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Exploring Pathways for the Connotative Development of Public Affairs Management in Aviation Universities

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Abstract: ***Amid China's strategic transition from a "large civil aviation country" to a "strong civil aviation country," the aviation industry is undergoing a historic shift from scale expansion to quality enhancement. From the perspective of governance modernization, this study conducts an in-depth analysis of the core principles and practical challenges in the connotative development of Public Affairs Management at aviation universities, and systematically constructs development pathways tailored to the aviation sector. The findings indicate that connotative development necessitates a paradigm shift: from emphasizing scale to focusing on quality, from knowledge indoctrination to competency cultivation, from discipline-oriented to demand-driven approaches, and from singular to multidimensional evaluation mechanisms. In response to current challenges—such as homogenized training objectives, outdated curriculum systems, monotonous teaching methods, insufficient faculty expertise, and misaligned evaluation mechanisms—this paper proposes comprehensive reforms across five dimensions: objective positioning, curriculum restructuring, pedagogical innovation, faculty development, and quality assessment. The study aims to provide theoretical insights and practical guidance for the transformation and upgrading of Public Affairs Management in aviation universities.***

Keywords: Aviation Universities, Public Affairs Management, Connotative Development, Teaching Reform, Talent Cultivation**.**

1. Introduction

Amid China's strategic transformation from a "large civil aviation country" to a "strong civil aviation country," the aviation industry is undergoing a historic paradigm shift from scale expansion to quality enhancement. This transition necessitates modernization of the civil aviation governance system and capabilities as crucial support mechanisms for industrial development. As key institutions for cultivating public management professionals in civil aviation, aviation universities face unprecedented challenges in their Public Affairs Management. Traditional training models significantly lag behind rapidly evolving industry demands, creating substantial gaps between graduates' knowledge structures and actual job competency requirements. Concurrently, under China's "Double Ten-Thousand Plan" for disciplinary development, program specialization and quality have become decisive factors for institutional sustainability.

While two decades of extensive scale expansion have addressed quantitative workforce needs, this approach has engendered deep-seated contradictions including homogenized talent cultivation, inadequate practical capabilities, and insufficient industry adaptation. The emergence of new technologies, business formats, and operational models - ranging from "smart airports" to "four-type airport" initiatives, and from aviation logistics supply chains to aerotropolis governance - demands higher-level public management expertise. Furthermore, the current development status of Public Affairs Management in numerous domestic aviation universities remains suboptimal.

Consequently, transitioning Public Affairs Management education from scale-oriented "extensive development" to quality-focused "connotative development" represents not merely an internal requirement for program transformation, but an inevitable choice for serving China's civil aviation power strategy. Grounded in the perspective of governance modernization, this study conducts thorough analysis of the core principles and practical challenges in the connotative development of Public Affairs Management at aviation universities, while systematically constructing aviation - specific development pathways. The research aims to provide theoretical references and practical guidance for program construction and reform initiatives.

2. Core Principles of Connotative Development

Connotative development represents a sophisticated quality-oriented paradigm that fundamentally transforms educational approaches by emphasizing holistic enhancement of system functionality through strategic optimization of internal elements and structural reorganization. This developmental philosophy moves beyond traditional quantitative metrics to focus on sustainable quality improvement and systemic excellence. In the specific context of Public Affairs Management within aviation universities, this comprehensive approach manifests through four fundamental, interconnected transitions that collectively redefine educational excellence in this specialized field:

2.1 Strategic Shift from Scale Emphasis to Quality Focus

This fundamental transition necessitates a complete departure from conventional development models centered on program expansion and enrollment growth. Instead, it advocates for strategic reallocation of institutional resources toward optimizing educational processes and enhancing graduates' core competencies through systematic quality enhancement initiatives. Aviation universities must embrace the "precision and distinctiveness" principle as their guiding philosophy, deliberately moving away from the "comprehensive coverage" approach that has traditionally dominated higher education.

By maintaining controlled enrollment scales while pursuing educational excellence, institutions can cultivate distinctive competitive advantages in the specialized domain of civil aviation public management. The exemplary practice of Nanchang Hangkong University's Public Administration Department serves as an illuminating case study, demonstrating how precise positioning and characteristic development enable even smaller-scale programs to achieve remarkable employment recognition and industry acceptance. Their success story reveals that strategic focus on niche areas within aviation public management can yield disproportionate returns in graduate employability and program reputation.

