

# Is China's Higher Education of Tourism Ready for "The Belt and Road" Initiative?

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**Abstract:** Tourism professional education in China's colleges and universities plays an important role in supporting China's tourism development by continuously providing professional talents to the expanding market. In the context of "The Belt and Road" initiative, tourism professional education in China's colleges and universities urgently calls for an upgrade, particular in internationalization.

**Keywords:** "The Belt and Road" initiative, tourism professional education in China's colleges and universities, teaching quality, internationalization

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the identifiable aspects of "The Belt and Road" initiative is people-to-people exchange, which creates favorable opportunities to promote the development of globalization for China's tourism. By the joint efforts of China, relevant countries and international organizations in the past six years, the institutional framework for building "The Belt and Road" cooperation on tourism has been basically shaped. However, upgrading the management and operation in China's tourism industry across the joint countries depend on the support from internationalized talents. Cultivating talented people is a key source of sustained competitive advantages, which calls for the tourism professional education in China's colleges and universities must be improved and be in line with the guidance of "The Belt and Road" initiative. In the current situation of global economic growth facing downward pressure, it is of great significance to seize such opportunities.

## II. THE STATUS QUO AND THE OBSTACLES OF TOURISM PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION IN CHINA'S COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

In China, the tourism industry started late, so did the tourism professional education in China's colleges and universities.

### A. Background of tourism professional education in China's colleges and universities.

Tourism professional education in China's colleges and universities started in 1979. Beijing International Studies University, formerly known as Beijing Second Language University, is the first university offering the tourism major, in order to solve the problem of shortage in tourism professionals in the context of "The Economic Reform and Open Up" since Dec. 1978[1]. In pace with the fast growth of tourism industry,

tourism professional education in China's colleges and universities has made great progress in nearly 40 years. By 2017, there were 1,694 colleges and universities offering the tourism major and a total of 175,168 students enrolled in this major[2].

### B. Tourism in the professional category of China's national higher education.

The setting of undergraduate education majors in China's colleges and universities is divided into 13 categories. Tourism is divided into management disciplines like business. Majors in hospitality management, hotel administration, leisure tourism management, tourism planning, exhibition management etc. are all classified into the management discipline and collectively called tourism management in China[3].

### C. Problems of tourism professional education in China's colleges and universities.

Although the number of colleges and universities in the discipline of tourism management has increased a lot, there are many issues related to the quality of education that continually emerge, which have attracted the attention from researchers and scholars.

In 2000, Terry Lan and Hongen Xiao indicated that there was a big gap existing between supply and demand for qualified tourism talents, because of poor curriculum design, problems regarding scholars' and educators' qualifications, their disciplinary knowledge and poor practice standardization of tourism education in China[4].

Most tourism departments in China are established on the bases of various academic backgrounds of the colleges, with origins from foreign language department, geography department, food department, etc. For example, majors in tourism management, hotel administration are offered in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, bringing without any influences from business, management or finance academic backgrounds. Situations like teaching resources are restrained, teaching staff lacks practical knowledge in tourism field, lacking qualified tourism educators are common concerns in tourism professional education in China's colleges and universities[5].

In addition, there is no clear distinction in course setting or teaching team between two majors related to tourism, the

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same teacher using the same textbook to teach different majors is common in colleges and universities.

The present state of graduate employment is low employment rate of tourism graduates in the tourism industry, which contradicts with the continued prosperity of tourism. It is caused by the unscientific training program that has no association with the employment market, random course setting for the program does not match the industry needs, textbooks are outdated, lacking systematic practical internship arrangements, students can not acquire essential learning about this industry through internships. Unqualified teaching teams seriously lag behind the development of the industry[6].

In spite of the rapid growth of China's tourism industry and similar growth in the number of colleges and universities in their tourism major, the quality of tourism professional education in China's colleges and universities is becoming an obstacle for cultivating qualified talents to meet the needs of the market.

