

# Development and Innovation of MICE Tourism in China in the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative

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**Abstract:** MICE tourism is a prominent part of research on tourism in China. The implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative has pointed out a new direction for the fusion and upgrading of the convention & exhibition industry and tourism in China, making MICE tourism expected to go global, integrate into China's overall strategic consideration system and usher in the opportunity to go international. In this paper, a brief definition of MICE tourism is given, and the value, challenges and innovation path for MICE tourism in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative are systematically analyzed.

**Keywords:** MICE Tourism, The Belt and Road, Development; Innovation.

## 1. Definition of MICE Tourism

In recent years, with the rise of MICE tourism in China's large and medium-sized cities, China has witnessed new driving forces for the tourism in transition and new ways for the sustainable development of tourism. Despite the rapid development of MICE tourism in China, the theoretical research on MICE tourism is still lagging behind, and its concept has engendered controversy. Therefore, by comprehensively consulting the literature and considering the characteristics of convention & exhibition and tourism, the author defines MICE tourism as follows: activities with characteristics of business communication, information exchange and exhibition, including conferences, exhibitions, incentive travel, expositions, trade fairs, as well as major festivals and special events, are held at a specific time and place as triggering factors to attract exhibitors, attendees, and the public to visit the destination. It is a new form of tourism derived from the combination of tourism and convention & exhibition.[1]



Figure 1. Types of MICE Tourism

## 2. The Value of Developing MICE Tourism in the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative

### 2.1. Building a Communication Platform to Promote Strategy Implementation

With the official implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, an increasing number of Chinese companies have begun to go out of the local market, and strived to participate in exhibitions and MICE activities. Through cooperation with countries along the Belt and Road in industry projects, they have opened up new markets and made the international market fully understand Chinese enterprises. With exchange platforms built between regions, cooperation between enterprises has been enhanced, integrating enterprises into the implementation of the Initiative.[2]

MICE activities, such as exhibitions, conference exchanges, festivals and special events, etc., have become a cultural exchange platform as well as a good channel for countries and regions along the Belt and Road to present their own culture and expand their influence, thereby gradually creating an environment for the development of cultural diversity. At the national level, conferences, exhibitions and business tours between governments have built a platform for dialogue between governments, promoted economic and trade exchanges as well as cultural communication between different regions in China, and strengthened the relationship between China and its neighboring countries as "a community of shared interests". It can be concluded that the Belt and Road initiative has brought opportunities to the development and upgrading of MICE tourism in China, and the fusion of convention & exhibition and tourism has in turn promoted the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind in the Initiative.

### 2.2. Accelerating the Flow of Resources Within Regions to Alleviate the Shortage of Domestic Resources

MICE tourism resources involve a relatively long industrial chain, with a significant positive effect and radiation effect on affiliates as well as upstream and downstream firms. Such an industrial chain can make the national strategy generate a

prominent spillover value, increase the common interests of countries along the Belt and Road, improve their desire and foundation of long-term and stable cooperation, and also promote comprehensive cooperation among countries in macro-policy, trade exchanges and other fields.[3] The fusion of convention & exhibition industry and tourism will build a bridge between China and countries along the Belt and Road for the interconnection and mutual learning of different civilizations. Meanwhile, since the countries and regions affected by the Belt and Road Initiative are generally abundant in resources, such a fusion can further guarantee the steady advancement and subsequent implementation of the strategy, and contribute to connecting trade routes with Eurasian countries through MICE tourism projects. The entire domestic economy will be further integrated with the world economy, thus driving the in-depth integration of Chinese market and overseas market.

### **2.3. Combining the Advantages of the Industries to Improve International Competitiveness**

Since the convention & exhibition industry and tourism involve connection, infiltration, integration, and cooperation with each other, advantageous resources of the two can be linked together to create a direct connection based on the contract, so as to develop an integrated industrial chain in tourism and form an alliance relationship for mutual development. This can achieve complementary advantages, save unnecessary expenses, reduce production costs, jointly create an overall image of MICE tourism, and promote win-win development of the industry, thereby expanding the influence and reach of the external market.

It is necessary for the convention & exhibition industry to make use of the resource positioning and service ability of tourism, and to reasonably select some economic partners from tourism, so as to improve its own positioning pattern and service. Besides, the convention & exhibition industry should fully combine its own advantage with the resource advantage of tourism, and promote the progress of tourism with its own market development, so as to create a further integrated brand, form its own positive advantages, and enhance the international competitiveness of the industry.

## **3. Challenges Faced by MICE Tourism in China in the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative**

### **3.1. Lack of Versatile Talents on “Language + Exhibition”**

Holding exhibitions requires professional talents with good capabilities in organizing exhibitions. When dealing with participants from countries along the Belt and Road, only with a good command of the languages of these countries, especially the exhibition interpretation, can exhibition staff effectively promote communication. To hold exhibitions related to the Belt and Road Initiative, a city needs to reserve plenty of talents on foreign languages of countries along the Belt and Road, as well as talents on organizing exhibitions. It is difficult for exhibition organizers to gather a number of versatile exhibition talents in a short term, which poses a certain challenge to the development of the exhibition economy[4].