2.2 Comprehensive Transition from Knowledge Transmission to Competency Cultivation

This paradigm shift involves moving beyond the traditional teaching model dominated by theoretical knowledge impartation toward a comprehensive emphasis on multidimensional development of students' core professional capabilities. The transformed approach systematically cultivates essential competencies including sophisticated systems thinking, rigorous policy analysis, effective crisis management, and dedicated public service orientation. Within aviation-specific contexts, students must develop the crucial ability to seamlessly apply public management theories to complex industry practices, encompassing specialized domains such as aviation policy formulation, airport governance optimization, and aviation safety regulation. This enables graduates to successfully navigate the intricate and dynamic aviation management environments they will encounter professionally. The necessary transformation demands close alignment between academic content and actual industry requirements, as exemplified by Civil Aviation University of China's strategic integration of specialized content including "civil aviation regulatory systems" and "airline operational safety management" into its core curriculum, ensuring graduates possess both theoretical understanding and practical application skills.

2.3 Systematic Evolution from Discipline Orientation to Demand Orientation

This evolutionary process requires breaking through traditional confined disciplinary logic to establish proactive engagement with the competency requirements emerging from national aviation power strategy, regional aviation economic development, and civil aviation public sector positions. Academic programs must establish sustainable, institutionalized interaction mechanisms with civil aviation administrations, airport groups, and airlines, creating efficient channels for transforming industry developments into dynamic educational resources. This approach enables continuous, dynamic adjustment of training objectives and educational schemes to enhance industry relevance and maintain foresight in talent cultivation. The Civil Aviation College of Xi'an Aeronautical University exemplifies this evolution through its deeply embedded collaboration with industry leaders including China Eastern Airlines and China Southern Airlines, effectively integrating authentic industry needs into its educational processes through joint curriculum development, guest lectures, and practical training opportunities.

2.4 Fundamental Transformation from Singular Assessment to Comprehensive Evaluation

This comprehensive transformation involves constructing sophisticated multidimensional evaluation systems that encompass knowledge acquisition, ability development, quality enhancement, and value cultivation, with particular emphasis on process evaluation and developmental assessment. In aviation education contexts, it becomes especially crucial to introduce authentic industry standards and specific position competency requirements, establishing robust multi-stakeholder evaluation mechanisms that involve academic institutions, industry partners, and societal representatives. This collaborative approach ensures comprehensive, multi-perspective assessment of talent cultivation quality while promoting students' holistic development. Xi'an Aeronautical Polytechnic College's innovative exploration of integrating "AI, big data, and other information technologies throughout the teaching process" has enabled sophisticated full-chain tracking and systematic evaluation of learning processes, providing valuable data-driven insights for continuous educational improvement and personalized student development.

These four interconnected transitions collectively form a comprehensive framework for achieving connotative development in aviation-oriented public affairs management education, ensuring graduates possess the specialized knowledge, practical skills, and professional attributes required to excel in the complex and evolving aviation industry.

3. Practical Challenges in the Development of Public Affairs Management at Aviation Universities

Despite the growing consensus on connotative development within academic circles, Public Affairs Management in aviation universities continue to encounter substantial and multifaceted challenges during their transformation processes. These difficulties primarily manifest in five critical aspects that collectively hinder the effective implementation of quality-oriented development strategies:

3.1 Homogenization of Educational Objectives and Deficient Aviation Characteristics

The majority of Public Affairs Management in aviation institutions exhibit pronounced homogeneity in their educational frameworks and training schemes, fundamentally failing to achieve differentiated positioning through adequate integration of unique institutional heritage and distinctive aviation industry characteristics. This phenomenon of "curriculum isomorphism" results in programs that lack innovative approaches to incorporating aviation-specific elements into their core educational structures. For instance, many institutions resort to superficial modifications by merely adding one or two introductory aviation courses while neglecting the systematic design of comprehensive knowledge structures, professional competencies, and essential qualities specifically tailored for aviation public management talent development. The consequences are

particularly evident in graduate employment outcomes, where students demonstrate insufficient competitive advantage within the specialized aviation sector, ultimately leading to homogeneous competition with graduates from comprehensive universities possessing broader but less specialized training. A case in point is Nanchang Hangkong University's Public Administration Department, which despite establishing an "Aviation Enterprise Management" concentration, has struggled to comprehensively integrate aviation characteristics across all core courses, consequently undermining the effectiveness of specialized talent cultivation and limiting graduates' professional differentiation in the job market.