### III. STANDARD AND CRITERIA OF TOURISM PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Standard and criteria of education plays critical role in maintaining and promoting the quantity of education in colleges or universities.

#### A. "National Standards for Undergraduate Professional Teaching Quality in Colleges and Universities" (NSUPTQCU).

The NSUPTQCU is the first completed and systematic national standard of teaching quality for China's colleges and universities. It was released in 2018 by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China for the aim of improving teaching quality in China's colleges and universities. It covers 92 categories with 587 majors and eight categories: overview, applicable professional scope, training objectives, training specifications, teaching staff, educational conditions, quality assurance system and appendices[7].

#### B. "National Standard for Teaching Quality of Tourism Management" (NSTQTM).

The NSTQTM is part of the NSUPTQCU standard whose purpose is to clarify the basic requirements on tourism education in colleges and universities. It works as the guide for undergraduate education in the field of tourism management, encouraging colleges and universities to fully apply their academic advantages and resources in the tourism training program[8].

Furthermore, the NATQTM aims at improving teaching quality, promoting the contribution of higher education to the economic and social service for the country or local communities. It also puts forward the basic requirements on establishing the tourism professional major for college and university graduates. It is the reference for evaluating teaching quality. Nine parts are included in this standard. They are the overview, scope of major application, training objectives, specifications of training, curriculum system, teacher, teaching conditions, teaching effects, and the management of quality[8].

#### C. National professional accreditation program.

Along with the promulgation of the NSUPTQCU, the education department of the government starts professional accreditation in colleges and universities. The purpose of supervising and strengthening the implementation and promotion of the NSUPTQCU is to ensure that all colleges and universities achieve the teaching quality and even exceed the standard. The professional accreditation focuses on five areas: achieving professional training objectives and training effectiveness, professional positioning and meeting social needs, supporting teachers and teaching resources, operation effectiveness of the quality assurance system and student and employer satisfaction. [7]

#### D. International Accreditation program worldwide.

Hospitality management and tourism management etc. belong in the business category in European and American universities and colleges. There are three authoritative institutional accreditation systems worldwide serving the education of business management. They are the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB), known as the North American System, the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS), and the Association of MBAs, or MBA European System (AMBA)

##### 1) AACSB standards and criteria.

In AACSB, there are four main categories: strategic management and innovation, participants-students, faculty, and professional staff, learning and teaching, academic and professional engagement[9].

##### 2) EQUIS standards and criteria.

EQUIS is part of the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) Accreditation for international business schools. The standards and the associated criteria are grouped into four main parts: context, governance and strategy, quality of the school's resources and operations, internationalization, corporate connections and ethics, responsibility & sustainability, and executive education[10].

##### 3) AMBA accreditation and criteria.

AMBA accreditation serves for postgraduate education level in business. There are ten 10 key principles listed, namely, the MBA portfolio, institutional integrity, sustainability & distinctiveness, faculty quality & sufficiency, program design & leadership, the student cohort experience, competences, graduate attributes & learning outcomes, curriculum breadth & depth, assessment rigour & relevance, delivery & interaction, impact & lifelong learning[11].

### IV. THE COMPARISON OF CURRICULUM IN NSTQTM AND WITH INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

Comparing the different standard of tourism professional education in China and other countries' college and university is conducive to discovering the difference in training program, and achieving the roles of complementing and improving the teaching quality.

#### A. Curriculum in NSTQTM, AACSB and EQUIS.

Curriculum, as the core of teaching quality in professional education programs, its content is required to meet the general

expectations for the specific degree program type and the learning goal of colleges and universities. Comparing the NSTQTM with the AACSB and the EQUIS respectively on the curriculum for undergraduate education will show the difference in curriculum, core course, selective course, practical core which are influenced by the mission, values, and culture of the colleges and universities.

