

Research on Strategies to Enhance the Trade Promotion Function of Dalian International Exhibitions

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Abstract: *The exhibition sector in China is advancing positively, as evidenced by the official release of Vision 2035 and the Outline of the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for the National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China. The Outline of the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan specifically highlights the importance of developing the convention and exhibition industry, advocating for several key initiatives: the deepening of reforms and the opening-up of the service sector; the promotion of integrated development within productive service industries; the encouragement of both domestic and international dual circulation; the enhancement of import-export synergies; and the advancement of the convention and exhibition industry itself. A primary emphasis is placed on fostering the synergistic development of imports and exports, as well as promoting dual circulation on both domestic and international fronts. The transformation of Dalian's convention and exhibition industry is particularly crucial, as the sector is evolving beyond traditional offline events. The emergence of online conventions and exhibitions is poised to disrupt conventional formats, thereby enhancing the overall development of the industry and improving the quality of services offered. This transition is expected to lead to increased service efficiency and quality, ultimately establishing a new convention and exhibition industry framework characterized by high quality, high efficiency, an optimized structure, and robust competitiveness.*

Keywords: *Dalian; International Exhibitions; Trade Promotion Function*

1. Status of the Development of International Exhibitions in Dalian

1.1. Exhibitions serve as a catalyst for regional economic development

As an integral aspect of the modern service industry, the exhibition sector significantly contributes to industrial advancement, promotes openness, facilitates investment and trade, enhances urban marketing, addresses community needs, and stimulates consumer spending. This sector has become a pivotal force in propelling the economic growth of Dalian, thereby augmenting the city's prominence and influence. Empirical studies examining the interplay between the convention and exhibition industry and urban development reveal a strong correlation between exhibitions and industrial innovation and upgrading, demonstrating a considerable spillover effect on local industrial progress^[1]. The evolution of the convention and exhibition industry in Dalian commenced earlier than in many other regions. In 1994, Dalian became the first city in Chinese mainland to articulate the ambition of becoming an internationally recognized exhibition city, emphasizing specialization, marketization, and internationalization. With advantageous natural conditions and a rich legacy in the exhibition sector, Dalian has garnered numerous accolades, including recognition as one of "China's Top Ten Famous Exhibition Cities," "National Golden Five-Star Excellent Exhibition Management Departments," "National Advanced Unit of Exhibition Work," and "Most Influential Exhibition City." In recent years, the conference and exhibition economy in Dalian has witnessed rapid expansion, with the driving coefficient of the convention and exhibition industry on related sectors reaching 1:7, thereby establishing it as a new growth driver for the regional economy^[2].

1.2. The project is considered to be of significant importance within the urban environment

In 2023, Liaoning Province focused on the three-year action of comprehensive revitalization and

new breakthroughs, starting from six initiatives: making the national brand exhibition bigger and stronger, building a "dual-core" convention and exhibition center city layout, promoting the highly integrated development of brand exhibitions and key industries, giving full play to the role of brand exhibitions as a consumption engine, cultivating and expanding new momentum of the exhibition industry, and improving the coordination and guarantee of the exhibition industry. Liaoning Province has been giving full play to the resource advantages of the trade promotion system, improving the standardization system of the exhibition industry, building a well-known exhibition brand, and promoting the high-quality development of the exhibition industry. Starting from the six initiatives, Dalian City will give full play to the resource advantages of the trade promotion system, improve the standardization system of the conference and exhibition industry, create famous conference and exhibition brands, and promote the high-quality development of the conference and exhibition industry [3]. Dalian City will continue to play a leading role as the central city of Liaoning Coastal Economic Belt, relying on the construction of an important international shipping center in Northeast Asia and a strong city of marine economy, continuously improve the influence of local key international exhibitions, and introduce large-scale and high-quality exhibition projects in line with the development of industries in Dalian City.

