

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN TOURISM HIGHER EDUCATION ALONG THE SILK ROAD COUNTRIES

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Abstract

Tourism is an important part of exchanges among civilizations and an important way to promote people-to-people interactions. By examining the present situation of the higher education in the field of tourism and relevant international cooperation, this paper sums up the opportunities and challenges encountered in the process of cooperation and strengthening the economic belt along the Silk Road countries. Higher education cooperation and communication is one of the necessary conditions for construction, consolidation, and development of the silk road economic belt. For the „Belt and Road“ countries, this implies training international tourism talents as an imminent step. Finally, the paper puts forward and strengthens the international cooperation on higher education in the field of tourism with the countries along the Silk Road from four aspects.

Key Words: the Silk Road, tourism, Higher Education, international cooperation

Introduction

In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the „Belt and Road“ initiative to establish the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road Economic Belt. After the initiative, our country entered the trade cooperation with frequent tourism activities between countries. Consequently, the need for professional tourism talents also rose sharply, whose training would strengthen China and the „Belt and Road“ along the central Asian countries. Therefore, under this strategic

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background, China should seize the opportunity and continuously strengthen the cooperation with higher education institutions in the field of tourism in the countries along the Belt and Road to meet the increasing demand for talents. Based on this, this paper studies the basis and conditions for higher education cooperation in the field of tourism between China and the countries along the Silk Road, putting forward corresponding suggestions by analyzing the advantages and obstacles in the cooperation.

Research status of higher education in the field of tourism in the countries along the Silk Road

In 1998, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China published the professional directory of higher learning undergraduate institutions, with a comparison table of old and new professions. After 26 years of vigorous development, China at present has 810 domestic universities that provide studies in tourism, 150 master's degree admissions units, 17 level discipline PhDs. With the continuous improvement of the scale and quality of running schools, the international cooperation of tourism management majors in China is also increasing. Especially in recent years, the domestic tourism management community and industry have actively responded to the „Belt and Road“ initiative and strengthened the exchanges with countries along the Belt and Road, but at present, China's tourism education is still in a state of low degree of internationalization, backward international ranking and low international visibility (Junjiao & Yanbo, 2020, p.2). There is still a lack of in-depth communication with countries along the „Belt and Road“ routes, which is inconsistent with the requirements of China's „Belt and Road“ initiative. Therefore, it is urgent to strengthen the cooperation with countries along the „Belt and Road“ routes. Currently, research on the „Belt and Road“ higher education mainly focuses on two aspects. The first is to discuss the status quo of higher education in the countries and regions along the „Belt and Road“ route, and the research focus is different according to the different countries and regions. For countries with relatively mature education system such as Japan and Singapore, scholars pay more attention to the experience of popularization and internationalization of higher education; while for developing countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia and regions with relatively backward higher education such as Africa, the research focuses more on the reform trend, direction, problem solving, challenges and prospect of higher education. The second is the study of China's higher education cooperation in countries along the Belt

and Road. The research in this aspect can be divided into three levels: the overall level of the research mainly focuses on the challenges of „Belt and Road“ education cooperation, the international integration strategy, the theoretical construction and governance model of the education community, etc.; the country-specific level research focuses on higher education cooperation between China and Kenya, Kazakhstan and Southeast Asian countries; research at the specific discipline level focuses on the international cooperation measurement and trend of basic disciplines such as physics, chemistry and life science. But overall, the international cooperation model of tourism management, that is the path of „going global“ in „Belt and Road“ needs further exploration (Xingping et al., 2024, p.4). This paper will discuss the opportunities and challenges encountered in the cooperation of tourism higher education in the countries along the Silk Road, summarize the status of the cooperation with China of some universities in countries along the Silk Road and the overall characteristics of development, and put forward strategic suggestions on strengthening the cooperation between domestic universities and universities in the countries along the Silk Road.

Higher education cooperation in countries along the Silk Road

1. Foreign cooperation between domestic colleges and universities

First, jointly build the Silk Road International Tourism University. The Silk Road International Tourism University was established on the initiative of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and signed by the President of Uzbekistan. At present, many colleges and vocational colleges have established cooperative relations with them. Beijing Second and Foreign Languages Institute has signed agreements on consultant dispatch, student communication, teacher assistance, research cooperation, teaching resources sharing, development of national tourism colleges and tourism institutions.

Secondly, the Tourism Education Alliance for countries along the Maritime Silk Road should be established.