3.2 Outdated Curriculum Systems and Disconnection from Industry Practice

Current curriculum structures remain heavily dominated by theoretical courses that primarily cover generic public management theories while critically lacking specialized content reflecting contemporary aviation sector characteristics and emerging industry trends. Extensive investigations of major domestic aviation universities reveal that aviation-specific courses—including essential subjects such as aviation regulations, airport management, airspace resource optimization, and aviation emergency management — collectively constitute less than 20% of total credit hours in most programs. Furthermore, practical teaching components often maintain a superficial character, suffering from insufficient substantive collaboration with key industry stakeholders including civil aviation administrations, airport authorities, and airline corporations. This disconnect creates significant competency gaps between students' practical capabilities and actual industry requirements, particularly in rapidly evolving areas such as digital transformation and sustainable aviation. While Civil Aviation University of China's curriculum demonstrates some progress through incorporating industry-specific courses like "Aviation Safety Statistics" and "Airport Safety Operations Management," these initiatives remain inadequate to address the comprehensively evolving demands of "smart civil aviation" development and the industry's increasing emphasis on technological integration and innovation management.

3.3 Monotonous Teaching Methods and Insufficient Innovative Application

Traditional instructional approaches continue to dominate classroom practices, with teacher-centered knowledge transmission models prevailing over more engaging and effective pedagogical strategies. There remains a notable under implementation of interactive methodologies including case-based teaching, scenario simulation, project-based learning, and other experiential learning approaches that foster critical thinking and practical problem-solving skills. The situation is particularly concerning in the development and application of aviation-specific case studies, where there exists a severe lag in creating comprehensive teaching materials that reflect China's unique civil aviation governance practices and operational challenges. The absence of high-quality, locally-relevant case libraries significantly hinders students' initiative in knowledge construction and internalization, ultimately constraining their ability to analyze and solve practical aviation problems in real-world contexts. Although the Civil Aviation College of Xi'an Aeronautical University has achieved certain recognition through its "ideological and political education training activities," substantial room for improvement persists in fundamental pedagogical innovation and the systematic integration of modern teaching technologies across the curriculum.

3.4 Insufficient Industry Experience Among Faculty Members

The faculty composition in most aviation university public management programs reveals a significant imbalance toward academically-oriented professionals who typically transition directly from graduate studies to teaching positions without substantial industry immersion. While these instructors generally possess solid theoretical foundations and research capabilities, they crucially lack professional experience or systematic secondments in civil aviation public sectors and related industries. Sample surveys conducted across multiple institutions indicate that less than 30% of faculty members in aviation public management programs possess meaningful industry practical experience, creating a substantial gap between theoretical instruction and practical application. This deficiency manifests in classroom teaching through limited capacity for deep analysis of actual operations and policy practices within aviation domains, ultimately compromising the industry relevance and targeted effectiveness of talent cultivation. The Civil Aviation College of Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics's recent initiative to involve industry experts from prominent companies including China Sky Aviation Engine Maintenance Company and Eastern Airport Group in revising talent training schemes reflects institutional recognition of this critical faculty shortcoming and represents a promising step toward bridging the academia-industry divide.

3.5 Disconnected Evaluation Mechanisms from Industry Standards

Current academic assessment systems predominantly rely on traditional final closed-book examinations that emphasize knowledge recall and theoretical understanding, while systematically failing to effectively evaluate the core competencies and practical skills required by the modern aviation industry. This evaluation gap is further exacerbated by the absence of comprehensive long-term tracking mechanisms for graduate career development, combined with ineffective channels for integrating employer feedback into continuous program improvement processes. These structural deficiencies have created fundamental disconnects between professional education outcomes and evolving industry needs, particularly in areas such as operational competence, regulatory compliance, and adaptive leadership in aviation contexts. Zhengzhou University of Aeronautics' 2025 education reform research project, which specifically focuses on "constructing and practicing competency model-based employment guidance service systems for aviation specialty students," demonstrates growing institutional recognition of this critical issue and represents an important initiative toward developing more industry-aligned evaluation frameworks. However, widespread implementation of such innovative approaches remains limited across the sector, indicating the

need for more systematic reforms in educational assessment practices.

