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ACADEMIC PAPER

Evaluating undergraduate courses in tourism management: A comparison between Australia and China

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Abstract

Tourism is an industry of growing economic importance to both Australia and China. The Chinese tourism industry will recruit one million tourism personnel over the next 10 years (Jiang & Tribe, 2009). This study examines tourism curricula by comparing higher education tourism courses in Australia with those offered in China in order to highlight differences in design, approach and outcomes. Analysis of these tourism curricula indicates that courses offered by Australian universities have a strong tourism focus, with business as a sub theme, whilst Chinese courses are business focussed, with tourism included as an addition.

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Keywords: tourism education; undergraduate; curriculum; Australia; China

Introduction

The growth of international tourism is well recognised, and Australia and China have been dominant contributors to this growth. The two countries are major players in the Asia Pacific region which is one of the world's most popular destinations, attracting one-fifth of all international tourists in the world in 2005 (more than 156 million visitors) and having a 7% annual growth rate in tourist numbers (World Tourism Organization, 2006). In spite of some differences between Australia and China in relation to development level (developed vs. developing), historical circumstances (Western vs. Eastern), national culture and political system, some similarities in their approaches to tourism higher education (HE) can be found. For example, both countries have increased the number of universities there over the last 50 years; have embraced tourism HE over the last 30 years; and are taking an active interest and involvement in each others' tourism education (Craig-Smith & Peiyi, 2007). It is therefore interesting to conduct a cross-country comparison of tourism HE by comparing the curricula in Australia with those offered in China to highlight differences in design, approach and outcomes.

Australia now ranks third behind the United States and the United Kingdom as the destination of choice for international students (Australian Education International [AEI], 2006). Universities in Australia have a history of hosting multi-national, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic student communities from a broad range of overseas nations (Barron, Baum, & Conway, 2007). Conversely China, as the world's most populous nation, is the largest exporter of international students, providing 22% of Australia's total international students in 2006 (IDP, 2008). The steady rise in the number of international students studying in Australia has subsequently resulted in an increase in the ratio of international students to domestic students. Indeed, the ratio in Australian universities is among the highest in the world (Lee, 2004).

The tourism management discipline in Australia appears attractive to international students, perhaps due to the rapid growth of their own country's tourism industry, for example in mainland China (Barron & Arcodia, 2002). In 2008, there were 343,000 short-term visitor arrivals (people planning to stay less than 12 months) by people from China, making it Australia's fifth largest market for overseas visitors after New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Japan and the United States (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Australia's Tourism Forecasting Committee predicts that China is destined to become Australia's single most important tourism market over the next decade (Tourism Research Australia, 2008). The demand for tourism services to meet international standards has led to the requirement of labour with well-trained skills. Tourism HE, as a major platform for human capital development for the industry (Ladkin, 2005), has a very close relationship with the economic development of the industry. However, despite rapid growth in the past three decades, in the Australian context tourism HE still faces uncertainties in terms of the content and nature of tourism degrees, and this restricts employment opportunities for tourism graduates (Airey, 2005; Dale & Robinson, 2001; Wang, 2008).

On the other hand, after three decades of development, China's tourism HE has expanded rapidly both in terms of number of institutions and enrolment of students. HE in tourism has become one of the fastest growing sectors in China's HE as a whole (Zhang & Fan, 2005). However, a range of problems and issues have also been highlighted. These include deficiencies in:

- quality, as a result of rapid expansion
- clear educational objectives
- basic resources such as relevant textbooks and other reference materials
- faculty members who have relevant qualifications and experience in the tourism field
- government financial and other support
- tourism academic research (Du, 2003)

While there is a great opportunity for China to provide more HE places for its students to study tourism-related courses, the issues highlighted above would undermine the important role of tourism HE in fostering quality human capital for the tourism industry.

As can be seen from the above discussion, both Australia and China are faced with a number of challenging factors at the tertiary level of tourism education, even though Australian institutions have a more global perspective in HE and more effective frameworks to manage student diversity (Barron & Arcodia, 2002; Jordan, 2008). In order to conduct a comparable study between Australia and China, within the parameters of this paper tourism HE was confined to that offered by the tertiary HE sector at the undergraduate level. The tourism programmes that this study surveys only cover tourism management programmes: hotel management programmes, event management and other tourism-related programmes were excluded. The research aim of this study was to compare tourism management curricula at the undergraduate level in Australia and China, in an attempt to contribute to our understanding of the current level and nature of curriculum content and design in the tourism HE sector. To achieve this aim, the following research questions were developed to guide the study:

1. What is the current level and focus of tourism undergraduate HE in Australia?
2. What is the current level and focus of tourism undergraduate HE in China?
3. What are the differences in curriculum content and design in tourism undergraduate courses between Australia and China?

Before looking in detail at the various curriculum designs, a brief background on the development of tourism HE in Australia and China is useful.

