

Tourism Management in the Context of Cultural-Tourism Integration: Current Issues and Optimization Strategies

Dongxue Lyu*

Zhejiang Yuexiu University, Shaoxing 312030, Zhejiang, China

**Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.*

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Abstract: The integration of culture and tourism has become a core driver for the high-quality development of China's tourism industry. Meanwhile, the global expansion of integrated cultural-tourism products is crucial for enhancing the nation's international cultural soft power. As a key link connecting the supply of cultural and tourism resources with market demand, the effectiveness of tourism management directly affects the depth of cultural and tourism integration and the success of its global expansion. Currently, tourism management in the context of cultural and tourism integration faces multiple bottlenecks. For instance, insufficient cross departmental coordination in the management system, resulting in weak overall planning for the globalization of cultural tourism; superficial exploration of cultural resources and severe homogenization of cultural tourism products, coupled with inadequate international adaptability; a shortage of interdisciplinary talent possessing cultural interpretation skills, tourism operation experience, and an international perspective; and low levels of international adaptation and digital intelligence within the service system. To address these issues, it is necessary to promote the optimization and upgrading of tourism management by establishing a collaborative and efficient management system; deepening the exploration of cultural resources; innovating products to meet international demand; cultivating interdisciplinary talent; enhancing an internationally oriented intelligent service system; and strengthening communication and risk control mechanisms for the globalization of cultural tourism. This initiative will not only resolve the obstacles to the integrated development of domestic culture and tourism but also provide solid support for the globalization of cultural-tourism, contributing to the high-quality development of the tourism industry and the building of China's cultural soft power.

Keywords: Cultural and tourism integration; Tourism management; Tourism services

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1. Introduction

China's "14th Five-Year Plan for Tourism Development", released by the State Council explicitly advocates

to “adhere to shaping tourism with culture and highlighting culture through tourism, and promote the in-depth integration of culture and tourism”. It positions this integration, along with international exchange and cooperation, as a core component of the high-quality development framework for the tourism industry. Against this backdrop, the role of tourism management has expanded beyond traditional functions like managing tourist sites and providing visitor services. It now includes broader responsibilities such as cultural preservation and innovation, resource integration and optimization, and global engagement.

Consequently, this paper examines the present landscape and challenges of tourism management through the lens of cultural-tourism integration and puts forward specific optimisation strategies. The findings are expected to:

- (1) Improve the quality and promote the upgrading of China’s domestic tourism industry;
- (2) Facilitate the effective implementation of the “cultural-tourism Global Expansion” strategy;
- (3) Support China’s ambition to build a strong cultural soft-power nation.

2. Value empowerment of cultural and tourism integration to tourism management

Cultural and tourism integration is not a simple combination of the two sectors but requires their deep integration. This process reshapes the goals, content, and boundaries of tourism management, giving it new value dimensions.

Cultural and tourism integration has expanded the resource scope of tourism management. Traditional tourism management mostly focuses on tangible resources such as natural landscapes and cultural heritage sites. In the context of cultural and tourism integration, however, cultural resources such as intangible cultural heritage, traditional crafts, and folk festivals are all incorporated into the tourism resource system and become core materials for tourism product development. This requires tourism management to adapt and utilize these resources effectively. While protecting their authenticity, management must convert these cultural resources into experiential and engaging tourism products through innovative methods. At the same time, these distinctive Chinese cultural resources can provide content that supports the entry of Chinese cultural and tourism products into the international market.

Cultural and tourism integration has also driven tourism management to focus more on enhancing the cultural added value of products. Traditional tourism products tend to focus on sightseeing and often lack differentiation. In the context of cultural and tourism integration, there is a growing demand for tourism products that offer more in-depth experiences. By exploring cultural stories, creating immersive settings, and designing interactive elements, tourism products can convey richer cultural meaning. For example, integrating traditional opera performances into scenic tours or transforming intangible cultural heritage skills into experiential workshops are common forms of product innovation within cultural and tourism integration.

