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Launching an online graduate degree for tourism management in China: lessons in Chinese-foreign cooperation

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ABSTRACT

This paper qualitatively analyzes the most recent, transnational graduate-level tourism program in China to follow the country's so-called Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model. Approved by the Chinese government in 2015, the program involves cooperation between one university from the U.S. (Colorado State University) and one from China (Central China Normal University). Analysis of this program is organized around adaptations, characteristics, and recommendations crucial for the development and delivery of transnational tourism education programs in China and abroad. Findings hold broader implications for educating tourism professionals to manage the expected growth in travel among Chinese citizens in the years ahead.

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1. Introduction

Recent trends in international tourism and higher education are driving major changes in tertiary tourism programs around the world. These programs are adapting to tourism industry needs through changes in curricula, program offerings, pedagogy, and learning environments (Hsu, 2018). Tourism programs are also following broader trends in higher education by offering students a growing range of transnational, online, and experiential education opportunities to engage an increasingly digital and globalized economy (Chiao, Chen, & Huang, 2018; Deale, 2018; Fiske, 2005; Skokic, Rienties, & Lockwood, 2016; Zhao, 2010).

One trend with substantial ramifications for tertiary tourism education involves recent growth in China's international and domestic travel. In terms of international travel, China has been the largest outbound travel market globally since 2012 (China Tourism Academy, 2017; United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2017). By 2020, visits to other countries by citizens of the People's Republic of China are expected to reach 160 million, generating expenditures of some 315 billion USD (Dichter, Chen, Saxon, Yu, & Suo, 2018).

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Furthermore, although international travel from China is growing, it now pales alongside China's in-country travel. In 2017, Chinese travelers spent 720 billion USD on domestic trips – six times more than the amount spent traveling abroad (Jing Travel, 2018). This represented a nearly 16% increase from 2016 and included some 221 billion USD spent on trips to destinations in rural China (Lingling, 2018).

Studies suggest that this rapid growth of travel by China's citizens – both domestic and international – has generated a need for novel approaches in educating Chinese tourism professionals (Li & Liu, 2016; Mei, Zhan, Fong, Liang, & Ma, 2016; Skokic et al., 2016; Sonnenschein, Barker, & Hibbins, 2018). To be sure, as more and more Chinese citizens appear in the tourism market, this developing economic field will increasingly require well-prepared Chinese managers with an international perspective to direct the so-called "Chinese tourist wave" (Siu, Lee, & Leung, 2013).

Given these needs, the purpose of this paper is to present lessons learned from the development and delivery of a transnational, graduate-level tourism program offered to Chinese students in China through a collaborative arrangement between two universities: one from the U.S. (Colorado State University, or CSU) and one from China (Central China Normal University, or CCNU). This Master of Tourism Management-China (MTM-China) program was launched in the Spring of 2016 to address a growing need for educating China's tourism professionals, particularly in light of the current and expected expansion of international and domestic travel by Chinese tourists.

The paper is organized around three primary questions related to the development and delivery of programs like MTM-China. Such programs align with the so-called Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model and include collaborative arrangements approved by the Chinese government that involve at least one Chinese university and one non-Chinese university. Linked to lessons learned from MTM-China, the three questions addressed in this paper include:

- (1) How is tourism education in China adapting to align with the country's policy of "inviting in and going global"?
- (2) How is MTM-China preparing students to meet the rapid growth of the global tourism industry?
- (3) What are some key recommendations for the development and delivery of programs following the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model?

To address these questions, the paper begins with an overview of adaptations in tertiary tourism education both internationally and in China, focusing on graduate tourism programs that follow the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model. Background on the development and design of the MTM-China program is then presented to highlight procedural/programmatic elements salient to the preparation of Chinese tourism professionals. The paper closes with specific recommendations and study implications for similar programs in China and abroad.

2. Adaptations in tourism education

Tertiary tourism education has undergone significant development and transformation in recent years. Research on trends in international hospitality and tourism education has

recognized the growing importance of experiential learning, online education and internet technologies, overseas program development, and industry internships or practicums for students (Hsu, 2018; Kim & Jeong, 2018). Depending on the program, these trends can vary greatly in their relationship to student experiences, instructional methods, classroom-community partnerships and even administrative (including financial) considerations.

In terms of student experience, research on tertiary tourism programs suggests that curriculum is the most significant determinant of student satisfaction (Frawley, Goh, & Law, 2018). It follows then that enhancing the quality of curriculum remains imperative for improving students' overall learning experience (Goh, Nguyen, & Law, 2017). To address such needs, many tertiary tourism institutions are striving to combine diverse topics such as management and data analysis as well as the humanities and other disciplines into a single program (Hsu, Xiao, & Chen, 2017).

In terms of instructional and programmatic considerations, tourism education has become decidedly more global in scope with the increased use of digital learning formats (e.g., incorporating virtual reality or online/hybrid instruction; Deale, 2018). By making necessary adaptations to global technology trends, tourism programs can better address industry demands driven by increased interactions between managers and their intersectoral and transnational partners and clientele (Airey, Tribe, Benckendorff, & Xiao, 2015).

These technological trends have triggered a rapid rise in online and mixed teaching models (Kim & Jeong, 2018). This is particularly true in China where mixed learning models (i.e., hybrid formats involving in-person and digital instruction) are growing considerably (Jiang, 2017; Qu, 2018; Zhang, 2017). The MTM-China program described in the current study follows this kind of hybrid instructional approach where students complete the bulk of their learning online but also meet with instructors in person each week.

