

Research on the Challenges and Transformation Path of Tour Guide Profession in the New Era

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Abstract: With the sharp increase in life pressures, holiday travel has become a popular choice for many. As an indispensable role in tourism, tour guides can significantly enhance the tourist experience and showcase the allure of various scenic spots. In the new era, to achieve sustainable development and positive transformation, tour guides face significant challenges. This paper explores these challenges and proposes potential transformation paths for the tour guide profession in Nanchang, a city with a rich history, as it strives to build a strong city brand.

Keywords: New era; Tour guide occupation; Challenges; Transition path

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1. Introduction

In 2021, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism issued the *Action Plan for Strengthening the Construction and Management of Tour Guides (2021–2023)*. This document emphasizes the crucial role of tour guides in the tourism industry and the promotion of socialist spiritual civilization. As a city with a long history, Nanchang aims to build a strong city brand, which is closely intertwined with the tour guide profession. This paper delves into the significance of tour guide career transformation, identifies the challenges faced by the profession, and proposes specific transformation paths to facilitate the effective transformation of tour guides in Nanchang.

2. The significance of tour guide career transformation in the new era

2.1. Improving the quality and experience of tourism services to meet diversified needs

Traditionally, tour guides have primarily served as narrators of historical sites and itinerary planners. However, as the tourism industry evolves, tourists' expectations have diversified, demanding more in-depth, personalized experiences that encompass ecological exploration and cultural immersion^[1-3]. To meet these changing demands, tour guides must undergo a transformation, positioning themselves as cultural ambassadors with a

strong foundation of professional knowledge and keen market insights. By tailoring tourism plans to individual preferences, tour guides can facilitate cultural exchange and elevate the overall tourist experience. This professional transformation not only enhances service quality but also propels the rapid development of the tourism industry ^[4].

2.2. Promoting the deep integration of tourism and culture, and facilitating cultural heritage and innovation

Tourism serves as a vehicle for cultural transmission, and tour guides play a crucial role in disseminating cultural knowledge. In the contemporary era, tour guides should delve into the exploration of regional culture, folk art, and other cultural elements to showcase local heritage. By employing innovative interpretive techniques, such as utilizing digital technology and multimedia, tour guides can present cultural content in a visually engaging and interactive manner, fostering a deeper appreciation for cultural heritage. The integration of tourism and culture can enhance the cultural soft power of tourism destinations, boost their attractiveness, and accelerate local tourism development ^[5].

2.3. Adapting to industry trends, enhancing career competitiveness, and ensuring sustainable development

The rapid advancement of science and technology, particularly big data and artificial intelligence, is reshaping the tourism industry. The emergence of new tourism models, such as smart tourism and online tourism, presents both opportunities and challenges for tour guides. To remain competitive, tour guides must continuously learn and adapt to the latest technological advancements, such as digital interpretation techniques. By honing their professional skills and providing high-quality services, tour guides can secure a sustainable career trajectory. Moreover, the transformation of the tour guide profession can contribute to the construction of a robust tourism ecosystem and promote the healthy development of the tourism industry ^[6].

3. Challenges faced by the tour guide profession in the new era

3.1. Challenges brought by changes in the social environment

As of December 31, 2023, the number of full-time tour guides in China's travel agencies had significantly decreased compared to 2019. While the tourism industry has gradually recovered in 2023, there remains a significant gap in tourist numbers and tourism income compared to 2019. In particular, inbound and outbound tourism is still in a low period, leading to insufficient work for outbound tour leaders and inbound receptionists. This prolonged period of reduced workload may erode the confidence of full-time tour guides, potentially prompting them to seek alternative employment ^[7].

3.2. Challenges posed by the widespread use of artificial intelligence

The rapid advancement of science and technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI) and big data, has led to their widespread application in museums and tourist attractions. AI-powered interpretation systems can replace human tour guides, posing a significant challenge to their survival. Many museums, tourist attractions, and cultural sites globally have implemented virtual browsing, augmented reality (AR) scene reduction, and AI-powered interpretation services. For instance, the Shanghai Museum has developed a smart guide service system that can automatically display 3D images of cultural relics based on tourist location, providing voice,

image, and animation explanations, and even interactive games to enhance visitor engagement ^[8]. Similarly, the Nanyue King Museum in Guangzhou has introduced AR smart glasses and VR stereoscopic projection technology to immerse visitors in the excavation and restoration process of cultural relics. In Spain, an app has been developed to provide virtual tours and real-time explanations of archaeological museums. The widespread adoption of AI technology at home and abroad has intensified the employment challenges faced by full-time tour guides, necessitating the exploration of effective measures to improve their situation.

3.3. The challenge of the imperfect salary system for tour guides

China's Tourism Law prohibits travel agencies from engaging in unfair practices such as low-cost group tours, enticing tourists, or receiving kickbacks through shopping arrangements or additional tourism projects. While this regulation aims to regulate the tour guide salary system, it also directly affects the income levels of tour guides. The current salary system for tour guides is far from perfect.

Firstly, the salary structure is not sufficiently scientific. Tour guides often rely on commissions from group tours to supplement their income, leading to potential conflicts with tourists and negatively impacting the overall tourism experience. Secondly, the income of tour guides is highly unstable due to the seasonal nature of the tourism industry. During peak seasons, their workload increases, and their income is relatively stable; however, during off-seasons, they may face significant income reductions, relying solely on basic salaries to sustain themselves. Thirdly, the salary system lacks differentiation based on factors such as experience, language skills, and expertise, limiting the career advancement opportunities for full-time tour guides and hindering the development of the tourism industry ^[9,10].