Furthermore, cultural and tourism integration is redefining the mission of tourism management. While ensuring operational efficiency and improving tourist satisfaction remain basic goals, tourism management must now also take on significant responsibilities in cultural preservation, social value guidance, and international communication ^[1]. Domestically, through thoughtful planning and well-designed services, tourism management should guide tourists to appreciate the charm of Chinese culture during their experiences, thereby fostering a stronger cultural identity. Internationally, as part of the strategy, tourism management must adapt to international market rules and cultural contexts. Through high-quality, standardized services and targeted communication strategies, it can present a realistic, multi-dimensional, and comprehensive image of China to international tourists, thereby promoting cultural exchange and mutual learning between civilizations.

3. Current situation and problems of tourism management under the background of cultural and tourism integration

3.1. Insufficient synergy in management system and weak coordination in cross-field and “global expansion” initiatives

The advancement of cultural and tourism integration requires collaboration among various departments, including those responsible for culture, tourism, housing and urban-rural development, transportation, and market supervision. Currently, the unclear division of authority and responsibilities among departments, coupled with ineffective collaboration mechanisms, has created bottlenecks that hinder the development of cross-sectoral cultural and tourism projects. For example, developing integrated cultural and tourism projects often involves multiple stages such as land planning and cultural resource protection.

In the field of cultural and tourism global expansion, more active collaboration among the involved entities is needed. However, China currently lacks a unified coordination mechanism for this initiative. As a result, the involved entities including government departments, cultural and tourism enterprises, and social organizations have not yet formed a cohesive effort, leading to fragmented and inefficient use of overseas promotion resources. For instance, some cultural and tourism departments conduct overseas promotional activities independently. However, their analysis of target markets is often insufficient, and due to a lack of resource integration, the impact of these promotions is limited. Similarly, some enterprises' overseas projects may encounter market development challenges and high compliance risks due to insufficient policy support and risk guidance from the government.

3.2. Insufficient product innovation, superficial cultural excavation, and lack of international adaptability

Most current cultural and tourism products remain at the level of simply replicating cultural symbols, lacking a systematic exploration and creative adaptation of the regional culture's essence. For example, some ancient town tourism projects feature only replicated “antique streets” and “identical shops” without designing unique experiences rooted in local history. Similarly, some intangible cultural heritage products are mainly for display and lack interactive elements for tourist participation, hindering a deep understanding of their cultural significance. Such superficial development results not only in significant product homogenization in the domestic market, failing to meet diverse tourist needs, but also fails to effectively convey the richness and depth of Chinese culture in the global context, limiting its appeal to international tourists.

Furthermore, the lack of international adaptability in products poses a major bottleneck for the “cultural-tourism global expansion” strategy. Some products intended for overseas markets are directly transplanted from domestic models without sufficient research into the target markets' cultural preferences, consumption patterns, and regulatory requirements. This creates a mismatch with local needs. For instance, the storytelling approaches in some cultural-themed scenic spots are too reliant on domestic cultural frameworks, making them difficult for international tourists to comprehend. Other services overlook the language preferences and payment systems of international tourists, negatively impacting their experience.

3.3. Shortage of interdisciplinary talents, failing to support integration and “global expansion” initiatives

The integration of culture and tourism and the “global expansion” strategy place higher demands on tourism management professionals. There is a pressing need for interdisciplinary talent equipped with skills in cultural interpretation, tourism operations, an international perspective, and cross-cultural communication. However, the

current supply of such professionals is inadequate. For example:

- (1) University curricula for tourism management majors still emphasize traditional operational knowledge, offering insufficient courses in areas such as cultural heritage conservation, cultural creativity, international cultural tourism market analysis, and cross-cultural service. This results in graduates lacking the necessary skills for cultural innovation and international communication;
- (2) Corporate training programs are underdeveloped. Most companies only provide basic service-oriented training and fail to offer specialized programs addressing the needs of cultural-tourism integration and global expansion, leaving existing staff ill-equipped to handle complex international cultural tourism operations.

The talent shortage is particularly acute in the context of the “global expansion” initiative. Professionals who possess a deep understanding of Chinese culture, are familiar with the rules of the international cultural tourism market, and have multilingual abilities are in short supply. This scarcity constrains the efficient operation of overseas projects and limits their effectiveness as vehicles for cultural exchange.

