

Research on Tourism Management Major in Eastern and Western Regions of China under the Incentive of Collaborative Education between Domestic and Foreign Universities

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Abstract: This study investigates the characteristics of Sino foreign cooperative tourism management projects in universities under the framework of the Chinese Ministry of Education's Sino foreign cooperative education system. It analyzes the utilization and incentives of educational resources in the context of such collaborative education, focusing on strategies to enhance the effective utilization and transformation of tourism management educational resources in western universities engaged in collaborative education with foreign partners. The aim is to contribute to the research and practical implications regarding the curriculum design and talent development models in the field of tourism management.

Keywords: Sino foreign cooperative education, Eastern and Western Regions, Tourism Management Major, Enhancement Strategies

1. Introduction

When it comes to the tourism management major, the concept of "people-centered" was proposed at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. As the leading industry among the "Five Happiness Industries," the tourism industry not only caters to the growing aspirations for a better life among the people but also serves as a crucial comprehensive sector driving local economic development and assisting in poverty alleviation. However, the sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has swept across the globe, resulting in a vulnerable halt of tourism activities heavily reliant on cross-regional population mobility. Consequently, the global tourism industry has been brought to a standstill, and the tourism economy has experienced a downturn amid the pandemic. Meanwhile, various tourism enterprises face stricter control over labor costs, and from the perspective of talent supply, tourism practitioners have become more sensitive to income changes, leading to a surge in job-hopping and career transitions.

Undergraduate education in tourism bears the important responsibility of cultivating high-quality professionals for the tourism industry. Collaborative education in tourism management between domestic and foreign institutions aligns with the trend of educational internationalization. By introducing and leveraging foreign educational resources, it contributes to the development of tourism education and the establishment of a robust talent system in the tourism industry. Moreover, it plays a crucial role in reshaping the enthusiasm and confidence of tourism practitioners and graduates in tourism-related majors after the outbreak of the pandemic.

Currently, the distribution of tourism management programs and institutions engaged in collaborative education between domestic and foreign universities in different regions of China, particularly in the eastern and western regions, which is uneven, with significant disparities. Therefore, this paper aims to provide a systematic analysis of the developmental and evolutionary mechanisms of tourism management programs in the eastern and western regions under the incentive of collaborative education between domestic and foreign universities. The goal is to explore effective strategies that can facilitate the transformation of undergraduate tourism education in the western region, specifically in light of the new circumstances.

2. Current Status of Collaborative Education in Tourism Management

2.1. Difficulties in talents training for tourism management

The Development of China's Tourism Industry has gone from non-existent to flourishing, with the gradual upgrading of people's tourism consumption. Emerging consumer markets have quietly transformed the consumption patterns in the tourism sector, as a single smartphone now encompasses the entire value chain of the industry, facilitating personalized direct customer interaction. However, despite the robust economic functions of the tourism industry, it has been unable to retain its workforce.

The shortage and attrition of talent in the tourism sector have become increasingly severe, particularly in the post-pandemic era when the industry hit rock bottom. Under these circumstances, undergraduate tourism management students have lost their sense of identification with the tourism industry. This appears to be a predicament brought about by the pandemic. The root cause lies in the failure of talent development in tourism management to achieve a proper match between individuals and their job roles, thus utilizing their full potential. If we persist in adhering to old practices, it is inevitable that graduates of tourism management programs will abandon the tourism industry. The pandemic merely serves as a catalyst in this regard.

2.2. Analysis of the Current Status of Collaborative Education in Tourism Management

In 2010, the Ministry of Education officially issued a list of domestically approved undergraduate-level collaborative education institutions. The country encourages universities to introduce high-quality educational resources from abroad with the aim of utilizing existing educational resources, thereby conducting collaborative education between domestic and foreign institutions [1]. In 2022, the Ministry of Education revised and issued the "Undergraduate Major Directory for General Higher Education Institutions (2022 edition)," which includes the major category of "Tourism Management" under the discipline of management. Collaborative education in tourism management between domestic and foreign institutions primarily focuses on undergraduate programs such as tourism management, hotel management, exhibition economics and management, as well as master's and doctoral degree programs in related fields within the tourism management category.