4. Transformation path of the tour guide profession in the new era

4.1. Adapting tourism policies to respond to changing circumstances

The new era presents the tourism industry with numerous changes and opportunities driven by factors such as economic globalization, technological advancements, and the concept of sustainable development. Tour guides, a crucial component of the tourism industry and its service delivery, face an urgent need for career transformation to meet evolving demands. This transition should prioritize responding to and aligning with tourism strategies to adapt to the current market situation. Specifically, tour guide career transformations can be explored through the following means:

Firstly, promoting professional development through policy guidance. To facilitate the career transformation of tour guides, the government can enact policies that encourage professional growth. This could involve establishing a tour guide qualification certification system, incentivizing those in the profession to actively obtain relevant certificates, and ultimately enhancing the capabilities of the entire tour guide workforce. Additionally, strengthening tour guide training programs is crucial, particularly with a focus on improving cross-cultural communication skills to cater to the needs of the international tourism market ^[11].

Secondly, integrating sustainable concepts into traditional tourism practices. Sustainable development has become a global consensus in the new era. Tour guide profession transformation necessitates integrating this concept. Tour guides should prioritize the harmonious blending of ecological protection, economic development, and cultural preservation. This involves designing environmentally friendly tourism routes with lower carbon footprints, offering tourists choices such as eco-friendly accommodation and food options,

encouraging participation in community cultural experiences, and ultimately contributing to the healthy development of the tourism industry. Tour guides must also grasp ecological protection concepts, conveying them to tourists and fostering environmentally conscious behavior amongst visitors.

Thirdly, embracing digital transformation to promote tourism industry development. Governments should actively promote the digital transformation of the tourism industry, accelerating the pace of change to equip tour guides with more convenient and efficient tools that enhance the quality of tourism services. By building smart tourism systems, real-time travel information can be shared, itineraries can be adjusted, and services can be improved. Furthermore, the government should actively promote the development of tourism big data and cloud computing technologies. This will provide tour guides with access to more accurate market analyses and insights into passenger demands, enabling them to develop more precise marketing strategies that meet the needs of a changing landscape ^[12].

4.2. Application of artificial intelligence, online and offline integration

The rapid advancement of AI technology is driving the intelligent transformation of various industries, including tourism. To thrive in this evolving landscape, traditional tour guides must not only adapt to change but also actively embrace AI-powered solutions.

One promising approach is the development of intelligent guide systems. Travel agencies can leverage AI technology to create intelligent systems that can recommend attractions based on tourist preferences and provide automated narrations about historical sites. For example, the Rope Pagoda scenic area utilizes an intelligent navigation system that allows visitors to customize their routes based on their interests. The system can also analyze visitor flow to prevent overcrowding and enhance the overall tourist experience.

Another strategy involves establishing an integrated online and offline service model. In the digital age, tour guides should leverage online platforms, such as social media and live streaming, to connect with tourists and offer services like travel reservations and cultural insights. However, offline services remain crucial. By systematically analyzing customer preferences, travel agencies can proactively reach out to tourists and provide tailored tourism services, improving overall service accuracy. This synergistic approach of combining online and offline services can enhance tourist satisfaction and expand opportunities for tour guides ^[13].

4.3. Practicing cultural-tourism integration and delving into cultural connotation

The integration of culture and tourism is an inevitable trend in contemporary tourism development. Tour guide career transformation must align with this trend to meet the evolving needs of the industry. The sustainable development of the tour guide profession is inextricably linked to a deep understanding and exploration of the cultural significance of scenic spots. Tour guides should delve into the historical context, development, and cultural value of different locations to facilitate cultural heritage and innovation. To achieve this, several key strategies can be implemented:

Firstly, excavating regional characteristic culture. Each scenic spot possesses a unique cultural identity shaped by its historical development. For example, the Tengwang Pavilion, renowned for its poetic imagery, stands along the Ganjiang River, witnessing the evolution of Nanchang since the Tang Dynasty. Visitors can appreciate the harmonious blend of ancient and modern elements while exploring the rich history and culture associated with the pavilion. To enhance the visitor experience, tour guides should delve into the cultural heritage of such sites, including collecting and sharing ancient verses and historical anecdotes.

Secondly, intensifies the development of cultural and creative products. To attract more tourists and promote cultural heritage, the development of cultural and creative products has become a popular strategy for many tourist attractions. By collaborating with travel agencies and artisans, scenic spots can create unique cultural and creative products that reflect local characteristics. For instance, the Bada Shanren Memorial Hall has developed a range of cultural and creative products, such as the Bada Shanren Lanting calligraphy revolving lamp, the Bada Shanren seal series Rubik's Cube, and the Bada Shanren art series Dupont bag. These products not only showcase the site's cultural heritage but also serve as effective vehicles for disseminating local culture [14,15].

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the career development and transformation of tour guides are inevitable in the evolving tourism landscape. To adapt to changing societal needs, tour guides must undergo significant transformation. This paper has analyzed the importance of tour guide career transformation and identified key challenges faced by the profession. To address these challenges, specific transformation paths have been proposed, including:

- (1) Adjusting tourism policies to respond to changing circumstances: Implementing policies that encourage professional development, prioritizing sustainability, and promoting digital transformation.
- (2) Leveraging artificial intelligence and integrating online and offline services: Utilizing AI-powered tools to enhance the tourist experience and adopting a blended approach to service delivery.
- (3) Practicing cultural-tourism integration and delving into cultural connotation: Exploring and showcasing regional cultural heritage, developing cultural and creative products, and fostering a deeper understanding of local culture among tourists.

By embracing these strategies, tour guides can position themselves as valuable assets in the tourism industry, contributing to the overall development and sustainability of the sector.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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