### **3.2. Few International Brand Exhibitions and Lack of International Voice**

It is the top priority for MICE tourism to take the road of brand development to achieve great progress in the new era. Throughout the world, countries and regions with developed MICE tourism generally have well-known exhibitions and cities, such as the Triennale Milano International Exhibition. In contrast, there are few global brand exhibitions in China, with the Canton Fair as one of the most influential ones. Despite certain advantages and influence in emerging exhibition projects (such as China High-tech Fair in Shenzhen and Airshow China in Zhuhai), the overall development of global brand exhibitions relatively lags behind. In the international convention and exhibition market, although China has taken a big step towards the vision and goal of becoming a major convention and exhibition country, there is a prominent gap between China and the world’s convention and exhibition powers in terms of influence, voice, and brand.

### **3.3. Low Degree of Marketization in the Exhibition Economy, and Low Utilization of Resource**

At present, many regions in China take the government as the lead to hold exhibitions, to carry out the construction of infrastructure like venues, hotels, and transportation, and to reserve talents on exhibition service. These talents on infrastructure construction and service can effectively meet the service needs of international friends participating in the exhibitions related to the Belt and Road Initiative. However, when there is no exhibition, the infrastructure tends to be idle and lack maintenance, resulting in its low utilization and waste of human resources. Government-led exhibitions are mainly constructed with financial funds, without enough exploration of market-oriented exhibitions, full utilization of market-oriented facilities and funds, as well as adequate market-oriented management.

## **4. Innovation Path for MICE Tourism Development in the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative**

### **4.1. Cultivating Versatile Talents on Exhibition Economy in the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative**

Versatile exhibition talents must have tactics, with the ability to plan exhibitions from a global perspective, and to coordinate the work of exhibition-related practitioners such as staff in hotel, catering, and transportation. Since the Belt and Road Initiative promotes all-round cooperation between China and countries along the Belt and Road, the exhibition economy faces great opportunities. China should cultivate talents related to the exhibition economy. First, in order to satisfy the basic needs of the exhibition economy, cities that develop the exhibition economy must select high-quality exhibition talents through local and global recruitment. Second, cities that hold exhibitions should cultivate talents in a planned way. For instance, they can set up majors related to convention and exhibition in local eligible colleges, and provide assistance in funds, teachers, etc., so as to continuously cultivate and deliver qualified talents for the exhibition economy related to the Initiative. Colleges with majors related to conference and exhibition should establish

a close cooperative relationship with the government and enterprises that hold exhibitions, and consult the government and enterprises on the training of exhibition talents, so as to improve the training program and the quality of talent training. Colleges should strengthen the training of versatile exhibition talents. such talents should be proficient in the languages of countries along the Belt and Road, especially with qualified ability in exhibition interpretation. In order to meet the requirements of the exhibition economy in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative for versatile exhibition talents, Colleges should also strengthen the education practice of exhibition talents, let students participate in more exhibition practice to improve their ability in exhibition organization and coordination, and cultivate the international general ability of exhibition talents.[5]

#### **4.2. Formulating Exhibition Standards to Master the International Voice**

The fusion of convention & exhibition and tourism is a strategic emerging industry without unified technical standards. However, industrial technical standards are vital to the global competitiveness of a country or region. The government should give full play to its powerful function in policy guidance, platform construction and mechanism creation. China should take the lead to jointly establish the international MICE tourism alliances, such as UFI, ICCA, IAEE, SITE, etc., with other countries and regions along the Belt and Road. Besides, brand standards and technical systems in the industry should be formulated by such alliances, so as to master the international voice.

#### **4.3. Promoting the Market-oriented Exhibition Economy to Improve the Utilization of Exhibition Resources**

Holding exhibitions requires a series of support in exhibition resources and infrastructure. Since the exhibitions in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative are international and advanced, they are not held frequently. For example, the Boao Forum for Asia is held once a year with a limited time.

When there is no exhibition, it is necessary to strengthen the utilization of exhibition resources to avoid the waste caused by inefficient use, and to guarantee the income of exhibition practitioners during this period. Therefore, cities should vigorously develop the market-oriented exhibition economy to achieve long-term utilization of exhibition resources. When holding exhibitions in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative, or building infrastructure, cities should attempt to select market-oriented institutions and personnel for exhibition services. For instance, the exhibition center can rent the center of a market organization to provide exhibition services during the exhibition, and the market organization can arrange it by itself when there is no exhibition. Meanwhile, cities can combine local special resources and advantageous industries to develop exhibitions at different levels, including international exhibitions serving the Belt and Road Initiative, and regional exhibitions serving local economic development, so as to make full use of exhibition resources as much as possible.

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