Over the years, Dalian has successfully held more than 20 influential large-scale international exhibitions, such as China International Digital and Software Service Fair, Dalian International Industrial Fair, China International Patent Technology and Products Fair, Dalian International Automobile Exhibition, Dalian International Food and Seasoning Fair, China (Dalian) International Forest Products Import and Export Fair, Dalian Import and Export Commodities Fair, China (Dalian) International Cultural and Tourism Industry Trade Fair, China-Japan (Dalian) Fair, International Maritime Exhibition, China International Sea Ranch and Fishery Fair, etc. The scale of exhibitions and the number of visitors have reached a high level with remarkable achievements.) Expo, International Maritime Exhibition, China International Sea Ranch and Fishery Expo, and more than 20 influential large-scale international exhibitions, the exhibition scale and the number of visitors have reached a high level, with remarkable achievements[4]. In addition, Dalian City starts from encouraging and supporting, strengthening service, revitalizing resources and other perspectives, benchmarks developed regions in the convention and exhibition industry, optimizes the business environment of the convention and exhibition industry, strongly supports all kinds of convention and exhibition activities, and a number of large-scale conventions and exhibitions have been landed in the city, including the CGM Animation Carnival, the First China (Dalian) International Forest Products Import and Export Expo, and the International Annual Meeting of Science and Technology for the Invention of New Drugs [5].

1.3. Prospects and obstacles confronting the industry

Despite the notable achievements of Dalian's international exhibitions in terms of quality and scale, the overall trajectory of the exhibition industry in recent years indicates that Dalian is confronting a complex and challenging internal and external environment, is shown in Table 1. Factors such as the city's economic conditions, environmental considerations, infrastructure, and human resources significantly influence the development of its exhibition economy [6]. This is evidenced by the findings in the China Exhibition Data Statistical Report, which reveals a decline in Dalian's ranking in the comprehensive index of urban exhibition industry development, dropping from 24th place in 2018 to 38th place in 2022. This decline suggests that as Dalian's exhibition industry transitions from merely increasing the number of exhibitions to enhancing their scale, the market is likely to eliminate superficial expansion and inefficient operational practices [7]. Consequently, as a historically significant exhibition city, Dalian must promptly address the myriad opportunities and challenges it currently faces, necessitating strategic adjustments and transformations.

Table 1: 2023 Dalian Exhibitions Summary List

2023 Dalian Exhibitions Summary List					
Months	1	2	3	4	5
March	2023 Blue Decoration Home Expo (Dalian)	2023 Dalian 80th Huizhou Auto Show	2023 Dalian Spring Housing Fair	2023 Northeast (Dalian) International Maternity and Infant Products Expo	2023 China Huaxia Home Expo (Dalian)
April	2023 The 7th Dalian Chinese and Foreign Commodities Expo and Agricultural Products Expo	The 17th China (Dalian)International Textile & Apparel Supply Chain Expo 2023			

May	2023 Blue Decoration Home Expo (Dalian)	2023 The 11th Dalian International Food and Seasoning Fair	2023 The 12th China (Dalian) International Automobile Trade Fair	25th Dalian International Industry Fair	2023 Dalian International Health Industry Expo
June	2023 China Huaxia Home Expo (Dalian)	36 th Dalian Import and Export Commodities Fair	2023 Dalian Spring International Tea Expo & Zisha Ceramic Crafts Fair		
July	2023 China International Digital and Software Services Fair	First Northeast Pet Industry Expo 2023	2023 Blue Decoration Home Expo (Dalian)	China(Dalian)International Cultural and Tourism Industry Trade Fair	2023 Dalian International Jewellery & Gem Fair
August	2023 The First National Sea Cucumber Industry Chain Trade Fair	2023 (28th) Dalian International Automobile Exhibition			
September	2023 The 8th China (Dalian) International Tea Industry Expo	2023 China Huaxia Home Expo (Dalian)	2023 Dalian International Aging Industry Expo		
October	2023 The 14th China Dalian International Agricultural Exposition	13th China International Patent Technology and Products Fair	2023 The 14th China (Dalian) Light Industry Commodity Fair	2023 Dalian Autumn International Tea Expo & Zisha Ceramic Crafts Fair	
November	2023 China Huaxia Home Expo (Dalian)				
December	2023 The 11th China Dalian International Sea Cucumber Festival & Fisheries Expo	2023 Blue Decoration Home Expo (Dalian)			

2. Challenges Confronting International Exhibitions in Dalian

2.1. Insufficient Integration and Development of the Convention and Exhibition Sector with Tourism

In recent years, both the convention and exhibition industry and the tourism sector have exhibited positive growth trends. As components of the tertiary industry, they share significant industrial correlations and interdependencies, exemplified by concepts such as convention and exhibition tourism and tourism-related conventions and exhibitions. The advancement of convention and exhibition tourism is characterized by high profitability and substantial interactivity, which significantly enhances the optimization of tourism product structures and fosters the sustainable development of the tourism sector. The growth of Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism, noted for its profitability and interactive nature, plays a crucial role in refining the tourism product structure and promoting sustainable tourism development^[8]. As a vital element of the tourism industry, the convention and exhibition sector represents a strategic avenue for the diversification of tourism. Furthermore, the convention and exhibition industry can leverage various services and resources offered by the tourism sector, highlighting their close interconnection, complementarity, and mutual reinforcement^[9].