Literature review

Ongoing debate regarding the content of tourism undergraduate courses

Service industries such as tourism have reported increasing employment opportunities and an increased need for skilled personnel (Korpi & Mertens, 2004). A well-educated, well-trained, enthusiastic and committed workforce is important for the tourism industry (Jiang & Tribe, 2009). Australian industry training advisory bodies generally believe that the skill level of people employed in the industry is inadequate, and the Australian Government continues to promote the value of key tourism skills within the education system and an awareness of career opportunities within the industry (Freeland, 2000). In response, tertiary educational institutions have developed and designed an array of courses at varying levels to address these increasing skill requirements.

However, educational institutions have long deliberated the issues of course content and design. The debate about the tourism HE curriculum has centred on issues of standardisation or diversification, more specialised or broader subjects in the curriculum (Airey, 2005; Airey & Johnson, 1999; Amoah & Baum, 1997; Cooper, Shepherd, & Westlake, 1996; Fayos-Solá, 1997; King, McKercher, & Waryszak, 2003; Koh, 1995; McKercher, 2002; Riley, Ladkin, & Szivas, 2002; Tan & Morgan, 2002). Much research has been conducted into the skills and knowledge required by the industry (Airey & Johnson, 1999; Baum, Amoah, & Spivack, 1997; Beeton & Graetz, 2001; Bondar, 1990; Cooper, Shepherd, & Westlake, 1994; Horng, Teng, & Baum, 2009; Jennings, 2000; Littlejohn & Watson, 2004; Moshin & Christie, 2000; Munar & Montaña, 2009; Rudall, Deery, & Stewart, 1996; Ryan, 1995a, 1995b; Smith & Cooper, 2000). Some (Gustin, 2001; Littlejohn & Watson, 2004; Tait, Richins, & Hanlon, 1993) stress the need for the more generic management training rather than the industry-specific skills and knowledge development. Others suggest that in today's climate of continually evolving information and communication technologies, tourism curriculum should increasingly nurture and instil the development of information literacy and knowledge management competencies (Sigala, 2002).

Jiang and Tribe (2009), in their study on student attitudes towards tourism careers in China, found that students who were studying tourism and who had practical experience of tourism

work were not committed to a long-term tourism career as they saw the available jobs as not geared to sustainable career progression. This could be due to the prevalence of the Generation Y students' desire for instant gratification or it could be that, as Dale and Robinson (2001) found, tourism employers tend to recruit non-tourism graduates who demonstrate strong generic skills which are in greater demand for vocational tourism. Either way it adds fuel to the ongoing debate related to curriculum design and content.

In summary, the focus of the debate regarding tourism curricula in HE courses, in general terms, is whether education should be for industry specific employability, and thus whether tourism courses should be basic business courses with a tourism speciality, or whether more focus should be placed on specific industry skills. With tourism being of ever growing importance to the Australian and Chinese economies, as well as an industry set to recruit one million tourism personnel in the next 10 years (Jiang & Tribe, 2009), this study adds to the debate by comparing tourism undergraduate courses in Australia with those offered in China, using empirical evidence to highlight differences in design, approach and outcomes.

Historical context for the development of tourism HE in Australia

Australia was one of the first western countries to pursue university tourism education programmes aggressively as part of its national policy (McKercher, 2002) and as a consequence introduced the first tourism management degree course approximately 30 years ago. In 1976, a tourism management degree course was introduced at Footscray Technical College, in Melbourne. "This was not only the first such course in Australia, but also one of the first of its kind in the world" (Richardson, 1999, p. 311). As a result of the rapid increase in inbound tourism from the mid-1980s, Australia became more aware of tourism and its role in the economy. In 1989, tourism education was officially recognised by the Australian university sector, when the first professorial chair in tourism was appointed at the James Cook University in Townsville (Richardson, 1999).

By late 1987, Australian HE underwent significant change and restructure. This was brought about by central government intervention, "as the former binary system of 65 institutions, namely universities on the one hand and colleges of advanced education (CAEs) on the other, has given way to a single system of 37 universities" (Sharpham, 1993, p. 51). CAEs were eliminated and their conversion to university status gave birth to the "new" universities, which introduced applied degree programmes in non-traditional areas, and tourism was one of the sectors targeted. Today, more than three quarters of Australian universities offer tourism studies at the undergraduate or postgraduate level.

In recent years, the Australian international education market has had obvious growth and Australia has become the third biggest international education provider (AEI, 2006). It is difficult to estimate the number of international students, or even the total number of students, studying tourism in undergraduate courses in Australia, because many students study tourism as part of a general business degree and are therefore classified as business students (Craig-Smith & Peiyi, 2007). However, tourism management courses appear attractive to Asian students (Huyton, 1997), and the undergraduate student population in the tourism discipline is becoming more diverse (Barron & Arcodia, 2002). The growing international student enrolment has resulted in increasing pressure for Australian institutions to develop effective frameworks to manage student diversity (Barron & Arcodia, 2002). After over 30 years' development, Australian tourism programmes have offered great potential for embedding a global perspective in HE given that contemporary global issues appear in the curriculum of many such courses (Jordan, 2008).