Hainan university unveiled the tourism education alliance of „countries along the maritime silk road“, and jointly issued the alliance declaration of Haikou, to „promote the development along the national tourism education, service social progress“ for the purpose of the alliance, and jointly build tourism education cooperation community along the 21st

century maritime silk road, as well as outstanding cultural exchanges, academic exchange platform function, scientific research projects, curriculum, communication between teachers and students to promote talent training and scientific research cooperation.

Third, school-school cooperation, industry and education integration.

Through the integration of industry and education, school-enterprise cooperation has taken place between the Jakarta Guilin Institute of Tourism, Business School of Tourism and the China Indonesia Tourism Research Institute, conducting undergraduate education and vocational training programs for Indonesian students; the Beijing Union University and the University of Copernicus in Poland jointly established the „China-Poland Tourism and Culture Center“ and the „Poland-China Tourism Research Center“, guiding students to conduct short-term practice at the Copernicus University in Poland; Xi 'an International Studies University has actively responded to the „Five Central Asian Countries“ international student education and training program established by the Xi' an Municipal Government, cooperation agreements have been signed with the Samarkand Institute of Economics and Services of Uzbekistan and the Uzbekistan Silk Road International University of Tourism and Culture in an effort to jointly promote the training of tourism talents, tourism planning and the export of tourism products.

Characteristics of tourism management and development in some countries along the Belt and Road

Russia: Since 2011, Russia has established the third generation of tourism higher education standards in accordance with the Bologna Agreement. In the same year, Russian universities began to train four-year „tourism“, „service“ and „hotel business“ and two-year master's degree. Up to now, most universities have opened tourism-related majors. In 2013, Russia abolished the five-year social and cultural services and tourism specialty, and adjusted the domestic management specialty to the management discipline. The tourism talent training mode of the Russian Far East National Chung University is designed according to the third generation of Russian higher education standards, and the core of this mode is to cultivate students' ability. Students' ability consists of general cultural ability (OC) and professional ability (PC), including 13 requirements for general cultural ability and 16 requirements for professional ability.

According to the student training program, students will study in school for four years, and practice in enterprises every semester. The school updates its educational program every three years.

Table 1: *Tourism professional courses*

Subject category	Course
Social and economic	Russian history, philosophy, foreign language
Mathematics and Science	Math, computer science, ecology
Professional course	tourism management, psychological diagnosis, service, marketing management

Source: <https://max.book118.com/html/2018/0517/166867147.shtm>

Kazakhstan: Kazakhstan introduced the „Bologna process“ principle to promote the transformation of its higher education in Europe and promoted the international academic flow of higher education in Kazakhstan.

Between 2011 and 2020, Kazakhstan supported a total of 17,328 students through budgetary grants and budgetary funds of the Ministry of Education and Science; and 637 foreign students from 26 countries to study in Kazakhstan, mainly in humanities and social sciences, including tourism.

Thailand: At present, Thailand has many high-level universities and higher vocational schools, which provide students with professional tourism and hotel management education, such as the Chiang Mai University and other well-known universities. At the same time, students can cooperate with enterprises to obtain practical work experience and put theoretical knowledge into practice. The Thai government is also committed to promoting the development of tourism, formulating many tourism policies, and implementing personnel training and career promotion strategies, such as the „Shantou Papalalagan Sports Tourism Development Plan“ and „Work-study-Action Tourism“ plans.

Opportunities and challenges of higher education cooperation in the field of tourism in the countries along the Silk Road

1. Opportunities for tourism and higher education cooperation in countries along the Silk Road

First, policy advantages: In recent years, China has issued a number of policies to promote international cooperation in higher education. For

example, in 2015, it issued the Vision and Actions for Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road in the 21st Century, and the Several Opinions on Opening Up Education in the New Era issued in 2016, which clearly proposed to „expand the scale of international students with each other“ and „strengthen tourism cooperation and expand the scale of tourism“. The Ministry of Education has deployed and implemented a number of „One Belt And One Road“ education initiatives. The governments of many countries along the Belt and Road support the development of higher education in tourism and actively promote international cooperation, providing policy convenience for academic exchanges and personnel training. Along the Midwest in the silk road economic belt, the region is relatively lag, there are still many weak links; in view of these problems, the country formulated the Midwest higher education revitalization plan (2012-2020), which aims to improve the education level of the Midwest. The plan specified the urgency to revitalize the Midwest higher education as a strategic focus to promote the development of higher education reform, seize the opportunity, to solve the outstanding problems, promote the Midwest higher education in the new historical starting point to realize the development of connotative new span.