In 2023, Dalian City promulgated over ten policy documents, including the "Dalian Municipality Promoting Enterprise Financing Implementation Program" and the "Dalian Municipality Implementing Opinions on Accelerating the Innovative Development of the Cultural Industry." These documents outlined more than one hundred strategies aimed at fostering the integration of the exhibition and tourism sectors, thereby expediting the development of the "Two Priority Zones" and "Three Centers" in the contemporary context of Dalian^[10]. The objective is to achieve a significant breakthrough in comprehensive revitalization, enhancing empowerment and efficiency. However, as the specialization of the exhibition and tourism industries has increased, the interdependence between the two has diminished, resulting in an inadequate correlation and a lack of synergistic interaction and development^[11].

Currently, enterprises within Dalian's convention and exhibition sector primarily concentrate on exhibition planning, service reception, and venue operations, with some organizing their own tourism initiatives but lacking collaboration with tourism enterprises. Conversely, tourism enterprises remain focused on fundamental tourism services, such as accommodation, food and beverage, transportation, and excursions, with limited development in non-essential tourism offerings and a lack of awareness regarding potential synergies with convention and exhibition enterprises.

Dalian possesses a robust foundation in the convention and exhibition industry, attracting numerous domestic and international exhibitors annually, particularly foreign participants who also express interest in tourism and consumption experiences. Tourism enterprises have the potential to organize specialized convention and exhibition tours tailored to the backgrounds and interests of tourists ^[1]. Established in 2019, the China (Dalian) International Culture and Tourism Industry Trade Fair has successfully conducted five sessions and is recognized as the first state-level exhibition in China focused on the integration of culture and tourism. This initiative aims to enhance tourism through cultural engagement and vice versa, while also improving the systems and mechanisms that facilitate the fusion and development of these sectors ^[3]. Furthermore, it seeks to promote the integration of culture and tourism with other fields, thereby enhancing comprehensive service capabilities and increasing the visibility of the achievements stemming from this integration. This exhibition serves as a platform for strengthening collaboration between convention and exhibition enterprises and tourism enterprises, ultimately contributing to the advancement of convention and exhibition tourism in Dalian and its neighboring regions.

2.2. The Impact of Regional Linkage Effects is Minimal

The Action Program for the High-Quality Development of the Liaoning Provincial Convention and Exhibition Industry (2023-2025) articulates a comprehensive objective: by 2025, Shenyang and Dalian are expected to effectively establish themselves as prominent cities for international conventions and exhibitions in Northeast Asia. The convention and exhibition sector within the province aims to develop a new framework characterized by a "2+N" model, which emphasizes "multiple points of strength" in both Shenyang and Dalian, as well as in other municipalities and the Shenyang Demonstration Zone. This "2+N" development model underscores the anticipated trends of collaboration, collective funding, and mutually beneficial outcomes in the future evolution of the conference and exhibition industry.

Firstly, while Dalian possesses distinct locational advantages, the effectiveness of its exhibition linkages with adjacent provinces and cities has not met expectations. Consequently, it is imperative for Dalian to proactively engage with regional exhibition resources, explore collaborative exhibition opportunities with cities such as Shenyang and Changchun, and establish a Northeast Regional Exhibition Alliance. This alliance would facilitate the joint hosting of significant international and national exhibitions, thereby fostering mutual benefits.

Secondly, Dalian should leverage the spillover effects of its prominent local brand exhibitions to host sub-exhibitions and touring exhibitions associated with major events. This strategy would enhance consumer market options and better address the diverse and quality-oriented consumption preferences of the populace. Additionally, by concentrating on emerging trends such as green and health-oriented consumption, and by showcasing a range of high-quality products alongside organizing vibrant activities, Dalian can cultivate a favorable consumer environment, bolster consumer confidence, and invigorate consumer engagement.