3.4. Underdeveloped service system with low international adaptability and limited intelligence

China’s domestic tourism service system still faces issues such as a lack of standardization and inattention to detail. For example, some tour guides at scenic spots lack specialized knowledge, resulting in generic and repetitive commentary. In some regions, the quality of supporting services like accommodation and catering is inconsistent, negatively impacting the visitor experience. Furthermore, the service system demonstrates low international adaptability, where some scenic spots and hotels provide services only in Chinese and English, which does not meet the diverse needs of international tourists. There is also a shortage of cross-cultural competence; front-line staff often lack a thorough understanding of the cultural norms and consumption habits of visitors from different countries, which can lead to misunderstandings or disputes.

In addition, a low level of digitalization also constraints the effectiveness of tourism management. Although a few regions have developed and launched smart cultural-tourism platforms, most of these platforms remain at a basic functional level, primarily providing information dissemination and online ticketing. They fail to leverage the full potential of technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data, thereby limiting management efficiency and diminishing the tourist experience.

4. Optimization strategies for tourism management in the context of cultural-tourism integration

To address these challenges, efforts need to be made from multiple dimensions including system, products, talents, and services. This entails not only optimizing the domestic tourism management system to deepen cultural-tourism integration but also enhancing management support for the “cultural-tourism global expansion” initiative. The ultimate goal is to facilitate a synergistic advancement in both domestic quality upgrading and international market expansion.

4.1. Establish a collaborative and efficient management system to enhance strategic coordination for the “global expansion” initiative

The cross-departmental collaboration mechanism must be improved. This involves clearly defining the authority and responsibilities of departments involved in cultural-tourism integration, such as culture, tourism, housing

and urban-rural development, and transportation. Developing cross-departmental responsibility lists, establishing regular joint meetings and an information-sharing platform, and streamlining approval processes for cross-sectoral projects are crucial steps to ensure effective policy implementation.

A dedicated coordination body for the “cultural-tourism global expansion” initiative should be established. Government-led, this body would integrate resources from cultural and tourism bureaus, commerce departments, diplomatic missions, and key enterprises to form a special task force. This task force would be responsible for formulating the overarching strategy for the global initiative, conducting international market risk assessments, coordinating overseas promotion resources, and providing policy support and compliance guidance for participating enterprises.

Furthermore, collaboration among government, industry, academia, and research institutions should be promoted. Partnering with universities and research institutes can provide important intellectual support, including market research and strategic consulting for the global initiative. This will help enterprises avoid ill-prepared or poorly informed international expansion.

4.2. Fostering product innovation and deep cultural interpretation to enhance international appeal

To deepen the excavation and transformation of cultural resources, a dedicated team of cultural experts, tourism planners, and creative designers should be assembled to catalogue regional cultural assets, uncover the historical narratives and spiritual meanings behind them, and seamlessly integrate these elements into tourism experiences. For example, traditional folk culture can be showcased through initiatives such as “folk custom experience days” and “intangible cultural heritage workshops,” allowing tourists to actively participate in cultural creation.

The international adaptability of product design must be strengthened. When developing cultural-tourism products for overseas markets, thorough target-market research should inform adjustments that align with local cultural contexts, consumption habits, and regulatory requirements. Moreover, cultural and tourism enterprises are encouraged to cooperate with overseas institutions to jointly develop cultural and tourism IPs that blend Chinese characteristics with international aesthetics, thereby enhancing the global competitiveness of these products ^[2].

4.3. Cultivate interdisciplinary talent to strengthen intellectual support for integration and global expansion

At the university level, the curriculum of tourism management majors should be restructured to embed courses such as cultural heritage protection, cultural creative design, international cultural tourism marketing, cross-cultural communication, and multilingual services to enhance students’ of cultural literacy and global outlook. Partnerships with cultural and tourism enterprises should be deepened to establish practical-based teaching bases and carry out order-driven talent training, enabling students to participate in the actual operation of cultural and tourism integration projects and overseas assignments to improve their practical competencies.

At the enterprise level, a systematic talent-development and recruitment mechanism is required. Existing employees should receive targeted training covering cultural interpretation, international market rules, cross-cultural services, risk control and management. For key positions, firms should attract senior professionals with experience in international cultural-tourism operations and retain them through equity incentives, clear career pathways and other motivational measures.

At the industry level, a dedicated communication platform for cultural and tourism talent exchange should

be built. Activities such as regular forums, skill competitions and knowledge-sharing events can facilitate the dissemination of best practices in integration and global expansion. Meanwhile, improve the evaluation system for cultural and tourism talents by incorporating cultural innovation capabilities and international communication skills into the evaluation indicators, thereby encouraging talents to develop in an interdisciplinary direction ^[3].

