

Dilemma and Solution: Tourism Tertiary Education in Post- pandemic Era

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Abstract: The development of tourism industry is quite easy to be affected by various factors. COVID-19 pandemic has become a big blow for it. The number of tourists reduced largely. Tourism revenue dropped sharply. Tourism companies failed or struggled for surviving. These effects on the development of tourism industry by COVID-19 pandemic also influenced the development of tourism management major. The students who major in tourism management deeply worried about their job-hunting. And it was hard to recruit tourism management majors. Every coin has two sides. COVID-19 pandemic also brought opportunities and challenges for the development of tourism industry and tourism tertiary education. Teaching reform is pressing and necessary. For the teachers who are engaged in tourism tertiary education, they should view this change rationally and make good use of it completely. The following ways may meet the changing social demands and realize the aim of training excellent tourism talents, such as clarifying discipline status, building specialized characteristic, exploring new major direction, optimizing course structure, and increasing cooperation between universities and companies.

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic; Tourism Tertiary Education; Dilemma; Solution

1. Introduction

In 2020, COVID-19 pandemic broke out all over the world. It postponed rapid development of tourism industry. The entire tourism industry suffered severe challenges by recurrent pandemic. Most tourism enterprises reduced recruitment positions to decrease costs.[1] According to released data by Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 841 colleges and universities have set up tourism

management major in 2024. So about 40,000 to 50,000 undergraduates will graduate. Job-hunting in tourism industry for undergraduates was more difficult because of fierce competition and low demand. Usually, the employment rate is around 30% [2]. But now the figure is even lower. Facing such employment situation, more and more undergraduates decide to find a job in other industries. And some of them plan to continue their postgraduate studies or register for civil service exam. "Delayed employment" has become the first choice for tourism management undergraduates.

Such phenomenon is contrary to the aim of tourism tertiary education. Besides influence caused by pandemic, we have to think about whether there is contradiction between social demand and social adaptability of tourism talent training.

2. New Changes in Tourism Industry in Post-pandemic Era

Tourism industry is the first of five happiness industries. It is an important industry which could satisfy people's growing expectations for a better life, expand employment and help to accomplish a complete victory in the fight against poverty alleviation. However, it is also quite fragile in the face of COVID-19 pandemic and sensitive to social and economic changes. Nowadays, propelling domestic demand and stimulating consumption become significant for our economy development. Thus, tourism development needs transformation and upgrading rather than just getting back to work in post- pandemic era [3].

2.1 Changes in Structure of Tourism Market

Our domestic, outbound and inbound tourist markets were hit hard by COVID-19 pandemic.

And there were great changes in consumer psychology, consumption experience and consumption propensity. Now tourists pay more attention to safety, nature, green and health while traveling. They prefer leisure tourism and healing tourism. They are apt to have short-distance travel, rural travel or family travel. They like to go on a road trip or choose independent tour. These changes will become new tourism development directions in the future.

2.2 Changes in Ways of Tourism Consumption

COVID-19 pandemic promoted the integration of tourism services and advanced Internet technologies such as 5G and AI. It is well situated to solve the mismatch between supply-demand quantity and structure of tourism consumption. Thus, it will promote high-quality tourism development. It also enables people to have immersive sightseeing experiences without time and spatial constraints. A series of cloud tourism services, such as AR games and AR navigation of online exhibitions, may fully meet residents' travel demands.

Virtual tour has gained in popularity in China. According to the survey results, 74.8 percent of the respondents said they were willing to take a virtual tour and 59.7 percent said they had a good online traveling experience. In the future, the combination of online virtual experience and offline immersive experience could be the way of consumption. Tourism development could be networkization, digitization and intellectualization.

2.3 Changes in Upgrading Trend of Tourism Products

For a long time, ordinary tourism products are surplus and superior ones are in shortage in China. Lack of personalized and high-quality service caused lower tourism income. The competition among enterprises mainly relies on price war. In post-pandemic era, tourism enterprises need to take advantage of modern technology to realize product innovation. It could be concerned with culture, sports, health, medical treatment, and so on. From the upgrading trend of tourism products, health and technology may become important elements in product innovation in the medium and short term. In the long term, development

mode and service product will tend to be diversified, high-quality and personalized. With the improvement of people's living standard and increasing spiritual demand, deep experience on cultural factors-oriented tourism development.