Historical context for the development of tourism HE in China

As a result of its political and economic systems, Chinese tourism development has been unique. With China's transition from a planned economy to a market economy, tourism has gradually changed from a political activity into one of economic pragmatism. Tourism in China emerged from solely inbound tourists who came to China for either political or economic reasons, and thus tourism services were first introduced to accommodate them. As international tourism was initially considered a diplomatic rather than an economic activity,

domestic tourism was not recognised as a routine activity and did not commence until the early 1990s (Zhang, Pine, & Lam, 2005). Initially, tourism development in China was not considered as a commercial profit making business, but rather as a means to win understanding and establish a good image of China. The role of tourism education was thus regarded as a political mission with the aim of developing the non-governmental diplomat (Zhang, et al., 2005). Hence learning other languages and cultural courses became a major focus of the tourism curriculum in China.

The development of tourism education in China was consistent with the industry's growth and the demand for labour in the region. The Nanjing Tourism School was first established in 1978 and university studies in tourism commenced in China in 1979, when the Shanghai Institute of Tourism was founded (Jin & Yu, 1990; Lam & Xiao, 2000). Most of the students in HE in China are enrolled immediately following their graduation from high school (Zhao, 1991). Most of them are domestic students enrolled as fulltime students. As Jiang and Tribe (2009) stated, there are 1,195 educational institutions, 252 of which provide tourism HE programmes and the remaining 943 are vocational schools. The number of on-campus tourism students has reached 330,000, including postgraduates, undergraduates, associates (college students) and secondary specialised (vocational education) students. The programmes are primarily designed for domestic students and the competition between these institutions is mainly nationally. There are many ways of providing tourism HE, including state-funded institutions, partnerships between government and enterprises, private/enterprise-invested, and international cooperation, but at present state-owned institutions are most common in China (Zhang & Fan, 2005).

Research into China's tourism HE has been limited. Zhao (1991) examined HE in hospitality and tourism in China in terms of progress, problems and possible solutions. Xiao (1999) described the overall situation of tourism HE in China and examined the major problems affecting tourism education. Du (2003) indicated the lack of a scientific approach towards tourism programme set up and curriculum design, and pointed out that it was extremely important to establish a mechanism to cultivate students' talent, in order to comply with current international standards and meet market needs. Even though it has experienced 30 years' rapid development, China's tourism HE still faces lots of problems. For example, Du (2003) pointed out curricula designs were kept apart from practical needs; most of the achievements of teaching staff were in teaching and theoretical research, and they seldom gained recognition and support from the tourism industry. Most recently, Jiang & Tribe (2009) found most student participants were dissatisfied with their educational programme. Even though the curriculum programmes offered by the institutions were regarded as helpful for their future careers, a big problem was the gap between curriculum and practice.

Since HE institutions are the main body of tourism education in China, the demand for re-evaluating tourism education and exploring possible ways to further reform has become an issue of great importance and urgency (Du, 2003). This paper seeks to evaluate the current focus of tourism management courses at the undergraduate level in China in comparison to tourism undergraduate courses in Australia. Investigation of the differences between China and Australia, particularly in curriculum design and content focus, will give a better understanding of the current tourism curriculum and enhance future development of tourism HE.

Method

This paper reports on a comparative study of the curriculum content and design of undergraduate degree courses in tourism management in China and Australia using empirical evidence. In Australian courses, the term "subject" also means "unit". To enable a meaningful comparison of these tourism courses, a collation of tourism subjects was conducted.

Institutional sampling for this study

The sample for the study comprised 43 institutions (43 courses) from China and seven institutions (eight courses) from Australia. The rationale for this sample is discussed below.

As indicated in the previous section, 252 institutions in China provided tourism HE programmes in 2006. Due to resource constraints and the scale of the population, it was not possible to study the whole population of Chinese institutions offering tourism undergraduate programmes (Jiang & Tribe, 2009). A convenience sample of 43 institutions was chosen, from internet resources, based on the accessibility of tourism undergraduate curricula. The age of tourism HE programmes, institutions' size and reputation were also considered. These educational institutions are located in 20 of the 32 provinces in mainland China, covering a wide geographic scope. Seven tourism undergraduate programmes were established before 1981 and were approved by the Ministry of Education as the pioneers of tourism HE in China. Chinese tourism curriculum was formulated and developed by these universities and, as a consequence, many of the newer universities have simply replicated this curriculum with some additional subjects, depending on the orientation of their department. In this sample, about 40% of tourism undergraduate programmes were established in the late 1970s and 1980s, and another 42% were established in the 1990s. This presents a reliable age scope. Convenience sampling is considered to have some bias and the limitations of this method are discussed in the last section of this paper.