#### *B. Comparing module of curriculum.*

Each of the NSTQTM, the AACSB and the EQUIS includes three modules in the curriculum system. In the NSTQTM, it is general education courses, basic courses and profession courses[8]. While, in the AACSB, it is the general skill, the general business knowledge and the technology agility areas[9]. In the EQUIS, the curriculum is designed under the guidance of internationalization, ethics, responsibility & sustainability, corporate connections, and these three dimensions are incorporated into the courses[10].

In the AACSB and the EQUIS, as the general guidance for the professional course setting, the course modules obviously present such features as business knowledge, technology application, corporate connection, internationalization, and meeting the growth needs of the industry and community. While in the NSTQTM, it doesn't show the close connection between the industry and society. And professionalism is not so duly emphasized.

#### *C. Comparing general course modules.*

In the NSTQTM, public compulsory courses and quality education courses make up the general course module. The public compulsory courses include the introduction to the basic principles of Marxism, Mao Zedong thought and the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the outline of China's modern history, ideological and moral cultivation and legal concept, situation and policy, computer science, college Chinese, foreign language, sports, etc., and other courses selected by the colleges and universities as based on the resources of the school. Quality education courses include humanities and social sciences, natural sciences, art, innovation and entrepreneurship, etc., as well as other courses selected by schools on the basis of the school's resources and specialties[8].

In the AACSB, its general skill module lists eight standards, which are effective communication in oral and writing, understanding and reasoning ethical issues and addressing the issues in a socially responsible manner, analyzing and framing problems in analytical way, working effectively with others and in team environments, working effectively in diverse environments, understanding oneself in the context of society in a reflective way, applying knowledge, and the integration of real-world business experiences[9].

In general, there are no big differences between NSTQTM and NSTQTM in terms of course design in the general course module. Both of the NSTQTM and the AACSB courses emphasize understanding ethical issues, social responsibilities and manner. In addition, the AACSB highlights the practical, such as communication, writing, social connection, team work, and working effectiveness in complicated context etc., that contribute to improving student working skills in the real world

and personal qualities in general. In the NSTQTM the specific curriculum of quality education are not being elaborated in details, which leads to different interpreting and understanding of quality education in different colleges and universities. The courses offered as based on the resources of the colleges and universities, do not completely match the requirements from market and the society.

#### *D. Comparing professional courses.*

The NSTQTM professional courses contain three sections, they are the compulsory courses, the selective courses and the practical courses[8].

##### *1) Comparing core courses.*

The required core courses for students in major of tourism management, hotel management are introduction to tourism, tourism reception, destination management, and tourism consumer behavior. Besides, the core courses for tourism management are tourism economics, tourism planning and developing tourism regulations, and for hotel management major, it is introduction to hotel management, hotel operation management and hotel customer management[8].

In the AACSB, there are six standards in general business knowledge areas : first, economic, political, regulatory, legal, technological, and social contexts of organizations in a global society; second, social responsibilities of sustainability, diversity and ethical behavior and approaches to management; third, financial theories, including analysis, reporting, and markets; fourth, systems and processes in organizations, including planning and design; fifth, production/operations, supply chain, marketing, and distribution, group and individual behaviors in organizations and society; sixth, others related to the concentrations, majors, or emphasis areas[9].

School of Hotel Administration (SHA), SC Johnson College of Business, Cornell University in U.S.A. earned AACSB accreditation, its core curriculum contains twenty one courses in four years. In the first year, there are organizational behavior and interpersonal skills, microeconomics for the service industry, managerial communication I, business computing, introduction to hotel operation, introduction to food service operation and financial accounting. In second year, core courses are hospitality quantitative analysis, human resources management, managerial accounting, finance, food service theory and practice, marketing management for services, hospitality development and planning. In the third year, they are service operation management, restaurant management, principles of hospitality real estate, hospitality facilities management, managerial communication II, business and hospitality law. In the fourth year, it is strategic management[12].