3. Tourism Tertiary Education Lagged behind Economy Development Demand

In China, tourism education was born with reform and open up. It develops from training personnel who are in charge of foreign affairs to formal tertiary education. The education level varies from secondary vocational education, higher vocational education, four-year higher vocational education, undergraduate education to postgraduate education. Now undergraduate education includes tourism management, hotel management and exhibition economy and management majors. The undergraduates may get bachelor's degree of Arts. The basic courses for these majors are general education courses of economy management. Special courses are set up only for junior and senior. But because of limited class periods, humanities courses are insufficient while engineering courses are uninvolved. So current discipline status, curriculum provision and faculty structure are unable to meet the needs of rapid economy development [4]. So, on the one hand, undergraduates could not find proper jobs after graduation. On the other hand, tourism enterprises are in need of professional talents.

3.1 No Independent Discipline Status

Tourism discipline has not been an independent discipline yet. In discipline classification, it is the subordinate one under business administration discipline and management discipline. However, tourism is a comprehensive social phenomenon. The complicated social relations formed in tourism development are beyond the subject field of business administration discipline. Such discipline classification restricts the development of tourism discipline. Because of rapid development of tourism industry, remarkable promotion of tourism status and numerous research findings, tourism discipline should have already been a first-class discipline [5]. But it still has not obtained the corresponding qualification so far. This is its

bottleneck.

3.2 No Specific Core Knowledge System

The specific core knowledge system of tourism discipline is still debated. Lack of theoretical guidelines impedes academic research development and people's understanding of tourism phenomenon. Tourism discipline is often regarded as a descriptive one. However, as a significant global economy activity and process to the government, tourism industry has great academic research value. In addition, with the development of tourism industry, a large number of students and skilled workers are needed. All these factors make tourism education, especially tourism tertiary education, very necessary.

Tourism tertiary education should not only carry out teaching, but also satisfy the needs of business and economy. So, it is easy to be interfered by various social pressures. Although Tourism Teaching Committee has advised several core courses, the discipline status prescribes a limit to autonomy in choosing. Core courses should be set up on economy management discipline. As to compulsory professional courses and elective professional courses, they are usually set up according to school type, school faculty and school history. For example, in Normal Universities, some core courses are relative to geography knowledge for some teachers' majors are geography. In Agricultural University or Forestry University, courses on agriculture and forestry resources may become core courses. While in universities of economics, courses on economy and management may be put too much emphasis without integrating particularity of tourism industry. In this case, there is no professional consensus of tourism discipline [6].

3.3 Low Social Satisfaction

When it comes to tourism staff, people may think of tour guides, hotel waiters, and so on. Many people still believe that jobs with such service industry are low-end. Even some of them take for granted that there is no need to have tertiary education for tourism staff. Those outdated concepts cause high turnover and low recognition. Statistics show that national enrolment for tourism management majors in 2020 declined by 5.33%, comparing with it in 2019. And for universities of project 985, it

declines 34.49%. Some universities and colleges enrolled students according to big academic subjects, such as business administration. That caused fewer students choose tourism management in their sophomore year.

Actually, the talent training objective for tourism management major is conveying high-class management talents. But current training program has less specialty characteristics and career planning courses. For tourism staff, hardworking and group corporation are quite important. And before being the managements, they need to work as entry-level clerks and in different jobs in order to know more about hotel operation. But our undergraduates are just good at theoretical knowledge. They lack practical ability and strong adaptability [7].

3.4 Less Integrated Thinking

Most tourism management majors are liberal arts students. So, they always solve problems with liberal arts thought. They couldn't fit the mode of interdisciplinary, integrated learning actively.

In class, teachers always teach theoretical knowledge rather than practical experience. And some teachers just teach the knowledge in their own research fields without combining with the development of tourism industry.

As to specialty construction, the absence of foresight and social practice makes it impossible to cater to real social needs of tourism industry.

All these factors make our undergraduates have narrow knowledge range, low professional cognition and poor practical skills. They are unable to adapt to digital tourism.

4. Solution to Tourism Tertiary Education in Post-pandemic Era

Promoting the reform of tourism tertiary education is good for enhancing endogenous power of tourism management major and accelerating its high-quality development. The following are the specific ways.