The Australian sample is based on seven universities: Charles Darwin University, Griffith University, Southern Cross University, Victoria University, Murdoch University, University of Canberra and University of Queensland. Each of these universities is a member of the International Centre of Excellence in Tourism and Hospitality Education (THE-ICE). Created in 2004, THE-ICE is an Australian government initiative to recognise, develop, promote and support outstanding capability in this field of education (THE-ICE, 2007). The tourism and hospitality operational programmes of member universities are assessed by an international panel to ensure that they meet comprehensive standards of excellence. The curriculum of universities with THE-ICE membership is regarded as being the epitome of Australian university-level education in tourism management. *Google Search* was used to collect course information on Bachelor degree programmes in tourism management offered by the seven member institutions. Eight course structures were reviewed, because Murdoch University provides two Bachelor courses related to tourism management in two different schools (Bachelor of Commerce and Bachelor of Tourism). These eight courses were all designed for 3-year full-time (or 6-year part-time) tourism students at undergraduate level. Course information, such as information about the type of school providing tourism programmes, programme structures and subject descriptions, was collected. The first collection was done in 2006 but because a number of course structures were changed in 2007 a second complementary collection was conducted.

Content analysis of subjects for this study

Content analysis is useful in this case as it enables analysis of non-structured subject information, which can be coded into a standardised format that allows characteristics of tourism curricula to be identified. Content analysis is an observational research method that is used to collect and organise non-structured qualitative and quantitative information into pre-defined categories, and to evaluate the symbolic content of all forms of recorded communication (Guthrie, Petty, Yongvanich, & Ricceri, 2004). As the relationship between tourism and cultural products has become recognised, content analysis is playing an increasingly important role in tourism research (Veal, 2006). Examples of its use in tourism education research include analysis of British postgraduate courses in tourism (Flohr, 2001), analysis of teaching methods (Okumus & Wong, 2004) and analysis of research in tourism education (Tribe, 2005).

A list of 133 subjects, with detailed descriptions, was collected from eight Australian university courses and a list of 546 subjects was collected from 43 Chinese university courses. The collected subjects were tabulated using a standard Microsoft Excel worksheet, with subject titles and subject descriptions. The subject descriptions summarised the aim,

specific theme, contents and learning outcomes of that subject, where “learning outcome” referred to what students are supposed to gain from that subject. The curriculum dataset collected from university websites did not include thorough information on assessment methods and quality assurance standards. Due to resource constraints and timeframe, these educational aspects were not compared in this study and could be considered for future research.

Subjects were then grouped according to themes and learning outcomes rather than just their title. For example, Employment Relations, Human Relations and Human Resource Management were clustered together because their content was found to cover similar topics and concepts, namely the principles and issues of human relations management. Similarly, Tourism Marketing was combined with Tourism Services Marketing because they both covered the concepts and principles of marketing, as practised in the tourism industry and service sector. The list of 133 Australian subjects was thus grouped into 34 areas of study, and the list of 546 Chinese subjects was grouped into 23 areas of study.

The second step involved further grouping of the areas of study into broad categories. Once subjects were listed under these broad categories, a count was made of how many institutions provided each specific area of study. However, no comparable framework of core subject requirements for teaching tourism has been developed (Ayres, 2006). Therefore, the development of criteria for the categorisation of collected subjects was required. A detailed discussion of this process is presented in the next section.

Criteria for the analysis of subjects

According to Riley et al. (2002) and Tribe (2005), a number of researchers and organisations have contributed to developing the core areas of study in tourism. An important framework was initiated by the UK National Liaison Group for Higher Education in Tourism (NLG) in 1995. The NLG framework comprised “meaning and nature of tourism, structure of the industry, dimensions of tourism and issues of measurement, significance and impacts of tourism, marketing in tourism, tourism planning and development, [and] policy and management in tourism” (Tribe, 2005, p. 53). Although it provides a commonly agreed definition of a core body of knowledge for tourism study (Airey & Johnson, 1999; Riley, et al., 2002), some limitations exist. First, the NLG core areas of study in tourism are focused on tourism core knowledge. The current literature shows that tourism is regarded as a subject area rather than a discipline (Riley, et al., 2002). The lists of 34 subject areas from Australia and 23 subject areas from China were condensed from all required subjects in tourism courses, not only in the tourism context but also in the business context. Secondly, the NLG core was devised in 1995, but with tourism being a dynamic industry it is likely that industry practitioners have also changed. For the purpose of this study, the NLG core was adapted to categorise tourism study into three areas: Tourism Theory, including the meaning and nature of tourism, the structure of the industry, the dimensions of tourism and issues of measurement, and the significance and impacts of tourism; Tourism Management, including tourism planning and development, and policy and management in tourism; and Marketing.

Tribe’s framework of tourism, knowledge and curriculum comprises two domains: business and non-business aspects (Tribe, 2005). If the NLG core provides a basis for subject analysis in the tourism context, Tribe’s model offers a more meaningful basis in the business context, comprising three topic areas: accounting, finance, economics; marketing; and management. Based on these, six broad categories were developed as listed below:

1. Accounting/Finance/Economics, including accounting, financial analysis, and other subjects that underpin many commerce degree study programmes.
2. Business Management, including human resource management, organisation behaviour, management concepts, and those subjects that discuss the acts, manners and practice of managing, monitoring, supervising and controlling business aspects.
3. Marketing, including principles of marketing, tourism marketing, and those subjects that enhance the understanding of the marketing process as applied to tourism

products, and provide a sustainable and strategic approach to industry sales and promotion.