The number of collaborative education programs between domestic and foreign institutions has been increasing, with an improvement in academic levels and a diversification of models. According to the information platform for the supervision of collaborative education established by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, as of January 2023, there are five domestic and foreign collaborative education institutions offering tourism management programs at the undergraduate level and above, with a total of 15 collaborative education programs (two of which have stopped enrollment). Among them, there are two institutions and programs offering graduate-level education or above (see Table 1).

Table 1: Collaborative Education Institutions and Programs in Tourism Management Approved and Reviewed by the Ministry of Education.

Regions in China	Institution/ Programs	Name (including Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan regions)	Approval Year
Zhejiang Province	Collaborative Education Institutions	Ningbo University - University of Angers Joint Institute at Ningbo University	2017
	Collaborative Education Programs	1. Undergraduate Education Program in Tourism Management (Jointly ran by Ningbo University and University of Angers)	2010
		2. Doctoral Degree Education Program in Hotel and Tourism Management (Jointly ran by Zhejiang University and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)	2013
		3. Postgraduate Education Program in Tourism Management (Jointly ran by Ningbo University and University of Angers)	2013
Guangdong	Collaborative	Undergraduate Education Program in Tourism	2002

Province	Education Programs	Management (Jointly ran by Guangzhou University and University of Angers)	
Hainan Province	Collaborative Education Institutions	1.HNU – ASU Joint International Tourism College, Hainan University	2017
		2.Alberta International School of Recreation, Sport and Tourism of Beijing Sport University	2022
	Collaborative Education Programs	Hainan Tropical Ocean University-Applied Science University Krems, Austria: Undergraduate Education Program in Tourism Management (Jointly ran by Hainan Tropical Ocean University and IMC University of Applied Sciences Krems, Austria)	2012
Fujian Province	Collaborative Education Programs	Undergraduate Education Program in Tourism Management (Jointly ran by Jinshan College of Fujian Agriculture and Mount Saint Vincent University, Canada)	2016
Shandong Province	Collaborative Education Programs	Undergraduate Education Program in Tourism Management (Jointly ran by Qingdao University and Fachhochschule IMC Krems, Austria)	2006
Henan Province	Collaborative Education Programs	Undergraduate Education Program in Tourism Management (Jointly ran by Henan Normal University and University of Oregon)	2012
Hubei Province	Collaborative Education Programs	Undergraduate Education Program in Tourism Management (Jointly ran by China Three Gorges University and University of Memphis)	2014
Heilongjian Province	Collaborative Education Programs	Undergraduate Education Program in Tourism Management (Jointly ran by Mudanjiang Normal University and Ussuriysk State Pedagogical University, Russia)	2011
		Undergraduate Education Program in Tourism Management (Jointly ran by Heihe University and South Ural State University, Russia)	2013
Liaoning Province	Collaborative Education Institutions	Surrey International Institute, Dongbei University of Finance and Economics	2007
	Collaborative Education Programs	Undergraduate Education Program in Tourism Management (Jointly ran by Dalian University and Southern Cross University, Australia)	2003
Jilin Province	Collaborative Education Institutions	Jilin University-Lambton College	1999
	Collaborative Education Programs	Undergraduate Education Program in Tourism Management (Jointly ran by Changchun Normal University-Southern Cross University, Australia)	2004
Guangxi Province	Collaborative Education Programs	Undergraduate Education Program in Tourism Management (Jointly ran by Nanning Normal University and Cardiff Metropolitan University, United Kingdom)	2014
Guizhou Province	Collaborative Education Programs	Undergraduate Education Program in Tourism Management (Jointly ran by Guizhou University and University of Lincoln, United Kingdom)	2018

Data Source: Information platform of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China for the supervision of Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools

