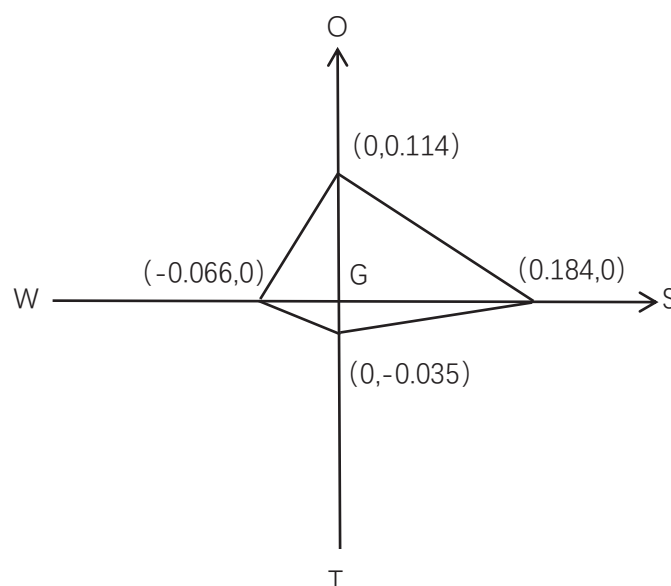


Figure 2. SWOT strategy quadrilateral for the ecological development of Shaoguan's silver economy

3.4 Analysis of the Strategic Choices for the Ecological Development of the Silver Industry in Shaoguan City

Strategic quadrilateral analysis clearly shows that the area of the SO (advantage-opportunity) strategy is significantly larger than other strategic combinations, which indicates that the primary and core strategy of the high-quality development of the Yinfa economy in Shaoguan City is the SO strategy. In particular, we will give full play to Shaoguan City's outstanding ecological environment advantages and rich cultural and tourism resources, and strive to seize the major opportunities of spillover of health care demand in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the continuous release of national and provincial policy dividends. Focusing on developing a mid-to-high-end silver economy featuring "ecological health care" and "cultural tourism and residence" to create a differentiated core competitiveness that is difficult to replicate

is the fundamental path for Shaoguan to overtake.

4. Construction of the ecological development strategy model of Shaoguan's silver economy

Based on the ecological connotation of the high-quality development of the silver-family economy in Shaoguan City and the aforementioned SWOT-AHP analysis conclusion (SO strategy priority), a strategic model of the ecological development of the silver-family economy in Shaoguan City as shown in Figure 3 is constructed. On the left side of this model is the core driving system that promotes the ecological development of the silver economy, and on the right side is the ecological development goal of the silver economy. The power system includes three mutually supported and coordinated subsystems: “policy coordination and ecological resource transformation”, “ecological health industry upgrading and talent support”, and “consumption potential stimulation and service optimization”.

