Research on the Training Path of Compound Talents in Tourism Management Major under the New Liberal Arts Vision

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Abstract: The New Liberal Arts initiative is driving the transformation of liberal arts education toward interdisciplinary, digital, and practice-oriented approaches. Meanwhile, the deep integration and digital upgrading of the cultural tourism industry have imposed compound competency requirements on tourism management professionals, encompassing "cultural heritage + digital technology + creative operations + service empathy." Currently, the tourism management discipline faces challenges such as talent cultivation lagging behind industry demands, rigid curriculum systems, and loose industry-education integration, leading to structural imbalances in talent supply and demand. Grounded in the core principles of the New Liberal Arts and aligned with the talent needs of the cultural tourism industry, this paper explores practical pathways for cultivating compound talents in tourism management through five dimensions: restructuring training objectives, optimizing curriculum systems, innovating teaching models, strengthening faculty development, and improving evaluation mechanisms. These insights provide references for educational reform in university tourism management programs.

Keywords: New Liberal Arts; Tourism Management; Compound Talents; Training Path; Cultural-Tourism Integration

1. Introduction

As a pivotal component of the "Four New" initiative, the New Liberal Arts program has transcended traditional disciplinary boundaries by emphasizing interdisciplinary integration, the convergence of technology and humanities, and the synergy of theory and practice [1]. It aims to cultivate innovative, versatile professionals capable of meeting the demands of modern societal development. With China's cultural tourism industry transitioning from "sightseeing check-ins" to "cultural immersion and personalized experiences," digital technologies such as AI, VR/AR, and big data have deeply integrated with the sector, giving rise to new business models like smart tourism, cultural tourism IP operations, and metaverse attractions. The industry's talent requirements have evolved from traditional service and management roles to a cross-disciplinary composite model encompassing "technology, culture, creativity, and operations." According to projections by the National Modern Cultural Tourism Industry-Industry-Education Integration Community, the total demand for skilled professionals in the cultural tourism sector will reach 28 million by 2025, with over 60% of the positions requiring composite skills in digital operations and cultural-tourism integration services [2].

As the cornerstone of cultural and tourism talent development, the traditional training model for tourism management programs has become inadequate for industry transformation. Current academic programs face challenges including ambiguous

training objectives, rigid curricula, insufficient digital teaching, and inadequate industry-academia collaboration. These issues result in graduates with limited professional skills and weak digital competencies, failing to meet the multifaceted demands of cultural and tourism enterprises [3]. This creates a supply-demand mismatch where businesses struggle to recruit while students face employment challenges. In this context, exploring interdisciplinary talent development pathways for tourism management through the lens of New Liberal Arts is not only a necessary response to national initiatives but also a critical measure to resolve talent shortages and drive high-quality industry growth.

2. Core Competency Dimensions of Compound Talents in Tourism Management under the Perspective of New Liberal Arts

The new liberal arts emphasize the trinity of "value shaping, knowledge imparting, and ability cultivation" [4]. Combined with the essence of experience economy and the characteristics of digital transformation in the cultural tourism industry, the compound talents of tourism management must possess the following four-dimensional core competencies, which constitute a mutually supportive and organically unified ability system [5].

2.1. Cultural Foundation: The Core Foundation of Compound Talents

The essence of the cultural tourism industry lies in "culture as the soul, tourism as the body," where cultural depth serves as the defining characteristic that sets tourism management professionals apart from others [6]. From the perspective of New Liberal Arts, cultural depth transcends mere knowledge accumulation-it demands profound capabilities in cultural exploration, deconstruction, and transformation [7]. First, it requires systematic understanding of local resources like regional history, folk traditions, intangible cultural heritage, and revolutionary culture, enabling the uncovering of spiritual values and narrative cores behind these traditions [8]. Second, it involves the ability to commercialize cultural elements, converting abstract concepts into experiential, shareable, and consumable products such as immersive performances, cultural merchandise, and experiential projects. Third, it demands cultural adaptability-understanding the distinct needs of different consumer groups (Gen Z, seniors, new middle class, etc.) to create personalized cultural experiences [9]. Whether in cultural tourism IP design, scenic spot interpretation, or tourism planning, cultural depth forms the foundation for crafting exceptional experiences. Tourism services lacking this cultural foundation will ultimately become soulless entities.