Other studies suggest that Chinese tourism programs increasingly incorporate digital-instructional innovations. Deng (2018), for example, describes an innovative teaching model in which students learn and are tested via mobile apps that simulate tour guide scenarios. In another study, Liu (2018) describes a situational teaching approach incorporating virtual reality simulations of guest rooms, restaurants, and tour guiding to enhance student learning.

Despite these recent adaptations, a need remains to enhance international perspectives and transnational partnerships in Chinese tourism education. For example, given the expansion of China's domestic and overseas tourism, some scholars believe that tourism educators in China must focus more on cultivating students' practical and cross-cultural communication skills (Gu, 2017). Others suggest that tertiary tourism programs in China must make more foundational improvements in pedagogy, curriculum design, and international cooperation to better meet tourism industry needs (Chen & Wu, 2017; Lin, 2016).

Such increased attention on internationalization in Chinese tourism education stems from, at least in part, China's national economic strategy of "inviting in and going global" ("qǐng jìnlái, zòu chūqù"), first proposed by previous Chinese President Jiang Zemin at the National Foreign Investment Conference on December 24, 1997 (Chen, 2009). This strategy still carries weight, emphasizing China's need to recognize and welcome external (non-Chinese) expertise into the country while encouraging successful Chinese individuals and institutions to expand their influence abroad.

A direct outcome of this strategy has been the more recent implementation of a Chinese policy known as the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model which provides a legal framework to guide collaborations between Chinese institutions of higher education and institutions abroad (Hu, Chen, & Shen, 2015). As of June 2018, there were nearly 1,100 active partnerships adhering to the Model at the undergraduate level and above, although closures and openings happen regularly (Redden, 2018). Despite the Model's international impact, previous research has paid little attention to its theoretical or programmatic implications for higher education. The current paper seeks to address this gap in the context of the transnational cooperation crucial for developing and delivering tertiary tourism programs.

At the undergraduate level, so-called "2 + 2" dual-degree programs are an example of these kinds of partnerships, whereby students are able to split their coursework between China and a university in another country if desired (i.e., two years at each school), eventually earning a Bachelor's degree (e.g., in tourism) from both schools (Li, Hu, & He, 2018). Another arrangement includes "4 + 0" programs where Chinese undergrads study in China for all four years but receive international training and educational opportunities abroad (Li et al., 2018). Graduate programs in tourism following the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model are far less common and described further below.

While this Model pertains only to transnational programs geared toward educating *Chinese* students, China's "inviting in and going global" policy has also influenced Beijing's growing focus on providing free education for *foreigners* in China. To be sure, the Chinese government now offers extensive scholarships for international students to study at universities in China. Offered by the Chinese Scholarship Council (CSC), these scholarships have been characterized as a form of soft power to further extend Chinese influence on a global scale. Consider the following quote:

In countries such as Britain, Australia and America, foreign students are welcomed mostly because universities can make more money out of them than out of locals. In China it is the opposite. Foreign students enjoy big subsidies. Often they are more generously treated than local students. Last year [China's] Ministry of Education budgeted 3.3bn yuan [470 million USD] for them, 16% more than in 2017. The rich world is selling education. China is using it to buy influence (The Economist, 2019).

While free education for foreigners does not relate directly to this paper's focus on programs offering *Chinese students* degrees from foreign institutions in-country, it does emphasize the extent of China's ostensible interest in using education as a means to establish global partnerships and improve its international image. It thus provides essential context for the case of the MTM-China program described here.

In summary, the need to prepare professionals who are capable of effectively addressing the rapid growth of the global tourism industry has led to significant adaptations in tertiary tourism education, both in China and abroad (Table 1). Additionally, the nature of cooperative arrangements between China and other countries characterizing graduate-level education has received little attention in tourism literature – representing a noticeable gap that the current study seeks to address. An overview of graduate-level tourism programs adhering to the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model is now presented.

Table 1. International and Chinese^a tourism education adaptations.

Scope	Adaptation	Literature
International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased focus on teaching methods with an experiential learning component • Growth in online education emphasizing internet technologies 	Kim and Jeong (2018)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curricula optimization with interdisciplinary considerations (management, data analysis, humanities, etc.) 	Frawley et al. (2018); Goh et al. (2017); Hsu (2018); Hsu et al. (2017)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth of transnational partnerships and programs; internationalization of curricula 	Airey, Tribe, Benckendorf & Xiao (2015); Deale (2018)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rise of distance learning models (online) and mixed teaching (combining in-person and online formats) 	Deng (2018); Jiang (2017); Liu (2018); Qu (2018); Zhang (2017)
China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on student practicum opportunities 	Chen and Wu (2017); Lin (2016)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing international cooperation between Chinese and foreign universities and tourism enterprises 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internationalization with specific focus on the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model 	Hu et al. (2015); Li et al. (2018)

^aOverlap exists between Chinese and international tourism education adaptations, but each here is distinguished according to the scope of the original article.

2.1. Transnational graduate tourism programs in China

Following China's cultural revolution (1966–1976) with major economic reforms in 1978, national leaders such as Deng Xiao-Ping turned their attention to tourism as a key sector for economic growth, leading to the development of what might be considered a fully established tourism education and training program by 1991 (Zhang, 1987; Zhang, Chong, & Ap, 1999). Between 1991 and 2018, the number of colleges or universities offering tourism courses increased from 68 to nearly 400 (Network of Science & Education Evaluation in China, 2018; Zhang et al., 1999). Many of these tourism programs now offer graduate degrees as well.

While tourism education in China has grown, student interest in education abroad remains strong. According to China's Ministry of Education (MOE), the number of Chinese students pursuing some kind of higher education experience overseas in 2017 was around 608,000, about a 12% increase from 2016 (MOE, 2018). The same source shows that 84% of Chinese students studying overseas between 1978 and 2017 returned to China after completing their overseas studies.