4.1 Clarifying the Status of First-degree Discipline

It is well-known that discipline construction relies on professional education while professional education needs the support of discipline construction. The basis and premise of professional education is the accumulation,

formation and maturity of a discipline. But now, there is no proper status for tourism discipline. This will inevitably affect the resource allocation and other aspects of tourism education.

The discipline hierarchy shows different status of each discipline according to certain standards. But now the status of tourism discipline is inferior. So being recognized as a first-degree discipline is the basis of tourism discipline development. Thus, it may form favorable, professional and inherited discipline research system. And the research direction and methods can be clearly defined. It would be the fundamental guarantee.

4.2 Building Specialized Characteristic

The syllabus should be formulated according to talent training aim rather than current teaching materials. We should pay attention to the innovation and specialized characteristics. And the major direction needs to be clarified while major advantages should be intensified. The internship program and course content also need to be optimized around major direction. The curriculum system should meet the latest development needs of tourism enterprises. Tourism enterprises include not only travel agencies, hotels and scenic spots, but also tourism websites and big data platforms such as Tuniu, Qunar and Ctrip. We could communicate with their staff in order to get the latest development trends of the tourism industry. So, we may design curriculum system on promoting talents' network operation skills and designing ability of digital, informationized and intelligent tourism products [8].

About the optimization of course content and structure, we need increase some more practical courses. That would improve the situation of excessive proportion of theoretical courses and the cultivation of application-oriented talents. And the talents may have solid foundation, strong practical ability, good applicability and various skills. In the new historical period, we should deepen the integration and cooperation between enterprises and vocational schools and universities. Also, we need to deepen the reform and practice of school-enterprise education mode.

4.3 Exploring New Major Direction

New changes on tourism industry make new requirements for tourism talents cultivation. So, exploring new major direction becomes an urgent task. We should consider the following factors before making decisions: implementation feasibility of new major direction, market development prospect of new major, students' future employment direction, relevant policy background, specialized characteristics and innovation. Listed below could be suitable alternatives: cultural creation tourism, study trip, tourism big data analysis and wellness tourism. In addition, we may make the best of campus resources and cooperate with other discipline teams to explore new major direction together.

4.4 Optimizing Curriculum Structure

Good tourism industry staff need to know almost everything, such as history, culture, economy, politics, technology, psychology behavior, and so on. So before setting the courses and compiling textbooks, we should optimize the courses and select proper content. According to the essence and main characters of tourism, "tourism psychology", "tourism aesthetics", "tourism culture" and "tourism economics" should be core courses.

With the growing demand of education and expansion of teaching contents, it is quite complex and important to organize courses reasonably within limited teaching periods. At present, the courses of political theory, English, computer, mathematics and economy management accounted for larger proportion in the curriculum of tourism management. The rest teaching periods are not enough for specialized courses. We need to make curriculum reform and break discipline boundaries to integrate new teaching contents and requirements with the original courses. For example, "tourism culture" and "tourism aesthetics" could be merged as the course named "tourism culture and aesthetic" [9]. Some courses are set as elective courses, such as "tourism literature", "cultural relics and archaeology", "ecological tourism", "MICE tourism" and so on. In this way could contribute to the cultivation of interdisciplinary breadth and critical thinking ability.

4.5 Increasing Cooperation between Universities and Companies

Since strong practicality is one of features of tourism management major, practical courses occupy an important position in its curriculum system. Universities need to cooperate with tourism companies. It will help the students deeply understand the values and moral elements in management practice. Also, it contributes to ideological and political construction of practical courses. Patriotism, artisan spirit and professional quality are the basic requirements of both tourism companies and universities for tourism management majors.

In order to ensure ideological and political construction of practical courses, universities should maintain close communication with tourism companies. On the one hand, we need to sum up typical cases and application-oriented resources for ideological and political courses. On the other hand, we need to provide necessary guidance to companies for effectively implementing ideological and political teaching, including the setting of teaching objectives, the design of teaching methods and the choice of teaching contents. The senior managers could be industry tutors for tourism majors. It will cultivate students' observation and acuity on tourism industry and help students establish correct professional ideology and sense of values [10].

5. Conclusion

COVID-19 pandemic caused a heavy blow to tourism industry which led to new changes. These new changes put forward new requirements for tourism talents cultivation. Cooperating with tourism companies may be a better solution. In addition, tourism discipline have to form its own characteristics and norms in the aspects of organization, concept system, discipline theory, research methods and research norms. Thus, it could be an independent discipline.

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