2.2. Digital Technology: A Universal Tool for Compound Talents

With the coverage rate of smart tourism applications reaching 85%, digital technology has become the universal infrastructure of the cultural and tourism industry, and digital technical capabilities have evolved from "bonus points" to "essential requirements" for versatile talents [10]. Under the perspective of new liberal arts, digital technical capabilities are divided into two levels: the basic application level applies to all positions, including the use of big data analysis tools (such as SPSS, Python basics), operation of smart devices (AI customer service, virtual tours), operation of new media platforms (TikTok, Xiaohongshu), and the ability to integrate online and offline services; the professional practical level applies to technical positions, including the practical application of VR/AR/XR technologies, in-depth analysis of tourism big data and user profiling, the construction and maintenance of smart scenic area systems, and the ability to integrate AI with cultural and tourism scenarios. The core of digital technical capabilities lies in the integration of "technology + scenario," rather than mere technical accumulation, requiring talents to use AI algorithms to achieve "personalized services for each individual" and employ VR technology to create immersive cultural experiences [11].

2.3. Creative Operation: Value Creation Ability of Compound Talents

The core competition in the cultural tourism industry lies in product innovation and operational excellence, where creative operational capabilities serve as the key to converting cultural and technological elements into commercial value. The New Liberal Arts Education emphasizes innovative thinking and practical skills. For tourism management professionals, their creative operational competencies encompass three key sub-capabilities: First, creative design skills that break traditional frameworks to develop differentiated cultural tourism products through cultural-technological integration, such as immersive scenario-based games in scenic areas, culturally themed mystery boxes, and metaverse-themed attractions. Second, commercial operational capabilities that combine market sensitivity with data analysis to identify consumer needs through big data insights, optimize product positioning and profit models, and achieve a balance between cultural and commercial value. Third, resource integration skills that consolidate cross-domain resources including culture, technology, finance, and media to drive the implementation and iteration of cultural tourism projects. These competencies are also the core requirements for high-level positions such as Cultural Tourism IP Operations Director and Smart Cultural Tourism Product Manager.

2.4. Service Empathy: The Warmth of Compound Talents

The cultural tourism industry is fundamentally human-centric, where emotional connection forms the core of the experience. Empathetic service capability is an essential quality for versatile professionals. The New Liberal Arts approach emphasizes humanistic values and social responsibility. For tourism management professionals, this empathy manifests in three key aspects: First, user-centric thinking-always considering issues from tourists 'perspectives, focusing on their needs, preferences, and emotional touchpoints rather than mere technical displays or self-expression. Second, meticulous attention to detail-paying close attention to every aspect of travel planning, scenic spot interpretation, and post-trip feedback to ensure comprehensive care. Third, emotional awareness and communication skills-being adept at sensing tourists' mood shifts, resolving conflicts through effective communication, and enhancing both experience and reputation. This empathetic service capability distinguishes professionals from purely technical or creative talents, serving as the cornerstone for high-quality cultural tourism development.

3. Current Status and Issues in the Cultivation of Compound Talents in Tourism Management

3.1. Ambiguous talent development objectives and misalignment with industry demands

Most tourism management programs in Chinese universities still focus on producing "traditional tourism service professionals," failing to meet the demands of new liberal arts education and the cultural tourism industry's transformation. These programs lack clear definitions of interdisciplinary competencies such as cultural literacy, digital technology, and creative operations, overemphasizing theoretical knowledge while neglecting innovation and practical skills. Although some institutions promote the "interdisciplinary talent" initiative, they fail to specify actionable competency indicators or training modules, resulting in vague educational objectives. Research indicates that over 60% of cultural tourism enterprises identify graduates' "single-skilled structure" as the core issue, while 45% report "knowledge disconnect" between academic training and workplace realities.