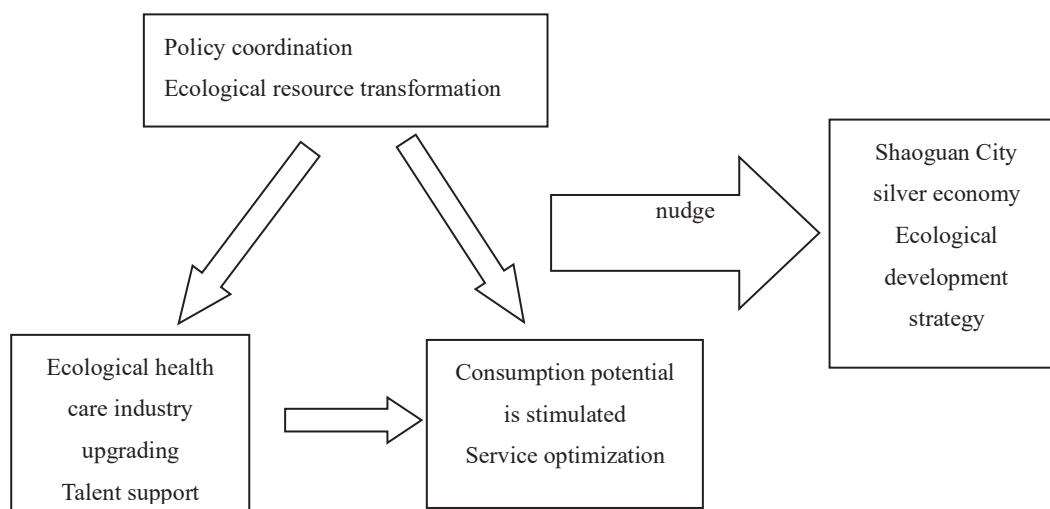


Figure 3. Shaoguan City's silver economy ecological development strategy model

4.1 “Policy Coordination and Ecological Resource Transformation” subsystem

This subsystem is the basic engine. It aims to closely combine Shaoguan City's unique ecological environment, outstanding health and wellness resource endowment, rich cultural and tourism resources, and enhance its advantages through precise policy design, such as regional cooperation policies, ecological compensation mechanisms, industrial support policies and efficient resource integration, especially ecological resources and cultural tourism resources, and enhance its advantages in Shaoguan City's unique ecological environment, outstanding health and wellness resource endowment, rich cultural heritage, and enhanced cultural heritage, as well as regional policy support strength, with the spillover of health and wellness demand in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the continuous release of national and provincial policy dividends. Its core task is to resolve the threat of the fierce regional competition and the siphon effect in the Pearl River Delta, and provide solid policy guarantees and a high-quality resource foundation for industrial upgrading.

4.2 “Ecological Health Industry Upgrading and Talent Support” Subsystem

This subsystem is the key pillar. Focus on transforming basic ecological resources into high-value-added ecological health products and services. Through technological innovation and model innovation, we will focus on developing characteristic business formats such as forest health care, hot spring health care, cultural tourism and residence, and traditional Chinese medicine health care, and promote the extension of the industrial chain to the mid-to-high-end. At the same time, the subsystem takes solving the disadvantages of serious lack of professional talents as one of its core tasks, and emphasizes strengthening the construction of professional talents through multiple channels such as policy incentives, training system construction and regional collaborative introduction, and providing core intelligence and skills guarantees for industrial upgrading.

4.3 “Consumption Potential Stimulation and Service Optimization” Subsystem

This subsystem is a value realization and feedback loop. We are committed to activate market potential, and by improving the level of social security, optimizing the consumption environment, especially intelligent, age-friendly

transformation, and designing multi-level service products that coexist inclusive and high-end customized, we will fully release the market momentum brought about by the opportunities for upgrading consumption concepts of the elderly, and meet the needs of different elderly groups, and alleviate the disadvantages of imperfect infrastructure and service systems. Its successful operation can effectively transform the market value of Shaoguan City's advantages such as "superior ecological environment" and provide market feedback for policy optimization and precise allocation of resources.

The core of Shaoguan City's silver-family economic ecological development strategy model is to build a closed-loop circulation system of "ecological resources-policy support-industry upgrade-talent support-service optimization-consumption feedback". The cycle is based on ecological resources, guided by policy coordination and regional linkage, and realizes ecological value transformation through industrial upgrading and talent support. Finally, while meeting the diversified consumption needs of the elderly, it forms positive feedback on policy optimization and resource re-allocation. Each round of cycles will improve the efficiency of ecological resource utilization, industrial competitiveness and service satisfaction, and promote Shaoguan City's silver-family economy toward a higher level of ecological, characteristic and high-quality development.

5. Implementation Path of Shaoguan City's Silver Economy Ecological Development Strategy

Based on the aforementioned strategic model and SO-first strategic orientation, Shaoguan City can focus on promoting the following implementation paths for the ecological development of its silver economy:

5.1 Deepen policy coordination and ecological resource value transformation

Seize the opportunities of the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and actively connect with the elderly care service standards and health care needs of the Greater Bay Area. Sign a regional cooperation agreement to jointly build the "Greater Bay Area-Shaoguan" ecological health care base, promote off-site settlement or mutual recognition pilot projects such as medical insurance and elderly care service subsidies, and open up channels for elderly people in the Greater Bay Area to come to Shaoguan to take care of their travels. Actively participate in the integrated promotion plan of the Greater Bay Area "Health and Care Tour" to enhance the popularity and attractiveness of Shaoguan's ecological health and care brand in the Greater Bay Area.