While Chinese students continue demonstrating significant interest in overseas study, they can be deterred by a range of cost-related and cross-cultural constraints (Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2009). Consequently, recent innovations allowing Chinese students to "study abroad" without ever leaving China (i.e., being able to earn degrees from foreign institutions while remaining in China) have grown in popularity in recent years. As more foreign universities collaborate with Chinese schools to provide such opportunities, Chinese students are able to minimize costs associated with studying overseas while benefiting from the combination of domestic and foreign educational resources in-country.

As with undergraduate programs, transnational graduate programs adhering to the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model must be approved by the Chinese MOE in order to recruit students in China. As of November 2019, only four such graduate programs in Hospitality and/or Tourism Management were approved by the MOE (Table 2).

The first graduate-level, Chinese-foreign cooperative arrangement in tourism was the Master of Hospitality and Tourism Management (HTM) program organized by Zhejiang

Table 2. Transnational graduate programs in hospitality/tourism management recognized by the Chinese ministry of education through Nov. 2019.

Organizing Universities	Starting year	Degree Awarded	Program length (yrs)	Class location	# Students (per semester)	Program description
Zhejiang University and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU)	2000	M.S. in Hotel and Tourism Management	3	China	80	(1) Master's degree awarded by PolyU (2) For non-traditional (part-time) students with jobs (3) Lectures often nights/weekends (4) Total program tuition: 19,173 USD; 31 credits total (5) Bilingual Chinese and English teaching materials
Dongbei University of Finance/Economics and University of Surrey (UK)	2007	Master of Tourism Admin. (MTA)	2.5	China	80	(1) Double degree from both universities (2) For full-time students only (3) Chinese Graduate Record Examination required (4) Total program tuition: 22,089 USD (5) Bilingual Chinese and English teaching materials
Ningbo University and University of Angers (France)	2014	Master of Tourism Admin. (MTA)	3	First two years in China, last year in France	20	(1) Double degree from both universities (2) For full-time students only (3) Chinese Graduate Record Examination required (4) Total program tuition: 8,835 USD (5) Bilingual Chinese and English teaching materials (French required for 3 rd year)
Central China Normal University and Colorado State University (USA)	2015	Master of Tourism Management (MTM)	1.5	China	30	(1) Master's degree awarded by CSU (2) For part-time or full-time students (3) Lectures in person and online (4) Total program tuition: 22,619 USD; 32 credits total (5) Bilingual Chinese and English teaching materials

Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2019a,2019b, 2019c, 2019d); Ningbo University (2018a, 2018b); Surrey International Institute (2019); Zhejiang University-The Hong Kong Polytechnic University Joint Center (2019).

University and Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU). In 2000, this program began recruiting non-traditional¹, or part-time, students. While students study at Zhejiang University for the entire two-year academic program, they are enrolled at PolyU. Enrollment caps at 80 students per year, and instructors from both universities lecture in English and Chinese. After completing 31 credits, students earn a Master's degree from PolyU (MOE, 2019a; Zhejiang University-Hong Kong Polytechnic University Joint Centre, 2019).

Also in line with the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model are two graduate tourism programs offering dual degrees (one from each partner institution). The Finance and Economics Department at Dongbei University and the University of Surrey in the United Kingdom began offering a Master of Tourism Administration² (MTA) degree in 2007. This is a two-and-a-half-year academic program accepting no more than 80 students per year (MOE, 2019b). Similarly, Ningbo University and the University of Angers in France jointly established a Master of Tourism Administration (MTA) degree in 2014, with a three-year academic program involving no more than 20 students per year. In this program, students study in China for the first two years and in France for the third year (MOE, 2019c; Ningbo University, 2018a, 2018b).

Before describing the fourth graduate tourism program which represents the focus of this paper (i.e., the MTM-China degree approved in 2015 and launched by CSU and CCNU in the Spring of 2016), it is worth mentioning one more arrangement that differs slightly from those just described. This arrangement involves exchange-oriented programs offering transferable credits by the institutions involved, but for which no degree is awarded by the overseas institution³.

For example, in 2015, Fudan University and Oklahoma State University (OSU) launched a dual Master of Tourism Administration (MTA) program incorporating a transferable credit/unit system. In this program, students study at Fudan University their first year, OSU their second year, and back at Fudan their third and final year to complete their academic thesis. Alternatively, after studying at OSU, students may apply for a one-year internship to work in the U.S. while completing their thesis rather than returning to Fudan (Fudan University, 2017).

In summary, trends in international and Chinese tourism and tourism education continue to influence the ongoing creation and development of innovative, transnational graduate tourism programs in China. We now present the methods used in the current study before describing the development and design of MTM-China as well as recommendations salient to the pursuit of Chinese-foreign cooperation in tourism education.

3. Methods

This study adopts a non-experimental approach in detailing activities and interactions of two institutions involved in the development and implementation of the MTM-China program: Colorado State University (CSU) and Central China Normal University (CCNU). Data were drawn from many sources, including institutional and government reports (e.g., MOUs, university- to departmental-level annual reports, Chinese MOE documents, etc.); extensive notes and observations made by the first and third authors during formal and informal meetings between CSU and CCNU faculty and administrators since 2013; and

MTM program and course documents (e.g., program reports, student course and program surveys from Spring 2016-present, course syllabi, etc.).

A data-driven approach (rather than theory) was employed to analyze and interpret this material (Namey, Guest, Thairu, & Johnson, 2007), adopting a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm to conceptualize and describe key themes pertaining to the three study questions listed above (Higgins-Desbiolles, Trevorrow, & Sparrow, 2014; Stake, 1995).