3.2. The rigid curriculum system and insufficient interdisciplinary integration

The curriculum system serves as the core vehicle for talent cultivation. However, the current tourism management program exhibits three critical shortcomings: Firstly, outdated course content remains dominant, with traditional subjects like "Introduction to Tourism Studies," "Travel Agency Management," and "Hotel Management" still dominating the curriculum. There is a notable lack of cutting-edge courses that

incorporate digital innovation, creative approaches, and interdisciplinary integration, particularly in emerging fields such as smart tourism, cultural tourism IP operations, and sustainable tourism. Secondly, the curriculum remains rigidly confined to management and economics disciplines, lacking interdisciplinary connections with literature, history, art, and computer science. This creates barriers for students to develop a comprehensive cross-disciplinary knowledge network. Thirdly, the curriculum updates are delayed, with textbooks requiring extended revision cycles. This hinders timely integration of new technologies and theories like AI, VR, and big data, resulting in a knowledge gap between academic learning and industry practices. For instance, fewer than 30% of universities offer courses such as "Tourism Big Data Analysis" and "Smart Tourism Technology," while even fewer provide specialized courses like "Cultural Tourism IP Operations" and "VR Applications in Tourism."

3.3. Traditional teaching methods lead to suboptimal practical learning outcomes

The current teaching model predominantly relies on "theoretical lectures + case analysis," lacking interactivity, practicality, and innovation, which hinders the cultivation of students 'interdisciplinary application skills and creative thinking. Firstly, digital teaching is insufficient, as most instructors still use traditional blackboard writing or PPT presentations, with inadequate application of online teaching platforms, virtual simulation technologies, and big data tools. This results in superficial development of students' digital competencies. Secondly, practical training remains superficial, primarily limited to traditional internship placements like hotel internships and travel agency rotations. There is a lack of practical projects related to emerging sectors such as smart cultural tourism and cultural tourism innovation, and the process lacks effective guidance and evaluation, making it difficult to achieve a closed-loop transformation between theory and practice. Thirdly, the integration of industry, academia, research, and application remains loose. School-enterprise collaborations often remain at superficial levels, such as "internship base plaques" and "expert lectures," lacking in-depth project partnerships and collaborative education mechanisms. Enterprises show insufficient enthusiasm in talent cultivation, failing to translate real industry demands into teaching content.

3.4. The faculty structure is monolithic with insufficient interdisciplinary capabilities

The faculty serves as the cornerstone of talent development, yet current tourism management educators exhibit pronounced "single-discipline" characteristics: Firstly, their academic backgrounds are predominantly traditional humanities disciplines like tourism management, economics, and management studies, with few possessing interdisciplinary expertise in computer science, art design, or history, making them ill-equipped to teach cross-disciplinary courses. Secondly, many lack systematic digital literacy training, demonstrating inadequate proficiency in emerging technologies such as AI, big data, and VR, which hinders their ability to effectively guide students' digital practices. Thirdly, most teachers have long focused on theoretical instruction without frontline experience in cultural tourism enterprises, resulting in insufficient understanding of emerging industry models and job roles, leading to a disconnect between academic content and real-world applications. Surveys reveal that only 25% of faculty hold interdisciplinary qualifications, while 30% have work experience in cultural tourism sectors, falling short of the requirements for cultivating versatile professionals.

3.5. Rigid Evaluation Mechanism Hindering Quality Assurance in Training

The current talent evaluation system for tourism management programs remains overly reliant on "knowledge-based assessments," presenting three critical flaws: First, the evaluation framework is overly teacher-centric, with assessments primarily conducted by faculty through classroom lectures and written exams, while excluding stakeholders like industry professionals, students, and the broader community. Second, the assessment

content is narrowly focused on theoretical knowledge retention, neglecting to evaluate interdisciplinary competencies such as cultural adaptation, digital application, and creative operations. Third, the evaluation methods are rigidly fixed, predominantly using summative assessments like final exams and course papers, lacking formative and practical skill evaluations that fail to comprehensively reflect students' overall competence and innovative capabilities. This rigid mechanism fosters a culture where students prioritize theory over practice and grades over skills, hindering the development of the core competencies required for versatile professionals.