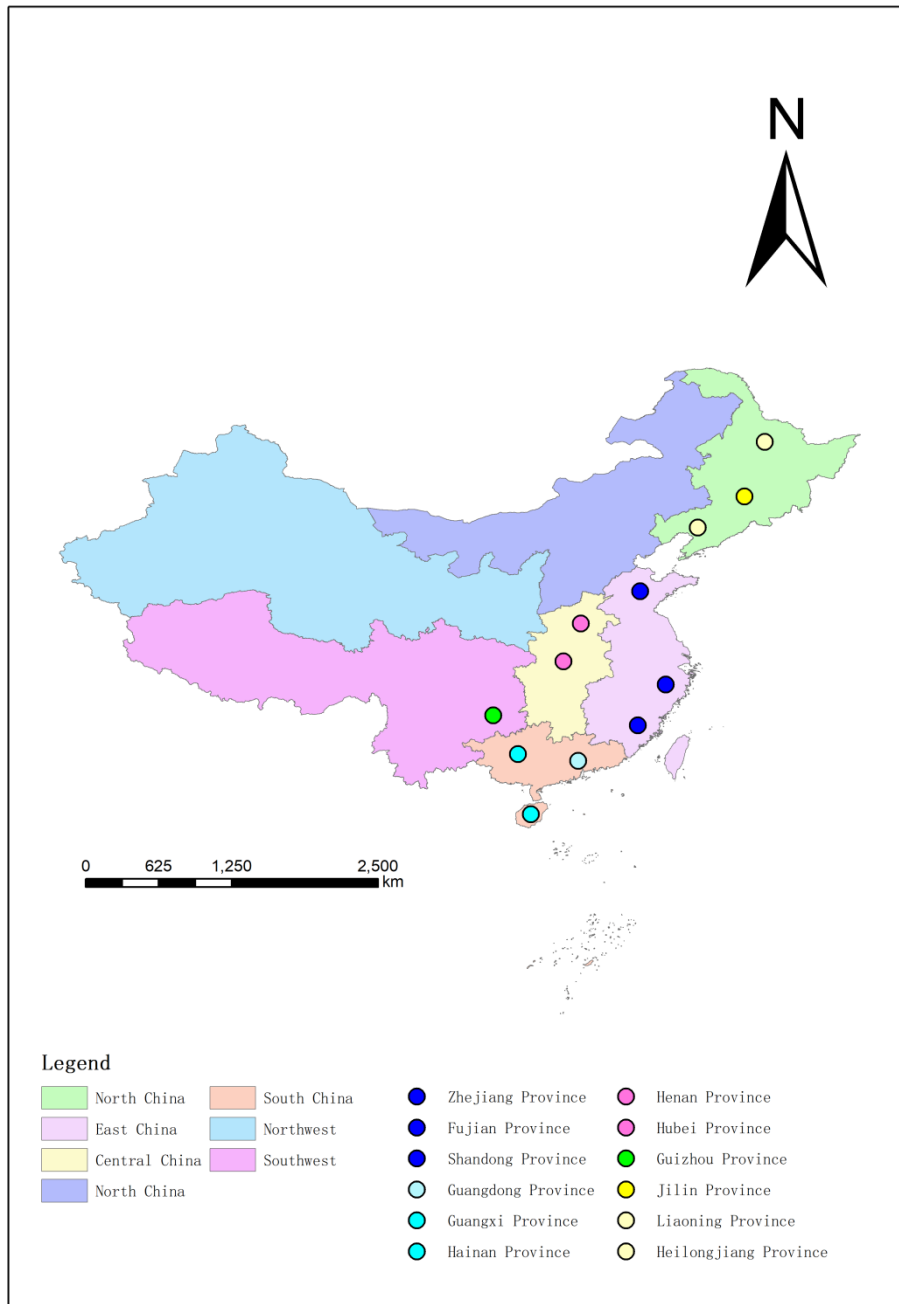


Figure 1: Spatial Distribution of Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education Institutions and Programs in Tourism Management in China.

As shown in Figure 1, the distribution of Chinese-Foreign cooperative education institutions and programs in tourism management in China can be observed from the perspective of the three major economic regions: the eastern, central, and western regions. The distribution shows a decreasing trend in terms of the number of programs offered, with the majority concentrated in the eastern region and sparse distribution in the western region. Examining the seven major administrative geographical regions, the distribution follows a descending order from South China (3 locations), East China (3 locations), Northeast China (3 locations), Central China (3 locations), Southwest China (1 location), with no presence in North China or Northwest China. Overall, the distribution exhibits a significant imbalance, gradually decreasing from east to west.