Formulate ecological development plans and supporting policies for silver economy. Establish a municipal-level silver economy ecological development guidance fund, focusing on supporting the development of ecological health care projects, the transformation of elderly-friendly facilities, the construction of smart elderly care platforms and the incubation of small and medium-sized enterprises. Implement preferential policies such as tax and fee reduction, land use guarantee, and financing support to attract social capital to invest in the middle and high-end links of the ecological health care industry chain.

Establish a mechanism for assessing and transforming ecological resource value. Relying on Danxia Mountain, Nanling National Forest Park, Hot Spring Resource Belt, etc., we will scientifically plan and layout forest health care bases, hot spring healing centers, and ecological travel communities. Explore and develop the under-forest economy Chinese medicinal materials planting and healthy product development, and promote the efficient transformation of ecological resources into health care products and services.

5.2 Focus on ecological health and wellness features to promote industrial upgrading and strengthen talent base

Create a distinctive ecological health care product system. Highlight the characteristics of "forest+", "hot spring+" and "culture+". Develop core health products such as forest bathing, natural healing, hot spring physiotherapy, traditional Chinese medicine and health care. Combining Zhuji Ancient Lane and Yao ethnic cultural resources, we will develop cultural experience, study and elderly care, rural tourism and other special projects. Vigorously develop long-term and short-term travel and migratory elderly care models with ecological health care as the core.

Promote the intelligent and integrated upgrading of the industrial chain. Introduce the Internet of Things, big data, and artificial intelligence technologies to build a municipal-level smart health and wellness cloud platform to provide remote health monitoring, emergency calls, service reservations and other functions. Promote the application of smart technology in forest health environment monitoring, intelligent control of hot spring water quality, cultural guided experience and other scenarios. Promote the deep integration of ecological health care with industries such as medical care, tourism, culture, sports, and agriculture, expand the industrial chain, and increase added value.

Build a multi-level talent training and introduction system. Cooperate with local universities to establish professional directions such as elderly care, rehabilitation treatment, health management, and elderly social workers to target local talents. Join forces with high-quality training institutions in the Greater Bay Area to establish a vocational skills training base. Formulate competitive talent introduction policies, focusing on introducing high-level talents and professional and technical backbones in the fields of health care project operation, elderly product research and development, smart elderly care technology, etc.

5.3 Stimulating consumption potential and optimizing service supply

Improve the consumption capacity and willingness of the elderly. Improve the basic pension and medical insurance system and explore the establishment of a long-term care insurance system. Special health and wellness consumption subsidies or service vouchers will be issued to rural elderly groups and low-income elderly groups. Strengthen the popularization of financial knowledge for the elderly and the development of financial products for the elderly.

Build a multi-level, age-friendly service system. Optimize the layout of urban and rural elderly care service facilities, and focus on strengthening the construction of rural regional elderly care service centers. Comprehensively promote the aging-friendly transformation of urban and rural communities. Relying on the smart health care platform, we integrate online and offline resources to provide convenient home-based elderly care, community care, health management and other services. Develop universal basic elderly care services and high-end customized clothing to meet diversified needs.

Create a friendly consumption environment. Strengthen aging-friendly design and barrier-free transformation in scenic spots, hotels, community service centers and other places. Carry out service quality star rating and brand creation activities for elderly care service institutions and health care bases. Strengthen market supervision and protect the rights and interests of elderly consumers. Hold activities such as ecological health and wellness cultural festivals, elderly health forums and other activities to cultivate a positive concept of aging and healthy consumption concepts.

Through the coordinated promotion of the above paths, Shaoguan City can effectively leverage its ecological advantages, grasp policies and regional opportunities, overcome shortcomings in the industrial chain and talent, respond to competitive challenges, and ultimately achieve ecological, distinctive and high-quality development of the silver economy.

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