Thirdly, it is essential to maintain a differentiated positioning strategy to reinforce specialized sectors. By capitalizing on its unique characteristics and advantages within the convention and exhibition industry, Dalian can align its development with that of other northeastern cities, thereby enhancing its specialized areas and nurturing a distinctive brand and operational model within the convention and exhibition sector.

Lastly, strengthening partnerships with professional media and digital companies is crucial. By harnessing their respective strengths, stakeholders can collaboratively innovate and expand independent brand exhibitions, professional forums, industry summits, trade and investment negotiations, educational training, and innovation and design competitions, as well as various industry activities coinciding with exhibitions. This collaborative approach is intended to spearhead the transformation and advancement of the conference and exhibition industry.

2.3. Insufficient level of international exchange and cooperation

Although Dalian organizes a large number of international exhibitions every year, it is undeniable that there are few international famous exhibitions in Dalian, and the number of international exhibitors and visitors has been at a low level, so it is necessary to make more efforts to promote exchanges and cooperation in international exhibitions. First, Dalian city encourages the exhibition to "bring in" and "go out" to promote Dalian International Industry Fair, China International Digital and Software

Service Fair, China International Digital and Software Service Fair and other large-scale conventions and exhibitions to impact the world's top 100 business exhibitions, to create a high level of world-class convention and exhibition projects [11]. Dalian city should expand the international influence and competitiveness of Dalian city brands such as Famous Clothing City, Romantic Capital and International Trade Center. Secondly, it should vigorously introduce internationally renowned exhibition organizers, strengthen communication with international exhibition organizations such as UFI, IAEE, ICCA, UIA, SISO, etc., and promote local exhibition enterprises, exhibition projects, exhibition venues and exhibition industry organizations to strive for the certification of international organizations, so as to enhance the international reputation of Dalian. Thirdly, it will vigorously introduce the headquarters of internationally renowned convention and exhibition enterprises, domestic and foreign professional exhibition organizers, important international brand exhibitions and activities, as well as upstream and downstream supporting enterprises, and actively strive to hold exhibitions and conferences certified by international authoritative institutions. Fourthly, it will encourage the scale, grouping and diversified development of convention and exhibition enterprises in the city, carry out cross-regional, cross-industry and cross-industry joint operation, adopt domestic and foreign cooperation, acquisition and merger and other modes to strengthen the strength of organizing exhibitions, support the building of convention and exhibition groups with international competitiveness, make great efforts to attract upstream and downstream supporting market entities for high-calibre international conventions and exhibitions, and actively cultivate the city's own branded exhibitions and projects.

2.4. Inadequate construction of public facilities and service systems

There are only two exhibition venues in Dalian: Dalian World Expo Plaza and Dalian Free Trade Zone International Convention and Exhibition Center, with a total indoor exhibition area of 82,000 square meters. The number of exhibition halls is relatively large, but the maximum exhibition area available for a single hall is only 50,000 square meters, which is slightly pressurized for the hosting of some large-scale international exhibitions [11]. 2023 Top 10 indoor exhibition venues in China in terms of area is shown in Table 2. Therefore, attention should be paid to enhancing the service capacity of international exhibitions, improving the undertaking capacity of venues, comprehensively upgrading the conditions for hosting exhibitions, promoting the upgrading and renovation of existing venues, and vigorously strengthening the hardware support capacity for hosting international and domestic high-profile exhibitions. In addition, the government should play the role of intermediary organizations, support industry chambers of commerce, associations and exhibition enterprises to jointly organize exhibitions, rely on the system of key contact enterprises in the exhibition industry, supervise exhibition halls to do a good job in coordinating exhibition scheduling, information announcement and early warning and guidance, and provide enterprises with timely information transmission, reflecting their demands and providing services such as legal support and consultation. At the same time, it will improve the exhibition industry system, explore the establishment of Dalian Exhibition Industry Association, study and formulate industry standards and operation guidelines, guide enterprises to standardize their operation, and enhance the level of industry self-discipline. Eventually, it will form a development system of conference and exhibition industry which is led by the government, led by the conference and exhibition enterprises, led by the industry association, led by the key projects and led by the industry linkage, industry support and efficient operation.