Table 2: *Discussion on strengthening educational exchanges and cooperation in the legal documents signed by China and some Belt and Road countries*

Country	Time	Document	Relevant Content
Russia	2013	On Cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation Win-win and deepen the comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination of the joint statement	Expand youth exchanges between the two countries on the basis of institutionalized and long-term development, China and Russia will organize friendly youth exchanges from 2014 to 2015 Year activities
Greece	2013	The Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of Hellenic Republic joint communique	The two sides are willing to continue working in education, scientific research, youth exchanges and language teaching Maintain close communication and cooperation in the fields
Turkmenistan	2013	The People's Republic of China and Turkmenistan on Development And a Joint declaration on deepening the strategic	The two sides will strengthen cooperation in exchanging international students and language teaching, To facilitate the promotion of each

		partnership	other's national language in their own country. Both sides encourage Universities in the two countries to establish cooperation; both sides will promote academic opportunities to strengthen cooperation between structures
Kyrgyzstan	2014	The People's Republic of China and the Kyrgyz Republic on The Joint Declaration on Further Deepening the Strategic Partnership“	The two sides will encourage establishing ties between universities and research institutions of the two countries, Cooperation in the field of science and technology and academic information exchange
Kazakhstan	2014	The Federation of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Kazakhstan Joint Declaration	The two sides agreed to continue to strengthen culture, education, press and broadcasting Exchange and mutual beneficial cooperation between the tourism, tourism, health, and sports departments
Uzbekistan	2014	The People's Republic of China and the Republic of Uzbekistan a joint declaration »	The two sides are ready to further strengthen and expand cooperation in science and technology and people-to-people Not in cooperation in science, education, sports and tourism
Tajikistan	2014	The People's Republic of China and the Republic of Tajikistan To further develop and deepen the strategic partnership Joint Declaration	The two sides are ready to further strengthen science and technology, education, culture, health, and sports Cooperation in tourism and other fields, expand education and scientific research institutions, news media, Friendly exchanges between non-governmental organizations, art groups and youth organizations Cooperation to continuously enhance the mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples
Serbia	2016	The Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Serbia on the Establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership	The two sides would like to continue to strengthen cultural exchanges and cooperation in culture, education, sports, health, science and technology, tourism, press and publication, expand the exchange of international students, and expand cooperation in emerging fields such as film and television, think tanks and media.

Source: *Official website of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China*

Second, advantages of people-to-people exchanges: China has many similarities with Central Asian countries in terms of language, culture and customs (Su & Yueqin, 2022, p.6). The long-term economic and trade exchanges and cultural exchanges have formed a close geographical relationship between China and the Belt and Road. In terms of culture, countries such as Serbia bear similarities with China from the perspective of identity and values. These common grounds can make the two countries have more harmonious exchanges and cooperation. In addition, China has also held silk Road expositions, art festivals and other activities, which have promoted the sharing of cultural achievements among other countries and become an important bond of people-to-people connectivity. At the „High-End Academic Seminar on Cultural Inheritance and Innovation“ held on October 17, 2015, 47 universities from 8 countries and regions along the „Belt and Road“ line jointly released the Dunhuang Consensus, and established the „Belt and Road“ University Alliance, aiming to build a higher education community. The alliance aims to give full play to the role of universities in cultural inheritance and innovation, make use of the historical and cultural resources of the Silk Road, especially the unique cultural brand of Dunhuang, and enhance the internationalization of higher education and expand the cultural influence of the Silk Road by strengthening the cooperation among countries along the Silk Road. In order to promote cultural inheritance and innovation, China's higher education institutions need to actively participate in international cultural and academic exchanges, using the strategic opportunity of the silk road economic belt, enhance the understanding of national culture and science and technology development, show the modern style of higher education, promote the multicultural communication and integration along the silk road (Xiong & Ying, 2017, p.136).

Third, the improvement of the quality of tourism higher education: China's higher education of tourism management major has experienced rapid development in the past few decades. With the growth of China's economy and the booming development of tourism, tourism management has gradually become one of the popular majors in universities, attracting a large number of students to apply for it. Since the 1980s, the curriculum system of tourism management major has been continuously improved and adjusted with the development of the market. In addition to basic courses such as management, economics and marketing, professional courses such as tourism regulations, tourism psychology, tourism geography and tourism culture have also been added.