As noted by Professor John Vander Graaf from Canada, "Environmental forces such as population, politics, economy, and social trends have a powerful impact on the development of contemporary higher education." [2] In China, Chinese-Foreign cooperative education in higher education started

relatively late and has a short development history, resulting in uneven regional distribution influenced by domestic and international factors. Therefore, in order to accelerate the development of Chinese-Foreign cooperative education in the field of tourism management in China, this paper focuses on the advantages of the development of tourism management programs in Chinese-Foreign cooperative education in eastern coastal cities. By comparing and analyzing the reasons for the slow development in the western region, it puts forward strategies and considerations for solving these issues, aiming to provide research on development pathways for the relatively slow-developing western regions.

3. Analysis of Reasons for the Favorable Development of Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education in the Eastern Region

3.1. The Unique Geographical Advantage of Natural Environment

The Eastern region takes the lead in establishing collaborative education programs in tourism management, ranking first in the number of project institutions. This achievement is closely related to its exceptional geographical advantages. For example, Hainan Province, located at the southernmost tip of China, sits at latitude 18°, experiencing mild winters, moderate summers, abundant rainfall, and ample sunshine, with an average annual temperature of 21.3°C. Its special geographical location and natural conditions provide a favorable environment for the development and research of collaborative education programs in tourism management. Moreover, Hainan possesses rich cultural and historical resources as well as island tourism attractions. As the only tropical island province in China, it strongly attracts foreign universities for collaborative education programs and research in the field of tourism management. Similarly, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region enjoys a favorable geographical position. It borders Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macau to the east, connects with Central China to the north, faces the Beibu Gulf to the south, and shares a border with Vietnam in the southwest. It serves as an important gateway to the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, radiating its influence to both ASEAN countries and facilitating exchanges between the East and the West. Additionally, as an autonomous region inhabited by ethnic minorities in China, Guangxi enjoys unique national policies, providing excellent development opportunities for collaborative education programs between domestic and foreign institutions, and promoting the exchange and cooperation in higher education.

3.2. National Policy Orientation

The development and positioning strategy of higher education is a regulatory policy aimed at spatial planning in education, directly impacting the spatial distribution of collaborative education programs. Hainan Province, a pioneer in Chinese-Foreign collaborative education programs in tourism management, is a perfect example. In April 2018, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the "Guidance on Supporting Hainan's Comprehensive Deepening of Reform, Opening-up, and Development," which emphasized the steady exploration and advancement of the construction of a free trade port in Hainan. It encouraged the introduction of high-quality education resources from overseas, the establishment of high-level Chinese-Foreign collaborative education institutions and programs, the innovation of talent development support mechanisms, and the cultivation of high-level international talents. The document highlighted the importance of comprehensive human development, fully unleashing development vitality and creativity, and building a higher-level and higher-standard open economy^[3]. In June 2020, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the "Overall Plan for the Construction of Hainan Free Trade Port," which explicitly stated the need to promote domestic key universities to introduce internationally renowned institutions to establish independent legal entities for Chinese-Foreign collaborative education in Hainan Free Trade Port. The formulation and implementation of national policies effectively broaden the scope of cultural and educational exchanges and cooperation in Hainan Province, gradually positioning it as a pioneer in Chinese-Foreign collaborative education^[4]. Furthermore, in recent years, the implementation of reciprocal policies such as the Belt and Road Initiative has increasingly promoted the trend of "Guangxi-ASEAN Economic Integration," facilitating educational exchanges and cooperation with countries along the routes. Learning from and introducing foreign educational concepts, individuals can enjoy international education without leaving their homes. The form of Chinese-Foreign collaborative education plays a particularly important role in the vast land of China.

3.3. Rapid Economic Development in the Eastern Region

"Economy is the foundation of social existence and also the foundation on which education relies for its survival and development. Economic growth can provide better material conditions for education, and the economic structure constrains the structure of education."^[5] The eastern coastal regions of China, characterized by high levels of urban economic development, strong industrial foundations, and robust scientific research capabilities, are not only among the most developed areas economically but also among the most abundant in terms of educational resources. Additionally, as the forefront of China's opening-up to the outside world, the eastern coastal regions have attracted a large number of foreign-funded enterprises, bringing advanced educational concepts and models to local higher education institutions. For example, at the end of 2022, the Education Department of Zhejiang Province issued the "Guidance on Promoting High-Quality Development of Education Opening-up and Building Zhejiang as a High-Quality Development Hub." It proposed comprehensive enhancement of the quality of Chinese-Foreign collaborative education, the establishment of the "Study in Zhejiang" brand, the optimization of services along the Belt and Road Initiative, and the goal to build Zhejiang into a national high-quality development hub for education opening-up by 2026^[6].