Table 2: 2023 Top 10 indoor exhibition venues in China in terms of area

2023 Top 10 indoor exhibition venues in China in terms of area					
NO.	CITY	Exhibition Area(million square metres)	NO.	CITY	Exhibition Area(million square metres)
1	Shanghai	97.7	11	Suzhou	22.30
2	Shenzhen	60.5	12	Wuhan	22.04
3	Guangzhou	49.24	13	Binzhou	21.30
4	Kunming	38.98	14	Foshan	19.60
5	Chengdu	32.5	15	Wenzhou	19.40
6	Hangzhou	30.76	16	Linyi	17.66
7	Chongqing	30.52	17	Xi'an	17.00
8	Qingdao	29.50	18	Nanjing	16.11
9	Beijing	28.96	19	Nanchang	15.60
10	Changchun	22.79	20	Shenyang	12.96

3. Countermeasures and recommendations

3.1. Enhancing the Trade Function of Dalian International Exhibitions Based on the Integration of Exhibition and Tourism Development

3.1.1. Enhancing the construction and upgrading of digital venues

Dalian city should upgrade the facilities of Dalian World Expo Plaza and Dalian Xinghai Convention and Exhibition Center, and introduce the latest scientific and technological achievements, such as VR virtual reality and meta-universe, etc., to improve the immersion and interactivity of the convention and exhibition ^[11]. At the same time, it will strengthen the construction of the surrounding transportation network and parking lot to ensure convenient transportation; increase the updating and upgrading of the digital infrastructure of the convention and exhibition venues, and make use of modern information technology, such as big data and cloud computing, to improve the quality and efficiency of convention and exhibition services.

3.1.2. Strengthening the branding and internationalization of conventions and exhibitions

Relying on Dalian's marine, cultural and tourism resources, it will create special brand exhibitions with international influence, such as the China (Dalian) International Marine Commerce and Trade Expo, to attract domestic and foreign exhibitors and visitors; establish cooperative relationships with internationally renowned convention and exhibition organizations and famous convention and exhibition cities to jointly organize international-level exhibitions, so as to enhance the international popularity and influence of Dalian's convention and exhibition industry.

3.2. Enhancing the Trade Function of Dalian International Exhibitions Based on Regional Linkage Effect

3.2.1. Strengthening regional cooperation and linkages

Dalian should strengthen economic and trade cooperation with Northeast Asia, especially with South Korea, Japan, Russia and other neighboring countries, and jointly promote regional trade facilitation through the signing of cooperation agreements and the establishment of joint working mechanisms, so as to provide broader market and resource support for international exhibitions; make use of Dalian's port advantages and geographic location to build a regional trade network centered on Dalian, and promote trade exchanges with neighboring countries and regions. It will make use of Dalian's port advantage and geographical location to build a regional trade network centered on Dalian, promote trade exchanges with neighboring countries and regions, realize resource sharing and complementary advantages, and attract more exhibitors and buyers for the international exhibition.

3.2.2. Enhance the internationalization level of the exhibition

Dalian city should actively introduce internationally renowned exhibition projects to enhance the popularity and influence of Dalian international exhibitions, attracting more international exhibitors and buyers to participate, and promote the in-depth development of international trade; establishing close contact with international organizations such as the International Association of the Exhibition Industry (UFI) and the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), to learn about the latest trends and rules of international exhibitions, and to enhance the internationalization level and degree of professionalism of Dalian international exhibitions.

3.3. Enhancing the Trade Function of Dalian International Exhibitions Based on International Exchange and Cooperation

3.3.1. Strengthen international exhibition cooperation and exchange

It actively cooperates with international famous exhibition organizers, introduces exhibition projects with global influence, and enhances the international popularity and influence of Dalian international exhibitions. This not only attracts more international exhibitors and buyers, but also promotes international trade exchanges and cooperation. It establishes cooperative relationships with exhibition organizations in many countries and regions around the world to jointly form an international exhibition alliance. Through the platform of the alliance, Dalian city should share exhibition resources, exchanging experience in running exhibitions, coordinating exhibition time, etc., to achieve mutual benefits and win-win results, and enhance the international competitiveness of

Dalian international exhibitions; actively joining international organizations such as the Union of International Fairs and Exhibitions Industry (UFI), and taking part in the formulation and revision of international exhibition standards, so as to enhance the professionalization and internationalization level of Dalian international exhibitions. Meanwhile, through the platform of international organizations, it will strengthen exchanges and cooperation with the global exhibition industry.