2. Challenges of tourism higher education cooperation in countries along the Silk Road

First, the international political and economic forms are complex: due to the special geographical location and the complex international situation, some areas along the Silk Road are facing severe security challenges. War, terrorist activities, resource shortage and other problems directly affect the stability and security of these areas. In particular, the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine has not only brought economic and social instability to Central Asia, but also caused a serious impact on the educational cooperation and exchanges between China and these countries. Besides, due to China's rapid rise as an emerging power, international competition is becoming more intense. Countries represented by Europe and the United States constantly want to stop China's peaceful rise, using the media and other means to smear it and partly damage the image of the country. There is a lack of understanding of the real situation in China on the part of small countries in Eastern Europe because of their proximity to EU countries. They have been subjected to long periods of sanctions and repression; Serbia, as a small country in Eastern Europe, went through a divisive war. If you add to that the crackdown by Western countries, represented by the United States, all this contributed to slowing down the development of its higher education. Although Serbia has a higher proportion of investment in education than most developing countries, the level of education is still much lower than that of the EU countries. All these factors jointly affect the cooperation with the countries along the Silk Road.

Second, the interference of ethnic and cultural differences and religious infiltration: the educational exchanges and cooperation among countries along the Silk Road face the challenges brought about by ethnic diversity (Gang & Jinsheng, 2017, p.23), religious complexity and cultural differences. Taking the border areas of China's west as an example, the historical changes have led to the formation of the Kazakh, Uzbek, Kirgiz, Tajik and other cross-border ethnic groups, some of which have established independent countries abroad. Influenced by religious extremism forces, ethnic separatist forces and international terrorist forces, the stability of cross-border ethnic minority areas is under threat. With the advancement of the „Belt and Road“ strategy, cultural and educational exchanges between China and countries along the Belt and Road are increasing. But at the same time, it is also necessary to be alert to the infiltration and destruction of ethnic separatist forces, properly

handle religious issues and safeguard national sovereignty. Central and South Asia are the unstable factors in western China.

Third, the low level of economic development affects the higher education international cooperation: the overall level of higher education along the Belt and Road countries is not high (Liu et al., 2016, p.3).

First of all, due to the low economic level and infrastructure level of the countries along the Belt and Road, the tourism development level is low, so the country attaches low importance to tourism education. Secondly, the gross enrollment rate of higher education in the countries along the Silk Road is generally low. In 2020, the average higher education enrollment rate in sub-Saharan Africa was only 9.82%. Higher education is in the initial development stage, the number of universities is small, fewer schools offer tourism-related majors, and the QS ranking is generally low. For example, only three of the „hotel and leisure management“ schools in Africa are in the top 150, only three international hotel colleges in the top 100, and the other two Cairo and Johannesburg universities in the top 100.

Suggestions on strengthening cooperation in tourism higher education between China and countries along the Silk Road

In the context of the new type of globalization, China has deepened its higher education cooperation with the countries along the Silk Road, which is of far-reaching significance to promoting the „Belt and Road“ initiative and the implementation of the „community with a shared future for mankind“. China's tourism higher education has certain advantages in the world. In the future, it can strengthen the cooperation of higher education in the field of tourism with countries along the Silk Road from the aspects of consolidating the cooperation foundation, establishing a more perfect cooperation mechanism, dividing the cooperation at different levels, and highlighting the cooperation priorities.

1. Consolidate the cooperation foundation of information construction, talent training, teaching materials and teaching plans.

At present, China has a low understanding of higher tourism education in countries along the Silk Road, and there is a lack of professional teachers and educational resources, which to some extent limits the cooperation and development with these countries in the field of higher tourism and

education. In order to strengthen cooperation, we can start from the following three sides: first, the use of big data technology to build an information platform for higher education in the field of tourism for the countries along the Silk Road (Xin, 2018, p.57). The platform can systematically collect and publish information about the curriculum, teachers and international cooperation, promote the construction of basic database and information network. Second, higher education institutions where domestic conditions permit should strengthen teacher training and exchanges. This includes special teaching training for domestic teachers, especially in the field of Silk Road tourism, and organizing teachers to make short-term academic visits to universities along the Belt and Road to learn from and exchange educational experience. At the same time, university teachers from countries along the Belt and Road should also be invited to China for short-term visits and teaching practice, so as to share China's advanced ideas and practical experiences in the field of tourism education. Finally, it is important to promote the development of teaching materials and teaching plans specifically for the Silk Road tourism education; As for the students from the countries along the Silk Road who study in China, relevant courses and textbooks should be provided to introduce Chinese tourism theory and practice; for domestic students, textbooks covering the tourism development and planning of these countries should be prepared to enhance their understanding and interest in international tourism development. These measures will promote in-depth cooperation between China and countries along the Silk Road in the field of tourism higher education.