4. The Path of Cultivating Compound Talents in Tourism Management under the Perspective of New Liberal Arts

4.1. Reconstructing Training Objectives: Anchoring on Compound Competency Orientation

Guided by the New Liberal Arts principle of 'cross-disciplinary integration, technology empowerment, and value creation,' and aligned with the talent demands of the cultural tourism industry, the Tourism Management program has redefined its educational objectives. It aims to cultivate versatile and innovative professionals with a profound cultural foundation, digital literacy, and exceptional creative operational and service empathy skills. These professionals will be equipped to adapt to emerging trends in smart cultural tourism, cultural-tourism integration, and sustainable tourism, while embracing a global perspective and social responsibility.

Educational objectives should be refined into actionable competency frameworks: The cultural dimension encompasses cultural resource awareness, cultural transformation and application, and cultural adaptation service capabilities; the digital technology dimension covers foundational digital tool application, professional digital technology implementation, and technology-scenario integration; the creative operations dimension includes product design innovation, business management, and cross-domain resource integration; the service empathy dimension involves user demand analysis, meticulous service execution, and emotional communication coordination. Furthermore, regional industrial characteristics should guide differentiated training orientations: Eastern universities may prioritize "digital cultural tourism + premium services", central regions should focus on "cultural-tourism integration + traditional service upgrades", while western regions should emphasize "ecotourism + rural cultural tourism".

4.2. Optimization of Curriculum System: Constructing Interdisciplinary Integration Modules

Break the barriers of traditional curriculum system, construct the three-dimensional curriculum system of "basic module + cross module + practice module", and realize the coordinated cultivation of "knowledge-ability-competence".

Core Module: Building Foundational Competencies. Retaining core foundational courses such as "Introduction to Tourism Studies" and "Tourism Economics," while introducing new courses like "Cultural Tourism Studies" and "Tourism Ethics" to strengthen cultural heritage and social responsibility. Offering general education courses including "Digital Literacy Fundamentals" and "Python Basics" to cultivate digital thinking and essential skills. Cross-disciplinary Module: Enhancing Interdisciplinary Integration. Integrating three major fields-humanities, digital technologies, and cultural tourism industry-through four cross-disciplinary course modules: Cultural Creativity (Cultural Tourism IP Operations, Intangible Cultural Heritage Experience Design, Immersive Planning), Digital Technology (Tourism Big Data Analysis, Smart Scenic Area Systems, VR Cultural Tourism Applications), Operations Management (Cultural Tourism Project Planning, Digital Marketing, Sustainable Tourism Management), and Service Enhancement (Customized Tourism Planning, Cross-Cultural Communication, Emergency Response). Establishing a dynamic "Industry Demand-Course Module" mapping mechanism to update course content in response to emerging industry trends, such as introducing cutting-edge courses like "Metaverse Cultural Tourism" and "Cultural

Tourism Live Streaming Operations." Practical Module: Promoting Knowledge-Practice Integration. Building a three-tiered practical system: Basic Practice (cognitive internships, service skill training), Professional Practice (position-based training at industry-academia collaboration bases for smart scenic area operations and cultural tourism IP planning), and Innovative Practice (real-world project implementation through corporate collaborations, cultural tourism entrepreneurship competitions, and rural tourism planning), transforming industry demands into actionable tasks.

4.3. Innovative Teaching Models: Promoting Digitalization and Practical Transformation

Digital teaching models are revolutionizing classroom education. The "online + offline" blended learning approach leverages virtual simulation platforms and digital cultural tourism labs to deliver immersive experiences. For instance, VR technology recreates historical settings for students to practice explanations and service skills in virtual environments, while big data analytics tools process real tourism data to develop data analysis capabilities. Interdisciplinary virtual teaching teams integrate computer science, art, and history faculty to break classroom boundaries. Project-driven pedagogy strengthens competency development. Guided by real-world cultural tourism projects, "project-based courses" enable students to complete full-cycle practices from product conception to operational implementation in teams. A prime example is the "Rural Cultural Tourism IP Development" project with a cultural tourism group, where students integrate cultural resources, apply digital technologies, and design operational plans to achieve deep integration of "project chain - competency chain - knowledge chain".