Such an approach and the descriptive nature of the study must acknowledge potential biases based on each author's cultural background, personal experience, and distinct involvement with the MTM-China program. To be sure, the first, second, and third authors are from the U.S., mainland China and Taiwan, respectively, affording them unique perspectives on the purported progress and effectiveness of the MTM-China program and on tertiary tourism education in China more broadly.

Additionally, the three authors have played very different roles within the program: the first as the primary on-site lecturer for MTM-China students at CCNU since the Spring of 2016 (sharing the role with one other lecturer for part of this time); the second as a current MTM-China student; and the third as the online course pedagogist for the MTM-China program (overseeing the development, translation, and layout of online coursework). While these varied backgrounds helped to offset positionality toward a singular interpretation of the data, the general orientation of this study represents a predominantly Western view based on CSU's long-term interests (i.e., to sustain or increase program revenues and recognition) tempered by the first author's extensive personal interactions with CCNU faculty, administration, and students.

3.1. Study site: CCNU in Wuhan, China

The MTM-China program is the product of a partnership between the two universities, CSU and CCNU, in the cities of Fort Collins (USA) and Wuhan (China). Both CSU and CCNU share similar national-level recognition for research and education in the U.S. and China, respectively, with CSU having R1 status in the U.S. (high research activity) and CCNU being categorized as a 211 university in China (among the top 100). Student numbers and programs are similar between the schools as well, with around 30,000 full-time undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at each university (Times Higher Education, 2019).

While CSU is the only major university in Fort Collins, CCNU is just one of over 40 major colleges and universities in the city of Wuhan (Unipage, 2019). The CCNU campus is surrounded by a sprawling urban metropolis with an estimated population of close to 11 million and one of the world's largest populations of university students (World Population Review, 2019). Once known as the "Chicago of the East", Wuhan has experienced the colonial presence of five Western nations since the 1800s: France, Belgium, England, Russia, and Japan. It was the site of the initial uprising leading to the overthrow of the final Chinese dynasty in 1911, which led to a short period of democratic rule under Dr. Sun Yat-Sen until 1949, when the Chinese Communist Party assumed power.

More recently, Wuhan officials have adopted a fitting motto alluding to the city's urban expansion and constant flux: "Wuhan. Different every day". Located along the world's third longest river (the Yangtze), the city once had over 100 lakes within its limits (as recently as the 1980s). However, rapid development has reduced the current number to

30 lakes, leading to excessive flooding in some years and, with it, governmental demands that Wuhan incorporate “sponge features” into 20% of its urban area by 2020 (Li, 2019). This policy is likely to affect many university campuses, including CCNU.

4. MTM-China: overview

4.1. Program development

The MTM-China concept is an extension of CSU’s existing Master of Tourism Management (MTM) degree program. Therefore, in order to understand the MTM-China program, it is necessary to provide some background on the broader MTM degree program at CSU.

The original MTM program was launched in 2011 by CSU’s Department of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources (HDNR) in both on-campus and online formats, entirely in English. There is no thesis requirement for CSU’s MTM program, and the curriculum emphasizes a combination of natural resource and business management content including 16 courses with a total of 30 credits to be taken over a 1-year period. These courses follow a quarterly system (eight weeks each) and cover a range of topics including Sustainable Tourism Development, Global Tourism Policy, Communication and Conflict Management, Quantitative Analysis, Tourism Marketing, Law and Legal Liability in Tourism, and others (Figure 1).

In 2015, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by CSU and CCNU representatives, establishing the MTM-China program as a transnational, joint venture adhering to the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model. The document was initially drawn

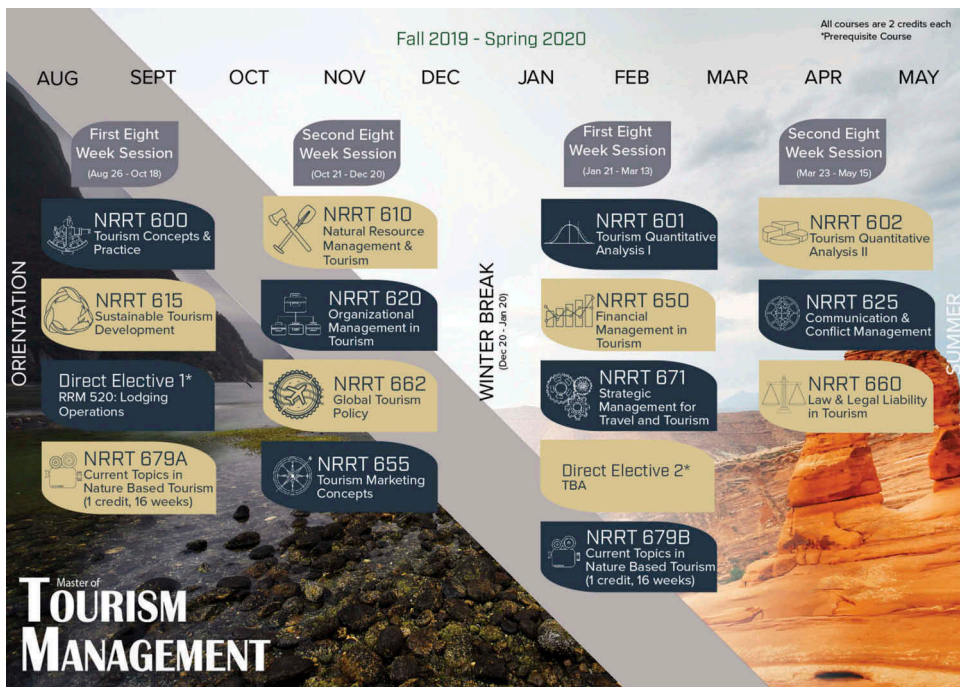


Figure 1. The MTM curriculum.

up by CSU faculty, signed, and then translated into Chinese before being submitted to and approved by the Chinese MOE. Interestingly, the document was altered by CCNU before submission to the MOE, but CSU agreed to move forward with the project regardless. The 2015 MOU covered a period of just three years, leading to a second memorandum in 2017, which was written with minimal changes.