The fundamental function of education is to promote human development, and "the population size determines the potential scale of the education cause. In modern society, the population size becomes one of the fundamental driving forces behind the development of education." Looking at the "Per Capita Disposable Income of Residents in Various Provinces in 2022" published on the website of the National Bureau of Statistics, Shanghai, Beijing, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Tianjin, and Guangdong are among the top provinces, while Qinghai, Yunnan, Tibet, Guizhou, and Gansu are far below the national average. Therefore, it is evident that the consumption level in eastern regions is much higher than that in western regions. From the perspective of consumer behavior, higher disposable income leads to higher expenditure on education, especially higher education. In addition, the eastern coastal regions have sufficient investment in educational infrastructure, which can better meet the growing demand for higher education from families. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on studying abroad, more families tend to choose domestic options that offer internationalized higher education models, thereby expanding the scale of Chinese-Foreign collaborative education.

4. Reasons for Slow Development of Chinese-Foreign Collaborative Education Programs in Tourism Management in China's Western Regions

4.1. Remote Geographical Location

From a geographical perspective, the western regions of China are situated deep in the inland areas, characterized by mountainous terrain and plateaus, which restricts transportation and hinders the development pace of the western development strategy. This limitation also impedes local economic growth and the renewal of ideas. Due to the relatively lower level of economic development in the western regions, the educational development level lags behind as well. When striving for Chinese-Foreign collaborative education programs, challenges often arise in terms of enrollment difficulties, limited faculty resources, and difficulties in ensuring teaching quality.

4.2. Slow Economic Development

Higher education in the western regions started opening up to the outside world relatively late, with a limited number of universities. In recent years, with long-term policy support and financial investment from the government, improvements have been made in terms of teaching facilities, teaching methods, and the quality of education. However, there still exists a significant gap compared to the eastern regions. Particularly in Chinese-Foreign collaborative education programs, the western regions lag considerably behind the eastern regions in terms of the number of programs offered, qualifications and academic ranks of faculty members, curriculum reforms, management scale, and teaching environment.

4.3. Labeling of Higher Education in Western Regions

Due to historical background, geographical conditions, and policy factors, there is a significant disparity in economic development between the eastern and western regions. It is commonly assumed that the eastern region represents advancement, while the western region is seen as backward. Once the

term "western region" is mentioned, it is immediately associated with difficulties, challenges, and backwardness. The higher education in the western regions is often implicitly labeled as "lagging behind." When it comes to applying for Chinese-Foreign collaborative education programs and projects, foreign universities tend to redirect their collaborations towards the more developed eastern regions due to unfavorable factors such as the natural geographical conditions, economic situation, population density, and social evaluation in the western regions. As a result, the perception of the "western region" identity in the development of higher education in the western regions has become locked-in, becoming a significant factor constraining the development of Chinese-Foreign collaborative education programs in the western regions.

5. Reflections on the Development of Chinese-Foreign Collaborative Education Programs in Tourism Management in Western Regions

Higher education in western regions plays a crucial role as a significant productive force for the economic development and comprehensive revitalization of the western regions. As a new model of Chinese-Foreign collaborative education in the new era, it focuses on the tourism management discipline, creating distinctive and advantageous programs to enhance regional vitality and improve the quality of talent cultivation. This endeavor is conducive to enhancing the reform and innovation capacity of higher education in the western regions.

5.1. Seizing Opportunities to Enhance Curriculum Development

With the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative, a new round of comprehensive, multi-level, and wide-ranging opening-up has been established. This unprecedented development opportunity has brought immense prospects for Chinese-Foreign collaborative education in the western regions. Education, as a vital platform for cultural exchanges and core for talent development, is not only an integral part of the Belt and Road Initiative but also its essence^[7]. It is imperative for China's education sector to take proactive measures by actively advocating for the establishment of an educational community among countries along the Belt and Road, promoting cultural exchanges in the regions along the Belt and Road, and expanding the space for Chinese-Foreign collaborative education.