4. Tourism Theory, including introduction to tourism, contemporary tourism issues, sustainable tourism, and such subjects that discuss the concepts and contemporary issues in tourism research and tourism development.
5. Tourism Management, including event management, services management, tourism enterprise management, strategic tourism management, and those subjects that show the application of management in a tourism context.
6. Others, including employment skills study, research skills study, languages study, geography and those subjects that do not easily fit into the previous categories.

Results

The analysis of the course content of Chinese universities revealed that the Chinese Ministry of Education demands three subjects as compulsory core subjects in all tourism management undergraduate programmes. A further nine subjects were established by the tourism education academic curriculum designers in China (see Table 1). Thus, a “3+9” curriculum framework forms the foundation curriculum for tourism management degrees in China: three fundamental subjects from the secondary discipline of Tourism Management required by government, and nine core subjects taken from the primary discipline of Business Administration required by universities. As Xiao (1999) indicated, the framework of core and fundamental subjects is aimed not only at developing students in a broader disciplinary context but also, and more practically, at guiding the actual curricula design of tourism management as a secondary discipline under Business Administration. This 3+9 framework covers a total of 340 subjects, which represents about 62.3% of all 546 subjects collected from the Chinese tourism courses.

Subjects required by government: Three fundamental subjects from the secondary discipline of Tourism Management	Introduction of tourism
	Tourism resources and development
	Hotel management
Subjects regulated by universities: Nine core subjects taken from the primary discipline of Business Administration	Marketing
	Accounting
	Finance management
	Western economic
	The principle of management
	Statistics
	Political economics
	Business law
	Information system management

Table 1: The 3+9 curriculum framework in tourism management education in China

In contrast, the Australian tourism management curriculum appears more diverse and flexible, with approximately 34 subject areas the curricula in Australian undergraduate-level degrees compared to approximately 23 in Chinese curricula. No comparable framework of core subject requirements was identified in the Australian courses.

Under each of the six broad categories described previously, subject areas with an effective fit are listed in Table 2, which shows the number of institutions in China and Australia offering the subject areas.

Core areas of study	Study areas	Number of subjects offered	
		Australia	Chinese
Tourism Management	Tourism Enterprise Management	8	50
	Tourism Planning and Development	5	35
	Strategic Tourism and Hospitality Management	4	9
	Services Management	4	0
	Information Systems for Services Industries	3	25
	Event Management	2	0
	Hotel Management Operations	2	54
	Entrepreneurship in T&H Industry	2	0
	Tourism and Hospitality Law	2	0
	Conventions, Meetings & Exhibitions Management	1	0
	Gaming and Club Management	1	0
	Food and Beverage Management	1	0
	Risk, Crisis and Disaster Management	1	0
	Human Resource Management in the T&H Industry	1	0
	Economic Analysis for Tourism and Hospitality	1	0
Tour Guide Operations	0	19	
<i>Total</i>		38	192
Tourism Theory	Introduction of Tourism	10	34
	Tourism, Culture and Society	7	7
	Sustainable Tourism	5	0
	International Trends and Global Issues in Tourism	4	0
	Special Interest Tourism	4	0
	Festivals and Special Events	1	0
	Tourism Planning and Environment	1	0
	<i>Total</i>	32	41
Business Management	Principles of Management	7	30
	Business Law	6	32
	Organisation Behaviour	4	0
	Human Resource Management	3	5
	Information Science for Business	1	0
	Public Relations	0	8
	<i>Total</i>	21	75
Others	Introduction to Research/ Business Research Skills	11	0
	Employment Skills/ Professional Development	4	0
	Tourism and Hospitality Research and Analysis	3	0
	Tourism Psychology	0	29
	English in Tourism	0	18
	Statistics	0	15
	Tourism Geography	0	11
	Tourism Etiquette	0	7
	2 nd Foreign Language (e.g. Japanese)	0	5
	Folklore	0	5
<i>Total</i>	18	90	

Accounting/ Finance/ Economics	Accounting/Finance/Economics for Business	8	83
	Accounting/Finance/Economics for T&H	4	33
	<i>Total</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>116</i>
Marketing	Tourism and Hospitality Marketing	7	22
	Principles of Marketing	5	10
	<i>Total</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>32</i>
	Total subjects	133	546

Table 2: Subjects taught in tourism management degrees (undergraduate)

Note: Subject areas grouped from 133 subjects from Australia courses and 546 subjects from Chinese courses.

The focus and priority of these six broad categories by both countries is indicated in Table 3.

Core areas of study (Six categories)	Australian		Chinese	
	Number of subjects offered (7 institutions)	Percentage	Number of subjects offered (43 institutions)	Percentage
Tourism management	38	28.6	192	35.2
Tourism theory	32	24.1	41	7.5
Business management	21	15.8	75	13.7
Others	18	13.5	90	16.5
Accounting/finance/ economics	12	9.0	116	21.2
Marketing	12	9.0	32	5.9
Total	133	100	546	100

Table 3: Comparison of focus of core areas of study

The degree of variance between China and Australia's focus on the six identified core areas (broad categories) can easily be seen in Figure 1.