According to these agreements, CSU and CCNU are responsible for overseeing 75% and 25% of the program respectively, and revenues are to be split accordingly. Based on this ratio, CSU teaches 12 of the 16 courses and CCNU teaches the remainder.

From its inception, CSU has viewed MTM-China as an online program with all content presented to students in weekly modules accessible via CSU's online learning platform, Canvas. All 12 courses offered by CSU were developed from the Fall of 2013 through the Spring of 2015. During this time, an instructional designer from CSU developed the courses in the Canvas learning system, grounding each in learning theories and frameworks. Meanwhile, faculty from CSU acted as subject matter experts providing content, and two Mandarin-speaking graduate students translated all courses into Chinese.

Following a quarterly system, each of the courses taught by CSU is comprised of eight modules (one per week), and each module generally includes several lessons. A student enrolled in three courses during one quarter, then, would complete three modules each week during that quarter, with a new set of courses beginning the following quarter. Courses taught by CCNU follow a similar schedule.

The first MTM-China cohort began coursework in the Spring of 2016, and every group of new students entering the program each semester since that time has been considered a new, stand-alone cohort. To date, eight cohorts have entered the program over a four-year period, with enrollment numbers presented in [Figure 2](#).

4.2. Program design: preparing Chinese tourism professionals

The MTM-China curriculum shares many similarities with the original MTM curriculum, but relates subject matter, tourism policy, management, development, etc. to the Chinese context. As a result, courses incorporate a variety of tourism topics and research deemed

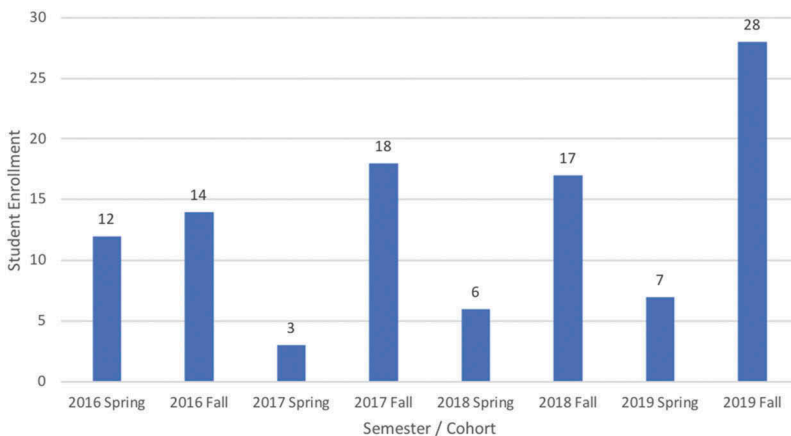


Figure 2. MTM-China enrollment by semester.

essential for Chinese tourism professionals such as China's current national policy focus on poverty alleviation, rural tourism development, recent changes in Chinese National Park management, and more. Ultimately, the MTM-China program offers a degree from CSU to Chinese students who never have to set foot on the CSU campus.

Modules for CSU courses generally require students to listen to lectures, read research-based articles and other publications, and watch videos such as TED Talks relevant to course topics. Since there is no English requirement for the program, all lectures and the bulk of readings and videos are translated into Chinese (English-only materials are optional content).

Some course content (e.g., an article from a Chinese journal) will differ from the original English version, but address the same learning objectives. Depending on the course, written assignments can include weekly discussion posts on course content, individual and group projects (e.g., the Tourism Poster Symposium described below), reflections on field trips or site visits, industry interviews, multiple choice quizzes or tests (online), and other assessments of student learning. Each year the learning process emphasizes the following:

- **Experiential learning:** MTM-China faculty (CSU and CCNU) have procured partial funding for student participation in the annual UNWTO Tourism Conference in Guilin, visits to Secret Garden Resort in Zhangjiakou near Beijing (the site of 2022 Winter Olympics), and other field-based learning opportunities.
- **Cross-culturalism:** MTM-China students have reported feeling “disconnected” from the main CSU campus (despite being CSU students). As such, the program has sought to increase MTM-China student connections with the CSU campus and the culture in Fort Collins by using WeChat (China's version of Facebook) as a communication tool between China and U.S.-based cohorts, and by supporting occasional visits to CCNU by U.S.-based MTM students.
- **Diverse assessment approaches:** Learning is assessed in a variety of ways, among which are formative assessments like weekly discussions and summative assessments like tests, papers, and projects. A prime example of one project is the annual Tourism Poster Symposium, which is described by CCNU administrators as “the highlight of the MTM-China program.” It requires that students synthesize and apply MTM-China content to address real-world tourism issues, with students both managing and presenting at this research-oriented, CCNU campus event.

The MTM-China program attempts to set itself apart from domestic (Chinese) tourism programs by emphasizing face-to-face interaction with so-called “foreign experts” (wài zhuān). From the CSU perspective, this means that while course content is offered entirely online, CSU faculty further engage MTM-China students via long- and short-term visits to CCNU.

To date, the bulk of these engagement lectures have been provided by either 1) CSU faculty members participating in long-term (six- to ten-week) visits to CCNU, or 2) five different CSU faculty members conducting one-week visits to CCNU throughout the

school year. With all but one of these long- and short-term visiting faculty members possessing limited to zero Mandarin-speaking ability, each lecture is interpreted (orally/non-simultaneously) by a CCNU faculty member on-site, making each lecture two to three hours on average.