While in the EQUIS, Liverpool Business School (LBS) in Liverpool John Moores University is member of the EQUIS[13]. It is well-known for its hospitality major in Europe. The core courses in LBS, emphasize more on internationalization and field specialties, such as, management and leadership in tourism, the business of international tourism, tourism concepts, tourism marketing, tourism dynamics, tourism and hospitality in society, managing tourism operations, work related learning, investigative tourism,

tourism, culture and society, applied international tourism, integrated marketing communications for tourism, individual research project, tourism, heritage and culture, responsible tourism and planning, enterprise and entrepreneurship for tourism, international marketing, etc. It places more emphasis on conforming to the requirements from professional industry and internal academic framework[14].

Furthermore, the AACSB gains more advantage in course quantities and qualities than NSTQTM does. The contents of core courses in AACSB are more complex and systemic than in the NSTQTM. Course setting in NSTQTM is limited in the range of function operation, such as: for hotel management major, they are front office operation, housekeeping operation, food & beverage operation. etc[8]. but, in AACSB, it is listed in basic professional theory guidance, such as: in SHA, the courses are accounting and financial system that includes managerial accounting, financial accounting, finance, analysis, reporting, market; system and process of organization; management includes organizational behavior and interpersonal skills, managerial communication I & II, strategic management etc[15]. That will help students gain consolidated theory knowledge systemically.

Successive theory system is another obvious advantage in the AACSB, such as in SHA, its theory system is successive and upgraded appropriately on the base of previous courses for each year. All of the above core knowledge of hospitality operations, finance and accounting, management, communication, organization behavior, etc. run through the four years of four-year undergraduate course and are constantly upgraded in theories, such as: managerial communication, financial accounting in the first year, in second year, the successive high level courses are managerial accounting finance, in the third year, they are principles of hospitality real estate, managerial communication II, in the fourth year, it is knowledge learned previously that is integrated in the strategic management course[15]. It clearly states that the prerequisite for strategic management are at least one course in accounting, finance, marketing, operations, economics, and information systems[16]. It aims to develop a mastery of the analytical tools for students on performing analyses of the industry and competitors. It teaches students how firms formulate, implement, and evaluate strategies, it “emphasizes critical thinking and decision making to maintain competitive advantage in a hyper competitive and maturing industry.” which is appropriate to the aim of education[15].

## 2) Comparing selective courses.

In the NSTQTM, the elective courses are based on the colleges and universities’ resources, advantages, and the specialties, which are set to meet the professional and industry requirements. Courses are required to be related with innovation and business, such as creative planning of tourism, tourism E-commerce, project planning of tourism, image promotion of tourism[8].

In the AACSB, there are elective courses offered, such as SHA elective courses offered throughout Cornell University. These courses aim to align students’ interest and their career goals[12]. Besides, there are SHA free electives, SHA’s free

elective courses imply that students are free to explore courses and areas of study which they are interested in. These electives provide students with the opportunity to pursue variable minors offered at Cornell or abroad[12]. Furthermore, there are non-SHA electives. More than 4,000 courses are offered by Cornell’s other six undergraduate schools and colleges that are open to students, students can choose some of them as either supplement or complement to their major[12].

In the EQUIS system, students have more time to fully understand the profession by learning many elective courses, such as in LBS, it offers the Foundation Year course, which covers variety of subjects in the foundation year, for students to learn basic knowledge of various subjects, and see if students have the interest and abilities to further pursuit a degree in this major. Once the students pass the foundation year, they will progress directly to the first year of the degree. Some of the courses open in the foundation year are : understanding business organization & operations, essentials of management, introduction to marketing & PR communications, data analysis techniques for business, program case study. These courses are basic concepts and knowledge of business[10].

In the NSTQTM, there are elective courses offered for student to choose, based on the resources and features of colleges and universities. However, the contents and scope are limited. In the AACSB and the EQUIS, it is encouraged to offer abundant courses for student selection, which is helpful for students to find their own interest, and gain better understanding of tourism major.