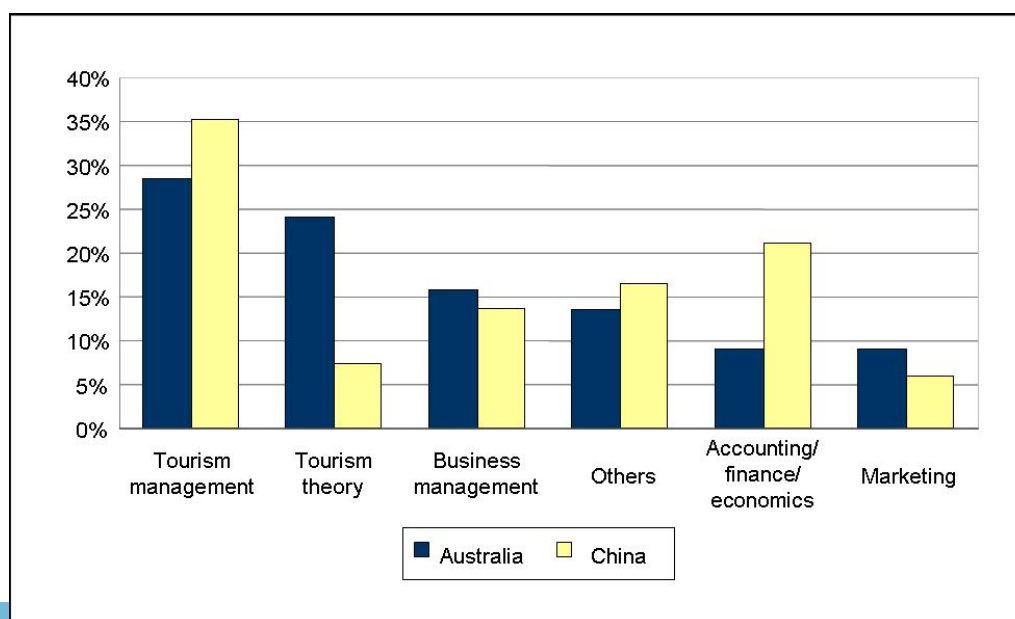


Figure 1: Comparison of focus of core areas of study

Discussion

The following discussion attempts to summarise the variance of focus placed by each country on the six core areas. Throughout this discussion the term focus is used to describe the proportion of tourism education given to that particular core area.

Differences in course structure between China and Australia

For all university students in China, one-third of the total degree credit points come from government-mandated subjects. Examples of the core subjects that are compulsory for Chinese students in all disciplines include College Students' Ideological and Moral Cultivation; Marxist Philosophy; Higher Mathematics; Military Theory; Introduction to Mao Ze Dong Thought; and Deng Xiao Ping Theory.

Another structural difference is the duration of degree programme study. All Chinese university undergraduate degrees take a minimum of 4 years to complete. This enables all students to complete the political and social core units mentioned above. In contrast, Australian degrees usually take 3 years to complete and flexibility of programme content appears to be a priority. Students are encouraged to enhance employment opportunities by embracing a study programme that enables them to develop a wide range of skills and knowledge. Many programmes only have 12 required tourism subjects in their core area of study and students complete their degree with elective subjects.

Previous studies (Barron & Arcodia, 2002; Jordan, 2008) indicate that Australian institutions export their curricula to different countries and sell their expertise in teaching, learning and quality assurance. They also offer tourism HE to both domestic and overseas students. The findings of this study confirm that Australian institutions have developed a more effective framework in tourism education than Chinese institutions. Due to the state-owned nature of Chinese universities, there is less flexibility and limited input for operating and developing programmes, even though the educational resources of the university can be shared (Zhang & Fan, 2005). On the other hand, the pressure to manage student diversity has forced Australian institutions into developing a more flexible tourism undergraduate curriculum.

Differences in focus of core subject areas between China and Australia

In order to emphasise differences, a comparison of the focus of core subject areas between China and Australia is discussed according to percentage differences (see Figure 1).

1. Tourism Theory

Tourism Theory in China constituted just 7.5% of subject offerings, while in Australia it accounted for 24.1%. This reflects the broader approach to tourism education in Australia, which is shown by the eclectic offering of subjects such as *Sustainable Tourism*, *International Trends and Global Issues in Tourism* and *Special Interest Tourism*. Of the tourism theory subjects offered in China, 83% of the focus is in the subject *Introduction of Tourism*. Along with globalisation of the tourism industry, China's tourism education should develop a global orientation as suggested by Zhao (1991). The findings in this study indicate that Australian tourism programmes have embedded a global perspective in tourism HE curriculum (Jordan, 2008). Therefore, it is possible for Chinese curriculum designers to learn from Western tourism programmes and redesign China's tourism curriculum to be more relevant to current global issues.

2. Accounting, Economics and Finance

China placed more emphasis on accounting, finance and economics subjects than Australia, with 21.2% of tourism-related courses focusing on this subject area in China and just 9.0% in Australia. This subject area in China is ranked second of all the six subject areas identified, whilst for Australia it is ranked fifth. A possible reason for the big difference in focus may stem from the rapid development of the economy in China, which has seen the promotion of, and greater demand for, graduates in accounting, finance and economics degrees. Accordingly, through academic association, there is a perception that the tourism industry also requires a high level of knowledge of accounting, economics and finance. This

perception is enhanced by the requirement that all students undertake higher mathematics, including calculus, linear algebra and probability statistics.