3.3.2. Promoting international economic and trade cooperation

Organizing international economic and trade forums or seminars during the Dalian International Exhibition, Dalian city should invite renowned economists, entrepreneurs and scholars from home and abroad to deliver speeches and discuss new trends, opportunities and challenges in international economic and trade cooperation. This not only provides exhibitors and buyers with valuable information and insights, but also promotes international economic and trade exchanges and cooperation; establishes economic and trade cooperation mechanisms with many countries and regions, and promotes mutual cooperation in trade, investment, technology and other aspects by signing cooperation agreements and establishing joint working groups. This helps to attract more international exhibitors and buyers for Dalian International Exhibition and promote trade transactions; utilize the platform of Dalian International Exhibition to promote the development of cross-border e-commerce. By setting up a cross-border e-commerce exhibition area and organizing a cross-border e-commerce forum, it will build a cross-border e-commerce exchange platform for domestic and foreign enterprises, and promote the rapid development of cross-border e-commerce and the facilitation of international trade (Figure 1).

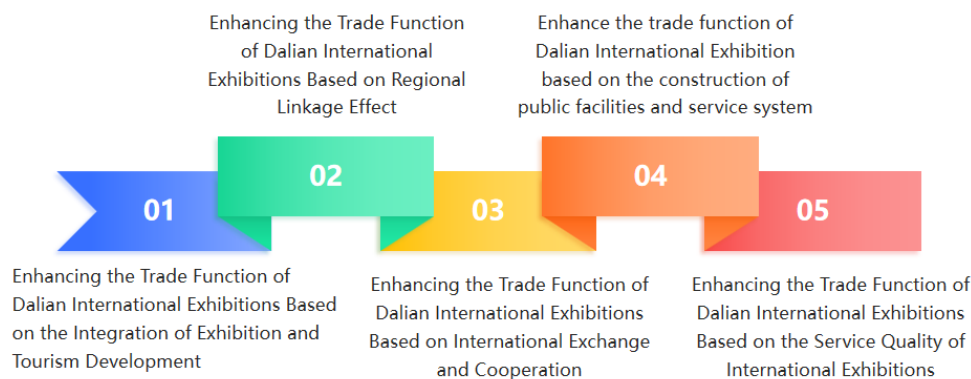


Figure 1: Countermeasures and recommendations of Dalian International Exhibitions

4. Conclusion and discussion

Based on the current situation of the development of international exhibitions in Dalian, this study proposes a series of specific and feasible countermeasures by analyzing the opportunities and challenges faced by international exhibitions in Dalian at present, from the perspective of the integrated development of convention and exhibition and tourism, the regional linkage effect, international exchanges and cooperation, the construction of public facilities and service system, and the quality of services of international exhibitions, and other dimensions.

In the process of exploring the strategies for improving the trade promotion function of Dalian international exhibitions, we have found some issues that deserve further attention and research:

1) Technology Innovation and Application

With the rapid development of information technology, how to apply new technologies to exhibition services and enhance the intelligent and digitalized level of exhibitions is an issue to be focused on in the future. For example, using big data to analyze the needs and behaviors of exhibitors and visitors to provide personalized recommendations and services; and realizing remote exhibition and online interaction through virtual reality technology.

2) Sustainable development and greening of exhibitions

While promoting the development of the exhibition, it should pay attention to its impact on the environment and advocate the concept of green exhibition organization. By adopting environmentally friendly materials, energy-saving and emission reduction measures, etc., the impact of the exhibition on

the environment should be reduced and sustainable development should be realized.

3) Policy support and guidance

The government should increase its support for the exhibition industry and introduce more favorable policies to provide a favorable policy environment for the development of exhibitions. At the same time, it should strengthen the supervision and guidance of the exhibition industry, standardize the market order and promote the healthy development of the exhibition industry.

4) Talent Cultivation and Introduction

Enhancing the quality of exhibition services requires the support of professional talents. Therefore, the cultivation and introduction of convention and exhibition talents should be strengthened, and a perfect talent training system should be established to attract more excellent talents to devote themselves to the cause of convention and exhibition.

The shortcoming of this study is that, due to the limitation of the conditions, the first-hand research data on the exhibitors, visitors and exhibition service managers of international exhibitions in Dalian is not sufficient, in the future research, it is still necessary to further through a large number of research in order to obtain more accurate and complete data, as well as more exploring and perfecting the related indexes and suggestions.

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