## 3) Comparing practical courses.

In the NSTQTM, practical courses include professional internships, graduation internship, and graduation thesis (design). The special profession also includes education and teaching internship. Professional internship refers to the cognitive internship of the profession, such as: professional learning, social survey, independent research, simulation training, and academic papers. Graduation internship refers to professional application internship, such as: job trainee, field survey, case study, planning and design. Graduation thesis (design) refers to summary professional study, taking the form of research papers, graduation design, research reports and so on[8].

In the AACSB, students are required to do field work. In SHA, in order to enhance their overall hospitality education, students are required to get practical experience in real working environments by completing 800 hours working experience in the hospitality industry in two summers[12].

The EQUIS requires for more profession practical and connection with the industry through the training program, i.e. LBS sets curriculum in emphasizing students’ practical experience by field trips, visiting guest lecturers and industry professionals regularly, and having students get comprehensive understanding of this profession before choosing the major[17].

The NSTQTM, the AACSB and the EQUIS all require students to do field work. However, in the NSTQTM, the graduation thesis is required, that is not included in the

AACSB and the EQUIS standards. The intentional standards emphasize student learning from the working field and allow for practical work in a rigorous assessment process.

#### 4) Comparing technology agility.

Technology agility is an important part of AACSB, its design in line with the development of technology in society, professional skills in processing information and making proper decision in connection with this area. Five standards are stated in AACSB, they are making decision based on evidence and integrating current and emerging technologies, such as the application of statistical tools and techniques, data management, data analytic and information technology, using and disseminating privacy and security data ethically[9].

But in the NSTQTM, there is no specific module to teach student how to apply modern technique and information tool to process information and solve problems. The role of technology in society as well as behavioral implications of technology in the workplace doesn't get sufficient attention, which does not meet the market needs nowadays. Students should demonstrate technology agility, gain the ability to rapidly adapt to new technologies, have higher-order cognitive skills to identify, analyze an unstructured problem, formulate and make a solution by using appropriate technologies.

In conclusion, there is an obvious difference in the setting of curriculum for tourism management between the NSTQTM and international standards. That is, the AACSB and the EQUIS curriculum design require to update the course, keep pace with the development of industry and society, and meet market requirements on internationalization, organization operation and management, technology agility into course. Strategic coherence with the curriculum content is transparent and comprehensible. The international standards highlight managerial skills of students in team work, interpersonal skills, presentation skills, project management, leadership skills, etc., that are promoted and developed by practical work, internships. These skills are practically integrated in the curriculum.

## V. CONCLUSION

In the context of internationalization, especially the "Belt and Road" initiative, tourism professional education in China's universities and college may be improved in the following aspects: first, enhance the module system and establish scientific professional knowledge and technical modules in reference to international accreditation standards in order to meet the development needs of the industry and the requirement of the "Belt and Road" initiative; second, the design of the core curriculum should be upgraded to the organizational level, business operation level, technical analysis level, and strategic development level, rather than staying at the low level of routine function operation; third, allow students to fully understand the profession of tourism before selecting the major so that they can dedicate to the career in this profession after graduation. This requires colleges and universities to provide sufficient opportunities for students to understand the situations facing students; fourth, strengthen interaction with the professional industry to

facilitate timely understanding of the development of the industry, adjusting the teaching and professional training program in time; fifth, students' internship arrangements need to be set flexibly so as to fully respect individual choices of students; sixth, improve tourism management in the direction of internationalization is urgent at present.

Tourism is a global phenomenon, its growth is closely tied with the international progress. Providing internationalization professionals to fit the market expectation is the mission, responsibilities and obligations of colleges and universities in China. In order to achieve the "the Belt and Road" initiative, the tourism professional education in China's higher education must be upgraded as soon as possible to narrow the gap between NSTQTM and international standards.

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