3. Tourism Management

In this area, China's focus was 35.2% while Australia's was 28.6% of core subject offerings. Sixteen subject areas were identified under the Tourism Management core area. Australian institutions offered 15 of the 16 subject areas identified, while China only focused on six. It would appear that Australian courses concentrate on industry-specific skills and offer a more holistic approach to the development of tourism management skills with a broad range of subject areas including service management, event management, and entrepreneurship in the tourism and hospitality industry. China appears to offer a narrower but deeper focus on subjects, including the more structured and policy-oriented subjects such as tourism enterprise management, hotel management operations, and tourism planning and development. This finding could partly explain why "Chinese tourism students thought the knowledge that the curriculum covers is not wide enough", as indicated by Jiang and Tribe (2009, p. 14). It could also confirm the trivialised programme setup in China as a factor in students having a narrower scope of knowledge, irrational knowledge structure and an inability to comprehensively analyse, as well as a poor adaptability to tourism-related occupations (Du, 2003).

One of the major differences in the degree focus was the mandatory study of hotel management as a core skill for Chinese tourism degrees which, as previously discussed, reflects the requirements of the Chinese Government. In Australia a distinction is made between tourism and hospitality management, and those seeking a career in hotel management have the opportunity to study for a degree in this area.

4. Marketing

Orientation towards marketing dominated in 9.0% of Australian tourism core subjects versus 5.9% in China. Of the six core subject areas, marketing was ranked of lowest priority by China. Interestingly, all seven of the THE-ICE member universities had at least one marketing subject as core. In China only half, or 22 of the 43 universities, had marketing as a core subject. According to Wang (2008), marketing as a subject area is regarded as the most important subject area by the tourism industry in Australia. Despite Wang's industry finding, this study indicates that marketing is not highly valued by the current tourism management curriculum either in China or Australia.

5. Others

This category comprises ten subjects that do not easily fit within the broad categories discussed above. Within the framework of core or mandatory subjects for students studying tourism in Australia, 18 or 13.5% of the subjects fell into this category, including introduction to research/business research skills; employment skills/professional development; and tourism and hospitality research and analysis. In China, the category represented 16.5% of core areas, with tourism psychology dominating at 32.2% of the other subjects. Also included in this category in China were English in tourism, statistics, tourism geography, tourism etiquette, second foreign language and folklore.

6. Business Management

The ranking of business management as a core area of skill was similar for both countries, with China offering 13.7% and Australia 15.8% of subjects in this area. It is interesting to note that the two prime subjects that constituted 82.7% of China's business management focus were principles of management and business law, while for Australia such subjects represented 62% of this core area.

Differences in the location of tourism undergraduate courses within universities

A further finding of interest from this research was the departmental location of tourism undergraduate courses within universities. In the seven THE-ICE institutions' schools of tourism, four tourism courses were taught in a business school, three in a dedicated tourism

management school, and only one in another area, namely a social sciences and humanities school (see Table 4). This result reflects the strong business/management orientation in Australian tourism degree programmes at the undergraduate level.

Key orientation	Name of School	Name of institution	Total
Business	School of Law and Business	CDU	4 (50%)
	Griffith Business School	GU	
	Murdoch Business School	MU	
	School of Business and Government	UC	
Tourism	School of Tourism and Hospitality Management	SCU	3 (37.5%)
	School of Tourism	UQ	
	School of Hospitality, Tourism and Marketing	VU	
Social Sciences	School of Social Sciences and Humanities	MU	1 (12.5%)

Table 4: Departmental location of tourism undergraduate programmes (THE-ICE member institutions)

Note: CDU= Charles Darwin University; GU= Griffith University; MU= Murdoch University; SCU= Southern Cross University; UC= University of Canberra; UQ= University of Queensland; VU= Victoria University.

In contrast, in China the tourism degree programmes fell into non-tourism-related disciplines such as foreign language, gardens, history and geography (see Figure 2). Wu and Li (2005) revealed that about 39% of the tourism departments were in a school of administration because the tourism management course was seen as a sub-course (secondary discipline) of business administration and tourism graduates were awarded with a Bachelor in Administration degree. About 20% were administered by schools of history and 17% by schools of geography, with the rationale for this structure being that tourism may have been seen as a means of maintaining these schools in a declining academic market. This raises a problem in the development of tourism education suppliers. Jiang Du (2003), Vice Chairman of China National Tourism Administration (CNTA), indicated that some tourism departments were established at random and that there was inefficiency in the use of educational resources. Most of the tourism institutions have followed conventional education patterns and the majority of the teaching and research staff come from other disciplines (Du, 2003; Huang, 2001).