Students are asked to complete surveys at the end of each course and at the end of the overall program. These internal survey results have indicated that since the launching of the MTM-China program, Chinese students have rated CSU courses and visiting CSU faculty⁴ from good to excellent on a 5-point scale ($4.0 < M < 5.0$). Data regarding student satisfaction with the four courses taught by CCNU has not been presented, yet students have spoken highly of the program overall, with 75% of the first graduating cohort willing to recommend the program to others.

5. Recommendations

Ongoing efforts to establish and improve the MTM-China program hold crucial implications for other institutions seeking to create or expand international tertiary tourism programs, particularly within China. These implications pertain also to future research. We now consider specific recommendations for institutions considering program development in the context of the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model, centered around the following four areas: resources, agreements, flexibility, and challenges.

5.1. Resources

Institutions contemplating any kind of transnational tourism program partnership must effectively engage existing resources to enhance tourism education accessibility and effectiveness. This recommendation applies most importantly to digital (e.g., online) and material (e.g., instructional) considerations.

From a digital perspective, while the majority of MTM-China students do attend face-to-face engagement lectures at CCNU, the online nature of the program has allowed several students with full-time jobs the ability to complete coursework while living in other Chinese cities, far from Wuhan. While none of these “off-campus” students live in definitively rural areas, the potential for online programs such as MTM-China to increase the accessibility of tourism education indicates a promising direction for the future of tertiary tourism education in China. This, however, would also require addressing various cognitive, infrastructural, and other barriers for potential online students (Kurt, 2018).

At the same time, online (including hybrid) programs offered to Chinese students have the potential to help equalize student experiences in rural versus urban settings, as rural teachers are faced with unique challenges in representing (through education) a China that may be considerably different from the teachers’ own surroundings and experience (Wu, 2018). In the Chinese context, then, more research is needed to answer questions about existing barriers to online education, and the variety of strategies necessary to overcome these barriers. Other research might explore the focus of online curricula for international online programs comparable to MTM-China, highlighting those topics and approaches that may be most effective (Hsu, 2014).

From a material/instructional standpoint, institutions must especially consider the resources required for translation of existing courses (and on-site lectures, if needed)

into Chinese. For MTM-China, there is no English requirement for students, so all course content has been translated into Chinese – including engagement lectures offered in-person by English-speaking faculty visiting from CSU.

This requirement has burdened CCNU faculty to provide anywhere from 3 to 15 additional hours of on-site translation for CSU professors during the regular workweek, depending on how many CSU faculty are lecturing. The CCNU faculty are compensated for this work, but expectations and scheduling for all parties (students, faculty, administrative staff) have required significant attention to translation-related and overall logistical concerns characterizing not only the online delivery of MTM-China courses, but also face-to-face delivery per Chinese MOE requirements.

Additional material and programmatic recommendations relate to strengthening ties through research and larger events such as graduation ceremonies. In order to further benefit MTM-China, program partners are aiming to build research collaboration in tourism, conservation, and protected area management. Current projects involve CCNU and CSU faculty, CSU's Center for Protected Area Management, and Chinese National Parks officials. As regards graduation, MTM-China students are invited each May to the CSU campus, requiring significant preparation in advance (e.g., U.S. tourist visas, flights, lodging, transportation, and activities). CSU's Department of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources (HDNR), the Office of International Programs (OIP), and CSU Online cooperate extensively to offer special events, meals, and receptions for MTM-China students attending graduation on the CSU campus.

5.2. Agreements

Institutions must come to an agreement over respective responsibilities in establishing any transnational program. MTM-China, for example, has required ongoing negotiations between and commitment from both CSU and CCNU since 2012 when representatives from these universities began talking.

Initially, conversations required significant input from both department-level and university-level faculty and administrators. From CSU, these included the HDNR Department Head and various faculty as well as the Vice Provost for Chinese Affairs, who is Chinese and currently oversees CSU's collaborations with more than 20 Chinese universities. From CCNU, early participants included the Dean of the Graduate School plus various faculty and administrators (including the Department Head) from CCNU's Department of Urban and Environmental Planning. To date, university-level administrators from both sides continue to assist with MTM-China planning and implementation, however, the bulk of negotiations now take place at the department-level.

Early negotiations (2012–2015) led to the drawing up of the MOU discussed above. Signed in 2015 by department heads and officials from both universities, the document highlighted important characteristics of the MTM-China program, including:

- **Degree offered:** MTM from CSU
- **Time frame:** 3-semester program (1.5 years) with new cohorts starting in fall or spring semesters (commencement optional at CSU every May for graduating students)

- **Teaching responsibilities:** CSU provides instruction for 12 courses, and CCNU provides instruction for the other 4 courses
- **Profit sharing and taxation⁵:** CSU retains (and pays Chinese export tax on) 75% of tuition revenues, and CCNU retains the remaining 25% (aligning with teaching responsibilities)
- **Tuition costs:** Chinese students pay the same amount as all CSU students completing online coursework (~750 USD/credit hour)
- **Payment method:** Chinese students pay tuition and fees to CCNU, which in turn pays CSU in one payment every semester
- **Curriculum for 12 CSU courses:** existing MTM coursework is to be translated into Chinese with all lectures, readings, videos, etc. – all available via CSU’s online learning platform (Canvas), but supplemented with face-to-face engagement by visiting CSU faculty at CCNU throughout the school year
- **Curriculum for 4 CCNU courses:** existing CCNU coursework is to be adjusted to align with CSU graduate school requirements, traditional classroom setting (face-to-face lectures), with predominantly Chinese language used for instruction and learning
- **Admittance requirements:** No English TOEFL or GRE exams required; undergraduate GPA > 3.0; student interviews at CCNU
- **Recruitment and marketing:** CCNU is primarily responsible for both recruitment and marketing

Aside from agreements between partnering schools, research suggests that institutions must also effectively establish tourism industry partnerships to enhance the sustainability and quality of (transnational) tertiary tourism programs (Feng, Chiang, Su, & Yang, 2015). Institutions such as CSU, seeking to establish legitimacy in China, must pay particular attention to solidifying *guanxi* (relationships) with major industry players by engaging in continuous, culturally-sensitive interactions (e.g., gift-giving, informal meals) with academic, professional, and political contacts. While such interactions are not usually the focus of research, it would be worth exploring how international academic and industry partnerships may be best established, as well as their effects on student engagement, learning, and satisfaction.