2. Expand the forms of cooperation and establish a sound cooperation mechanism.

At present, the cooperation form of China's tourism higher education and foreign countries is mainly signed by the two sides, and this kind of cooperation mode is relatively single. In order to diversify the forms of cooperation, we should promote the establishment of a multi-level cooperation mechanism between governments, organizations, universities and disciplines in the future, and strengthen the stability and sustainability of the existing cooperation results (Xiong & Ying, 2017, p.133). In terms of intergovernmental cooperation, we can promote the establishment of deeper cooperation mechanisms between China and some African countries in the field of tourism higher education within the framework of the existing Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the China-Africa Higher Education Forum. In recent years, the five Central Asian countries

have successively launched new national development strategies, such as Kazakhstan's Bright Road New Economic Policy, Uzbekistan's New Uzbekistan Plan and Tajikistan.

There are also Kyrgyzstan's „National Development Strategy before 2030“ and Turkmenistan's „revival of the Ancient Silk Road“ strategy. The five Central Asian countries have also actively promoted the alignment of their national development strategies with China's Belt and Road initiative. Inter-organization cooperation can rely on international multilateral organizations such as the UN-Habitat, Industrial Development Organization and UNESCO, develop cooperation models led by these organizations, and at the same time strengthen cooperation between the Chinese Tourism Society and academic institutions in corresponding fields of countries along the Belt and Road. In the cooperation mechanism among universities and disciplines, the „Belt and Road“ university strategic alliance model was established by universities in 47 countries along the Belt and Road in 2015. In the future, universities where conditions permit can refer to the MIT Special Training Program for Urban and Regional Research (SPURS) to explore the establishment of training centers or relevant institutions for tourism professionals in countries along the Belt and Road, so as to form a sustained and stable cooperation mechanism.

3. Cooperation at different levels according to country

Higher education cooperation in the field of tourism between China and the countries along the Silk Road should be based on the policies of both sides. The cooperation should be based on national strategic guidance, with a more detailed docking strategy and long-term cooperation plan. Tourism talent demand in national regions should be the key cooperation area, while at the same time investing in higher education development in the field of tourism. Cooperation should be strengthened with the universities of the abovementioned countries, Africa and Southeast Asia in particular. The regional education quality assessment should also be strengthened by improving the development level of higher education in the field of tourism in the region.

4. Focus on courses, scientific research and projects.

In order to adapt to the differences in educational level and resources of universities in countries along the Silk Road, domestic universities should

further expand the types of cooperation in the process of promoting international collaboration and explore the construction of diversified international curriculums, projects, scientific research and talent training in higher education in the field of tourism (Xingping et al., 2024, p.9). In terms of curriculum cooperation, we will promote joint teaching and credit mutual recognition with relevant universities in the countries along the Silk Road, select distinctive domestic and partner regions as teaching cases, and carry out joint tourism planning and design. In terms of project cooperation, we should focus on tourism industrial parks, historical and cultural heritage protection, and cooperate with the help of the universities along the Belt and Road, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and UNESCO. In terms of scientific research cooperation, guided by solving key technical problems in the field of tourism education along the Belt and Road, we will cooperate with universities along the Belt and Road to carry out technological research and innovation, and actively apply for international cooperation projects such as the Ministry of Science and Technology and the National Natural Science Foundation of China. In terms of talent cooperation, we will strengthen exchanges and visits with universities along the Belt and Road at the level of graduate students, young teachers and scholars, and promote the establishment of bilateral teaching and practice bases. In addition, the form of „project system“ can be adopted, such as regional and national high-level talent training programs, using the China Scholarship Council channels to jointly train master and doctoral students in tourism majors with universities along the Belt and Road.

Conclusion

With distinct service orientation and application characteristics, tourism is closely related to economic and social development. Tourism is particularly important in the „Belt and Road“ initiative because it not only involves cultural exchange and understanding, but is also directly related to regional economic development and international cooperation. In-depth research on the tourism higher education and cooperation between countries along the Silk Road and with China is of great value to the establishment of a higher education community in the field of tourism along the countries of the Silk Road. On the basis of examining the development of tourism and related majors of universities along the countries of the Silk Road and the challenges encountered in cooperation with China, this paper puts forward the discussion of strengthening the cooperation between domestic universities and universities along the Silk

Road in the field of tourism higher education. For the future, domestic tourism academia and industry should understand the importance and the role of the „Belt and Road“, actively participate in the national „Belt and Road“ initiative through scientific research cooperation, project practice and other ways, strengthen the exchanges and cooperation with universities along the „Belt and Road“, so as to lay a solid foundation for the „Belt and Road“ tourism higher education community.

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