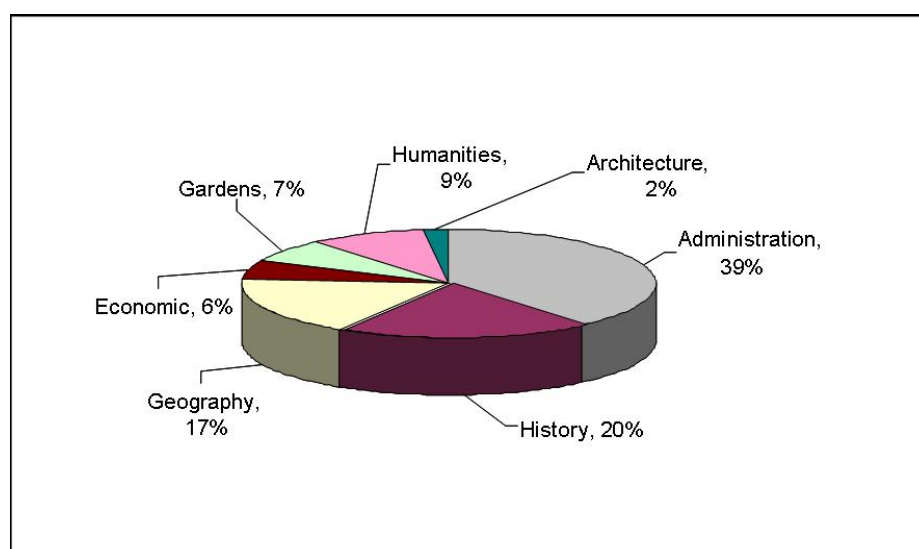


Figure 2: Types of schools which established tourism management courses in China (n = 69)
Resource: Wu & Li (2005)

Conclusion

Findings from this study can be used as the basis of information sharing for those responsible for reform and development of tourism education. This study outlines the current level of the content and design of tourism curriculum in Australia and China at the undergraduate level. Whilst there is general agreement that a high level of tourism education serves to sustain the community and underpins successful tourism destinations (Cooper, et al., 1996; Tribe, 2005; Wang, 2008; Zhang et al., 2005), this paper highlights variances in course structure, focus of subject areas and programme location within universities, between Australia and China.

It appears that tourism education in China is somewhat rigid, while tourism education in Australia is more dynamic and takes a holistic approach. The Chinese tourism undergraduate curriculum is found to be rather inflexible, old and outdated, which is consistent with previous research (Du, 2003; Huang, 2001; Jiang & Tribe, 2009; Lam & Xiao, 2000; Xiao, 1999; Zhao, 1991) that indicated that China's tourism curriculum has not been valued by the tourism industry. On the other hand, Australia has a strong international reputation for providing high quality tourism education (McKercher, 2002). The Australian tourism undergraduate curriculum is found to be more flexible, having developed effective frameworks to manage student diversity and meet not only domestic but also international students' needs. A global perspective has also been embedded in curriculum design. Previous studies (Barron & Arcodia, 2002; Craig-Smith & Peiyi, 2007; Jordan, 2008) support this finding. Furthermore, the findings of this study show that Australian tourism degrees tend to focus on a tourism specialisation with a business influence, whereas Chinese tourism degrees focus on business with a tourism influence. Strong variances in the focus of tourism curriculum between China and Australia are particularly evident in the subject areas of tourism theory, and accounting, economics and finance. This finding contributes to a deeper understanding of tourism HE with regard to curriculum design at the undergraduate level.

Some limitations of this study should be noted, which also indicate future research areas. The major limitation of this study rests in the sampling. The convenience sample of this study cannot claim to be representative of all tourism courses in Australia and China (Schunk, McArthur, & Maahs-Fladung, 2009). In order to enhance the generalisations of the findings, a larger sample should be conducted. The second main limitation of this study was the absence of a model to analyse tourism subjects in HE (Wang, 2008). Even though this study has developed categories for the purpose of analysing tourism subjects, the researchers call for a model for subject analysis in further research. Also, further research could be undertaken to examine the background of teaching staff of tourism HE programmes. As Jordan (2008) stated, curricula development is shaped by policies and structures, validation procedures and quality assurance systems; in essence, it relies on people. The diversity of the background of teaching staff and the ways in which they teach could shape the curriculum, and a comparison of teaching styles and educational background of teaching staff could be conducted. Furthermore, the influence of other major tourism education countries (such as the UK or US) was not discussed in this study, and differences in political regimes, assessment methods and quality assurance standards could be further explored.

The findings highlight some of the differences that may assist those involved in curriculum design. However, further research into the effectiveness and relevance of both Chinese and Australian tourism education in meeting the needs of industry is required, to ensure that curriculum design is relevant to careers within the tourism industry globally. It would be interesting to collect data on industry needs and industry perceptions of tourism education, as well as academics' perceptions of tourism degree priorities and practitioners' thoughts as to the applicability of tourism courses to the workplace. Despite the recognition that tourism is a global industry, there is considerable difference in the design, structure and focus of tourism degree programmes in China and Australia. To ensure that tourism education meets the increasing challenges of a globalised tourism industry, there is a need for greater collaboration and discussion between tourism educational professionals, as well as industry practitioners and policy makers.

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