4.4. Enhance the service system to raise internationalization and intelligence levels

Service standardization and international adaptation should be strengthened. Comprehensive service standards for the integration of culture and tourism need to be developed, incorporating key service processes, such as scenic-spot interpretation, accommodation and catering services, and transportation coordination, into unified and standardized management systems ^[4]. For international visitors, the scope of language services should be expanded through the installation of multilingual signage and the deployment of trained service personnel at scenic areas, hotels, transportation hubs, and other critical points. To further enhance payment convenience for international tourists, measures facilitating cross-border payments should be refined, including the construction of platforms compatible with international credit cards and mainstream global payment systems. In addition, cross-cultural training for service staff should be intensified to improve their understanding of diverse cultural customs, etiquette norms, and consumption preferences, thereby enabling the provision of more tailored and responsive services.

An intelligent cultural and tourism service system should be developed. Resources from existing smart cultural and tourism platforms ought to be integrated, and platform functions upgraded to deliver higher-quality digital services. For instance, intelligent service platforms can provide itinerary planning, scenic-spot navigation, and multilingual interpretation. Moreover, digital human systems can be introduced as new carriers for cultural communication at scenic sites. By modeling historical figures and cultural IP images, these digital humans can act as storytellers, conveying historical origins, cultural narratives, and folk legends to visitors. Interactive features, such as voice-based communication and motion-enabled scenarios, may be incorporated to create more immersive and engaging visitor experiences. A dedicated sub-platform for overseas smart cultural and tourism services should be established to address the needs of international tourists more precisely. This sub-platform should be connected to mainstream social media and tourism service platforms in target international markets, thereby enhancing the accuracy, relevance, and effectiveness of services provided to global travelers.

4.5. Improve the communication and risk control mechanisms

On one hand, a systematic international communication matrix should be established. Major global social media platforms should be strategically utilized, with differentiated communication approaches designed to reflect the cultural contexts and audience preferences of specific target markets. The meanings and values of Chinese culture can be disseminated through high-quality content, such as cultural short films, travel vlogs, and demonstrations of intangible cultural-heritage practices. Drawing on international best practices, diversified promotional activities, including China Cultural and Tourism Weeks and overseas exhibitions of cultural-tourism intellectual-property products, may be organized to enhance the visibility and influence of China's cultural-tourism image and enable international audiences to gain a more nuanced understanding of the country. In parallel, the role of civic communication should be fully leveraged by encouraging overseas Chinese, international students, and cultural-tourism practitioners to serve as informal cultural ambassadors. Their authentic experience-sharing and word-of-mouth communication can deepen global perceptions of China's cultural-tourism brand and strengthen international recognition ^[5].

On the other hand, a risk-control framework for the global expansion of the cultural-tourism sector should be established. Risk-assessment efforts should be strengthened, particularly with respect to international market regulations, cultural differences, and economic volatility. Early-warning services should be provided for enterprises engaged in overseas expansion, along with professional guidance on risk-response strategies. Cultural and tourism enterprises should be encouraged to develop compliance management systems for overseas projects to ensure that all initiatives align with local laws, regulations, and environmental protection standards. An emergency-response mechanism for overseas services should be instituted so that, in cases where tourists encounter safety incidents, service disputes, or other related problems, enterprises can rapidly coordinate with local institutions to resolve issues. Such measures help safeguard tourist rights and interests while protecting the brand image of China's cultural-tourism industry.

5. Conclusion

Against the backdrop of deepening cultural-tourism integration and the gradual implementation of the cultural-tourism “going-global” strategy, tourism management urgently needs optimization and upgrading. By establishing a collaborative and efficient management system, promoting product cultural innovation and international adaptation, cultivating interdisciplinary talents, improving the service system, and strengthening the support mechanism for global expansion, we can enhance the effectiveness of domestic tourism management. This not only facilitates the full integration of cultural and tourism resources and the release of their value but also provides solid guarantees for the global expansion of the cultural-tourism sector. Ultimately, this will enable Chinese cultural and tourism products to showcase their unique charm in the international market, promote the international dissemination of Chinese culture, and advance cultural exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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