4. Pathway Construction for Connotative Development of Public Affairs Management in Aviation Universities

To systematically address the multifaceted challenges identified in Public Affairs Management, aviation universities must implement comprehensive and integrated reforms to develop industry-specific pathways for connotative development. This requires a strategic framework that encompasses five interconnected dimensions of educational transformation:

4.1 Strategic Repositioning of Educational Objectives: Establishing the Distinctive Orientation of "Civil Aviation Governance Professionals"

Each aviation university must undertake a meticulous repositioning of its educational objectives through deep analysis of institutional heritage, regional development characteristics, and specific industry advantages. This strategic positioning should translate into clearly differentiated program identities that reflect unique institutional strengths. For example, Civil Aviation University of China can leverage its direct administrative affiliation with the Civil Aviation Administration to develop specialized expertise in cultivating "civil aviation policy and regulatory professionals" with deep understanding of national aviation governance frameworks. Similarly, Civil Aviation Flight University of China can capitalize on its distinctive flight training infrastructure and expertise to emphasize the development of "civil aviation safety and emergency management professionals" equipped with both theoretical knowledge and practical safety management skills. Aviation-oriented comprehensive institutions like Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics can utilize their interdisciplinary advantages in engineering and management to focus on cultivating "aviation logistics and supply chain management" specialists capable of addressing complex aviation supply chain challenges. The fundamental objective remains transforming graduates into specialized professionals with deep expertise in specific civil aviation public affairs domains, moving decisively away from producing generalists with superficial understanding of multiple areas.

Programs should strategically align with three core industry demand clusters: governmental governance requirements (encompassing civil aviation policy formulation, industry regulation, and international aviation relations), airport governance demands (covering airport operations management, public service delivery, and stakeholder coordination), and regional aviation governance needs (including aerotropolis management, airspace resource optimization, and regional aviation economic development). This tripartite focus ensures comprehensive alignment between talent cultivation outcomes and evolving industry requirements. Throughout the educational process, institutions must systematically integrate the contemporary civil aviation spirit — embodying "political integrity with loyalty and responsibility, rigorous scientific professionalism, collaborative work ethic, and dedicated professional conduct" — through dedicated curriculum design and experiential learning activities to cultivate students' professional identity and public service commitment.

4.2 Systematic Curriculum Restructuring: Creating an Aviation Governance-Characterized Curriculum System

A sophisticated modular curriculum architecture organized around "general foundation + aviation characteristics + practical innovation" should be established to achieve deep integration of theoretical knowledge and practical application. This requires fundamental rethinking of curriculum structure and content organization:

Theoretical Module Enhancement: While maintaining rigorous foundation courses in public administration, economics, and political science, programs must systematically incorporate advanced courses reflecting industry transformations, such as "Smart Civil Aviation and Governance Innovation," "Frontiers of Aviation Policy," and "Civil Aviation Safety and Emergency Management." These courses should integrate the latest industry practices, research findings, and regulatory developments into core teaching content. Particularly critical is strengthening courses focusing on digital technology applications in civil aviation governance, including specialized topics like big data analytics for aviation policy simulation, artificial intelligence applications in airport management, and blockchain technology for aviation security. These technological components should draw inspiration from pioneering institutions like Xi'an Aeronautical Polytechnic College, which has successfully integrated cutting-edge technologies including artificial intelligence, big data, and blockchain into its curriculum system through comprehensive digital transformation of aviation programs.

Practical Module Development: A comprehensive four-component practical teaching ecosystem integrating "course experimentation - professional training - graduation internship - social practice" must be constructed with clear learning outcomes and competency benchmarks. Priority investment should be directed toward developing sophisticated civil aviation management case libraries and advanced simulation laboratories, creating authentic practical projects covering critical scenarios such as flight delay management, airport noise coordination, aviation emergency response, and aviation environmental management. Through establishing strategically aligned practice bases with aviation organizations and systematically promoting "civil aviation workshops" and "structured work placement programs," students should engage in meaningful projects within civil aviation management departments to ensure comprehensive and deeply integrated practical education. The demonstrated success of Nanchang Hangkong University's Public Administration Department in collaborating with aviation enterprises provides compelling evidence that such deep industry-education integration effectively enhances students' practical capabilities and industry readiness.

Values Module Integration: The contemporary civil aviation spirit must permeate the entire talent cultivation process through both explicit and implicit curriculum design. By offering dedicated courses such as "Civil Aviation Ethics and Professional Responsibility" and "Introduction to Civil

Aviation Culture," complemented by regular lectures from aviation role models and distinguished alumni, institutions can systematically shape students' intrinsic motivation for serving civil aviation and contributing to society, while strengthening their professional identity. The Civil Aviation College of Xi'an Aeronautical University's comprehensive approach of integrating the educational philosophy of "life safety throughout the entire cycle, aviation safety throughout the entire chain" throughout the education process offers a valuable reference for embedding safety culture and professional values across the curriculum.