5.3. Flexibility

Significant flexibility is required as institutions move expand beyond traditional programming to establish new partnerships and pursue innovations in curriculum and instruction. From a marketing perspective, Figure 2 (above) highlights a critical difference in enrollment options between many Western programs and that characterizing Chinese institutions: namely, allowing for either a Fall or Spring start. MTM-China allows students to begin the program in either the Fall or Spring and other institutions considering the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model should recognize this dynamic as a key attractor of students from the Chinese market, as it allows students who miss Fall admission deadlines to start earlier than they otherwise would.

Broadly, lessons learned from MTM-China highlight the innovation and flexibility required for effectively tailoring course content and pedagogy (both in-person and

online) to the Chinese context. The MTM-China program illustrates the challenge and importance of blending/adjusting pre-existing content and pedagogy from both CSU and CCNU to align with skills and topics deemed crucial for Chinese tourism professionals (e.g., understanding Chinese ecotourism; Fang et al., 2018). Better understanding of how to enhance this process and produce desired outcomes in student learning point to a significant need for the current MTM-China program as well as an area for additional research.

5.4. Challenges

Institutions must be aware of the risks associated with investment in any program following the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model. Despite achieving notable progress, for example, the MTM-China program has been characterized by an array of challenges for CSU and CCNU administrators, faculty, staff, and students. To date, these challenges have been primarily related to the evolving (and often conflicting) interplay of three areas: cross-national tourism industry dynamics, logistical considerations, and socio-political systems.

First, from an industry perspective, attempts by CSU to formalize partnerships with Chinese tourism professionals and policy makers have been difficult. The original MTM program at CSU has developed many industry partnerships over the years, leading to the creation of an Advisory Board comprised of around 30 international tourism executives, researchers, and professionals from around the world. However, while these board members are aware of the MTM-China program, few of them have direct ties to China. As such, if the quality of the tourism program quality is tied to its reputation and impact as perceived by institutional managers (Airey et al., 2015), then Chinese tourism professionals and policy makers, in particular, must be more directly involved in the design and delivery of MTM-China.

Second, significant logistical challenges exist related to the accessibility of online coursework and the translation of course content into Chinese. China's so-called "great firewall," for example, prohibits people in China from accessing Google, YouTube, and many other sites unless the user has installed a virtual private network (VPN) on their computer or mobile device. While CSU does provide MTM-China students with a VPN, the software was initially difficult for students to install, and after installation of the VPN, some students continued experiencing slower-than-normal internet speeds while viewing course content (e.g., TED Talks on YouTube with Chinese subtitles). At the time of writing, however, both VPN usage and internet speeds have generally improved.

Third, challenges have resulted from clashing norms and socio-politics characterizing Sino-American relations. A telling example of clashing norms was mentioned briefly above – CCNU altering the first MOU after it was signed by CSU officials but before it was presented to the Chinese MOE. This alteration, which seemed innocuous at first (i.e., that Chinese students would pay tuition in Chinese yuan instead of US dollars as originally stated), resulted in CSU losing tens of thousands of dollars in the first three years of the program when the Chinese government devalued its currency against the US dollar (2015–16). Additional budgetary concerns have arisen for CSU with a more recent Chinese devaluation of the yuan in 2019.

A broader example of the interplay of socio-politics is the decrease in visas granted MTM-China students to attend CSU's graduation ceremony in Fort Collins. While nearly 15 students obtained travel visas to attend graduation in the USA in the Spring of 2017, only three students received them the following year. Considering a similar number of Chinese students actually applied for visas in 2018, it seems logical to suggest that MTM-China participants may have experienced some fallout from socio-political tensions characterizing Sino-American relations (including international trade) since 2016.

6. Conclusion

This paper has highlighted trends in tertiary tourism education globally and in China, detailing the development and delivery of an online graduate program in tourism offered by a transnational partnership between Colorado State University and Central China Normal University. The combined effects of China's growth in travel (both domestic and outbound), tertiary tourism education, and international partnerships in general ("inviting in and going global") suggest that the high demand for transnational tourism education programs within China will not soon diminish.

This paper has emphasized tourism education issues more broadly and the need for future research in relation to three primary questions. These may be summarized as follows:

- (1) How is Chinese tourism education in China adapting to align with the country's policy of "inviting in and going global"?
The study highlighted recent adaptations in tertiary tourism education both internationally and in China, with a specific emphasis on partnership programs such as MTM-China with its adherence to the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model.
- (2) How is MTM-China preparing Chinese students to meet the rapid growth of the global tourism industry?
The study focused on processes and programmatic dynamics linked to the ongoing development and design of MTM-China. Specific aspects of course content, experiential learning opportunities, and lectures from visiting (international) scholars highlight ways MTM-China and similar programs might more effectively prepare Chinese tourism professionals for a rapidly changing global tourism industry.
- (3) What are some key recommendations for the development and delivery of programs following the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model?
The study presented recommendations regarding resources, agreements, flexibility, and challenges that necessarily impact how institutions might effectively and cooperatively establish Chinese-foreign tourism education programs.