In terms of openness, the western regions need to fully mobilize the enthusiasm of universities in cities along the Belt and Road. Local universities should actively seek cooperation and strengthen collaboration within representative cities rich in tourism resources, such as Chengdu, Xi'an, and Lanzhou in the western regions. For example, efforts can be made to promote innovative development in the tourism discipline within the Chengdu-Chongqing Economic Circle, encouraging resource sharing and complementarity. By fully utilizing existing higher education resources and intensifying the frequency and depth of cooperation, the construction and development of Chinese-Foreign collaborative education programs in tourism management in the western regions can be jointly advanced.

5.2. Emancipating Thinking and Pursuing Differentiated Development Path

The western region serves as a crucial gateway along the "Belt and Road" initiative, endowed with unique geographical advantages. Universities in this region should seize this opportunity to break free from long-standing cognitive constraints and conventional thinking regarding the "western identity." They should actively engage in cooperative education programs with countries along the "Belt and Road," explore local tourism characteristics, and strategically establish collaborative programs in tourism management that showcase the distinctive advantages of western region's tourism industry. By identifying suitable positioning and leveraging geographic features, ethnic cultures, and tourism resources, they can establish interdisciplinary programs in collaborative education with a distinct national character. Guided by the initiative "Promoting Education Cooperation along the Belt and Road," enterprises can play a pivotal role in guiding the transformation and development of collaborative education institutions in the western region, enabling them to effectively serve the tourism development needs of countries along the "Belt and Road." This, in turn, significantly enhances the social recognition of collaborative education institutions in the western region^[8].

5.3. Nurturing Human Capital and Enriching Social Resources

Western universities should place emphasis on reinvesting in human capital and adhere to strategies

of both "bringing in" and "going out." Seizing the momentum of rapid national educational development, they should actively establish friendly cooperative relationships with prestigious domestic and international universities. This can be achieved by inviting renowned experts and leaders from academia and social enterprises to deliver lectures, expanding the "Internet+" learning mode, cultivating a series of high-quality online courses (MOOCs), and organizing special activities to facilitate overseas study and exchange programs for outstanding young and mid-career teachers. Furthermore, efforts should be made to broaden training opportunities for staff members in their current positions and provide opportunities for job rotation, enabling them to learn and introduce advanced educational concepts and management techniques, enhance their capabilities in information technology-based teaching, and augment the depth of human capital.

The western region should proactively attract social capital and mobilize regional vitality to enrich educational resources. Taking universities in Xi'an, Chengdu, and Lanzhou as pilot cities, they should take the leading role in deepening the integration of industry and education, actively collaborating with local governments, tourist destinations, tourism associations, and social enterprises. They should strengthen the integration of industry, academia, and research, establish think tanks for tourism specialties, and provide research outcomes to support the government and society in addressing local economic and social development challenges. The government should increase policy support, strengthen the implementation of task division, and provide more high-quality higher education resources. Social enterprises should collaborate closely with universities, implement targeted support, and work together with universities to establish smart tourism research centers. Through collaborative education platforms, such as Chinese-Foreign cooperation programs, teachers should be encouraged to establish close relationships with domestic and international institutions and enterprises, jointly dedicating themselves to collaborative education. Simultaneously, by seizing the opportunities of the "Belt and Road" initiative, effectively leveraging their geographic advantages, exploring tourism resources, and creating distinctive academic exchange platforms for tourism, the western region can promote its international influence.

6. Conclusions

As the main ground for cultivating high-quality tourism management talents, universities have to base their efforts on the Chinese national conditions, be inclusive, and through the collaborative education programs, address the uneven distribution of tourism management programs in central and western universities. By drawing on strengths and compensating for weaknesses, universities can embark on a path of differentiated and distinctive development. They should continuously expand the scale of collaborative education programs in tourism management majors, effectively improve the quality of talent cultivation in high-quality tourism management, enhance national confidence and cultural self-assurance, and enable talents to better adapt to the needs of societal development in this era.

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