The industry-academia integration model establishes a seamless talent development framework through school-enterprise collaboration. Inspired by Hubei University's "Dual Integration and Five-Dimensional Synergy" approach, this initiative creates a tripartite platform involving universities, governments, and enterprises. Universities design curricula and develop faculty, while governments provide policy support and research guidance. Enterprises contribute practical training bases, real-world projects, and industry experts. A dual-mentor system assigns both academic advisors from universities and technical mentors from enterprises to guide students throughout their learning and practice. The order-based training program collaborates with enterprises to develop customized training plans for critical positions, achieving the goal of "onboarding as enrollment and employment upon graduation."

4.4. Building a Faculty Team: Creating a Multidisciplinary Teaching Team

Optimize faculty structure by recruiting interdisciplinary talents. Develop a cross-disciplinary talent recruitment plan, prioritizing hiring teachers with backgrounds in computer science, art design, history, and related fields to strengthen interdisciplinary course instruction. Encourage in-house faculty to collaborate with colleagues from other disciplines in teaching and research, fostering cross-disciplinary teaching capabilities. Enhance professional development through systematic training. Establish a dual-track training mechanism combining "digital skills + industry practice," organizing teachers to participate in AI, big data, VR, and other technology training to improve digital teaching competencies. Implement the "Teacher Industry Practice Program," requiring teachers to complete at least three months of on-the-job training in cultural and tourism enterprises annually to gain deep insights into industry trends and job requirements. Invite corporate technical experts and industry leaders to participate in faculty training, sharing practical experience.

Establish a sharing mechanism to achieve faculty collaboration. Develop a shared faculty database comprising "in-house faculty + industry experts," where industry experts participate in course instruction, project guidance, and evaluation, while in-house faculty provide theoretical support and research services to enterprises. This forms a faculty structure characterized by "mutual penetration and complementary advantages."

4.5. Improving the Evaluation Mechanism: Establishing a Multi-Dimensional Evaluation System

The evaluation system adopts a multi-stakeholder approach, integrating diverse participants. A four-dimensional framework of "university + enterprise + student + society" is established: universities focus on assessing theoretical knowledge and foundational skills, enterprises evaluate practical competencies and job fit, students conduct self-assessment and peer reviews, while society provides feedback through graduate employment quality and industry reputation. The evaluation content is comprehensive, covering interdisciplinary competencies. It includes not only theoretical knowledge but also cultural adaptation, digital technology application, creative design, and service empathy. A "competency portfolio" is created to document students' performance in project practices, competitions, and internships, reflecting their growth process. The evaluation methods emphasize both process and outcome, adopting a comprehensive approach of "formative assessment + summative evaluation + practical achievement evaluation." Formative assessment accounts for no less than 40%, including classroom performance, project progress, and teamwork. Summative evaluation combines "theoretical exams + practical assessments," while practical achievement evaluation primarily relies on project reports, creative proposals, and corporate feedback. A dynamic adjustment mechanism is established to optimize evaluation criteria based on industry demands and training outcomes.

5. Conclusion and Outlook

The development of New Liberal Arts provides a pivotal opportunity for reforming tourism management education, while the digital transformation and deep integration of the cultural tourism industry create an urgent demand for interdisciplinary professionals. To cultivate such talents, the discipline must be guided by the core principles of New Liberal Arts, focusing on four key competencies: cultural heritage, digital technology, creative operations, and service empathy. By restructuring training objectives, optimizing curricula, innovating teaching methods, building faculty teams, and refining evaluation mechanisms, the field can overcome current challenges in talent development.

In the future, the cultivation of tourism management professionals should focus on three key trends: First, the deep integration of technology and education, further promoting the application of new technologies such as AI and the metaverse in teaching to create intelligent educational environments. Second, precise alignment between regions and industries, tailoring training programs to the unique characteristics of cultural and tourism sectors in different areas to achieve accurate matching between talent supply and demand. Third, the synergy of internationalization and localization, fostering a global perspective while strengthening local cultural identity and transformation capabilities. Through continuous reforms, the tourism management discipline will cultivate more versatile professionals who meet the demands of the new era, providing solid talent support for the high-quality development of the cultural and tourism industry.

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