As MTM-China represents an ongoing educational experiment in transnational (Sino-American) cooperation, its structure and quality have been significantly shaped by individual personalities, the institutional histories of CSU and CCNU, political and infrastructural dynamics (e.g., China's internet speeds and restricted internet content), sheer geo-cultural distances separating China and the U.S., and a host of other factors. Now in its fifth year, the program's structure continues to evolve, requiring ongoing innovation by both CSU and CCNU to collectively address a highly mobile and globalized array of

industry-oriented, logistical, instructional-programmatic, and socio-political challenges, many of which were highlighted in this paper.

Lessons learned from MTM-China point to a variety of factors influencing the establishment and progress of international tourism education programs adhering to the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model. These factors can be described as personal, socio-political, and environmental elements that directly influence the conversion of innovative ideas or strategies into actual and effective educational programming (Robeyns, 2005). Measuring how effective such programming may be, however, remains a considerable challenge in and of itself – requiring long-term analysis of student survey results, graduates' opportunities and performance within the tourism industry, and, finally, evidence of program recognition in China and abroad.

Another challenge associated with programs such as MTM-China is one of accessibility. On the one hand, offering Chinese students the opportunity to earn a foreign degree in tourism *while in China* (and *in Chinese*) represents a considerably cheaper and more convenient option for many students. On the other hand, the high comparative cost of completing the MTM-China program as opposed to a program offered by a single Chinese institution, combined with the fact that it is physically housed at a university within a massive urban metropolis⁶, still generates severe restrictions on poorer Chinese students from rural areas wishing to enhance their professional and/or academic capacity in the tourism field. These socio-geographic concerns are not unique to the Chinese rural-urban divide, but do stand in opposition to research suggesting that tertiary tourism programs in China should pursue stronger ties to rural areas (Cao, Li, Song, & Shen, 2017), increasing skill-building opportunities coinciding with China's recent focus on tourism-based development and poverty alleviation.

It is worth noting several limitations of the current study. First, its non-experimental, descriptive design constrains more predictive analyses of the effects of specific programmatic innovations (e.g., site-visits, cross-cultural interactions with U.S. faculty, online and face-to-face pedagogy, etc.) on student learning and satisfaction. Second, the study emphasizes only the portion of the program for which CSU is responsible but does not include program dynamics and student experiences in CCNU-led courses.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the study does not analyze transitions into employment for MTM-China graduates. As such, the extent to which skills acquired in the program match the talent demand of the Chinese tourism market remains uncertain. A major question thus arises whether MTM-China students with a "Western" study experience will take up jobs in the Chinese tourism industry more successfully than national counterparts with a domestic (Chinese) educational experience, and whether the knowledge structure obtained from the MTM-China program is indeed more suitable for preparing Chinese tourism professionals. These limitations and related questions represent areas for future analysis, with the current study laying an essential conceptual foundation for understanding tourism education trends linked to the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model.

In closing, evidence presented in this paper suggests that MTM-China has experienced considerable progress in many areas, though the program is still in its infancy, limiting the ability to make sweeping conclusions about best practices for transnational tourism programs cooperatively offering degrees to Chinese students. Despite early challenges, CSU and CCNU faculty and staff have pursued and established effective collaboration in numerous areas to enhance MTM-China program outcomes and opportunities for students.

Ongoing programmatic adaptation based on the lessons learned should contribute to these efforts moving forward. Ultimately, it is hoped that the lessons presented here will provide critical insight for tertiary tourism educators and researchers working together to prepare Chinese leaders to sustainably direct the world's largest tourism market.

Notes

1. "Non-traditional" refers to part-time students in China. According to the definition of the MOE, part-time graduate students differ from ordinary full-time graduate students in that they can still continue to engage in other professions while studying, and the total time of study can be extended appropriately according to work requirements.
2. According to the MOE (2019b), the Chinese degree is a Master of Tourism Administration, but the foreign degree is a Master of Science in Tourism Management.
3. The exchange student project between Fudan University and OSU, and others like it, cannot be included in Table 2 because the programs in Table 2 belong to the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Model and are approved by the MOE (i.e., they can be found on the MOE website). These MOE-approved programs can only recruit Chinese citizens and are protected by Chinese law. Exchange programs, however, are less formal – allowing Chinese students to go out and foreign students to study in China, involving no issuance of diplomas, and being predominantly determined by the schools themselves.
4. Questions used in this measurement are as follows (original survey in Chinese):
 - Overall, how would you rate the following? (where 1 = poor; 2 = below avg.; 3 = avg.; 4 = good; 5 = excellent):
 - This course?
 - Resident (long-term) CSU faculty providing engagement in the host university for this course?
5. According to tax specialists at CSU (S. Zhang, personal communication, 4 March 2019), the Chinese export tax on program revenues for CSU has differed from year to year, with invoices and records dividing taxes into categories such as value-added labor and franchise tax, income tax, and several additional taxes (i.e., urban construction tax, education tax, and local education tax). In 2018, the export taxes charged to CSU (i.e., on 75% of overall program revenues) amounted to 10.9% of revenues for the Spring semester, and 5.6% of revenues for the Fall semester.
6. While all MTM coursework is officially completed online from the CSU's point of view, the Chinese MOE has yet to approve a purely online MTM-China program and still requires a minimum number of contact hours between students and course instructors (from either CSU or CCNU). As a result, as with most tertiary tourism programs in China, the MTM-China program is physically housed at CCNU in Wuhan, where students are encouraged to attend face-to-face engagement lectures for each course.

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