4.3 Comprehensive Pedagogical Innovation: Implementing Student-Centered Teaching Models

Institutions must comprehensively promote case-based teaching methodologies, supported by systematic development of specialized case libraries reflecting China's civil aviation governance practices and covering critical issues such as air transport management, airspace resource allocation, aviation environmental sustainability, and civil aviation energy conservation. Project-based learning (PBL) should be actively implemented through carefully designed projects that enable students to form interdisciplinary teams addressing genuine civil aviation public issues (e.g., coordinated airport area development, aviation logistics efficiency improvement, sustainable aviation fuel implementation). These projects should facilitate knowledge internalization and competency enhancement through comprehensive investigation, rigorous analysis, and innovative solution development processes. Digital learning platforms should be fully leveraged to develop sophisticated blended "golden courses" that strategically shift basic knowledge transmission to pre-class sessions while optimizing classroom time for higher-order thinking training, interactive discussions, and collaborative problem-solving activities.

Furthermore, advanced scenario simulation teaching should be introduced through establishing civil aviation emergency command simulation laboratories that recreate authentic scenarios such as aviation emergency response coordination and management of large-scale flight delays, thereby enhancing students' decision-making capabilities and operational competencies in complex, dynamic situations. The Civil Aviation College of Xi'an Aeronautical University's demonstrated success in "promoting learning, teaching, and reform through competitions" by organizing systematic student participation in professional contests such as flight simulation championships and transportation science and technology competitions has proven effective in enhancing students' practical innovation abilities and offers transferable insights for other institutions. Additionally, Xi'an Aeronautical Polytechnic College's innovative "three-stage, six-link" smart classroom teaching model — featuring pre-class context introduction, in-class guidance - learning - practice-assessment-evaluation-expansion, and post-class reinforcement—provides a comprehensive framework for optimizing the entire teaching process through technology integration and pedagogical innovation.

4.4 Strategic Faculty Optimization: Developing Dual-Qualified and Industry-Experienced Teams

A comprehensive "Faculty Capability Enhancement Plan" must be implemented, incorporating multiple strategies for professional development. This includes establishing structured programs encouraging young teachers to pursue advanced studies and visiting scholarships at top domestic and international universities to enhance academic qualifications, while simultaneously creating a "government-university revolving door" mechanism for selecting and dispatching faculty to civil aviation administrations, airport groups, and airlines for substantial six-month to one-year secondments to accumulate meaningful industry practical experience. Concurrently, institutions should systematically appoint experienced officials from civil aviation public sectors and senior industry experts as adjunct professors or industry mentors with clearly defined responsibilities for professional course teaching and practical guidance, thereby establishing an effective dual-tutorial system of "academic supervisors + industry mentors" that provides students with comprehensive guidance from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

Sophisticated faculty industry practice archives and achievement transformation mechanisms should be developed, incorporating teachers' practical achievements—including industry consulting outcomes, policy research contributions, and technical innovation applications—into professional title evaluation and performance assessment systems to create tangible incentives for industry engagement. The Civil Aviation College of Xi'an Aeronautical University's implementation of dual "teaching + research" supervision and the "New Aviation Professional" young faculty development program, which provides comprehensive support spanning classroom teaching design to research project proposal development, offers replicable models for systematic faculty development. Moreover, Zhengzhou University of Aeronautics' strategic prioritization of "breaking talent bottlenecks and strengthening faculty development" as an institutional key task underscores the crucial role of faculty optimization in achieving connotative development objectives.

4.5 Fundamental Evaluation Reform: Establishing Continuous Improvement Quality Mechanisms

Academic assessment methods require fundamental reform through significantly increasing the weighting of process evaluations—including sophisticated course papers, comprehensive research reports, innovative project designs, and structured classroom debates—while emphasizing comprehensive evaluation of students' critical thinking abilities, innovation capabilities, and practical skills development. For aviation-characterized courses, industry experts should be systematically involved in graduation project reviews and course assessment processes to ensure integration of authentic industry standards into evaluation systems. Comprehensive graduate career tracking surveys and structured civil aviation employer feedback mechanisms should be established to regularly collect "outcome" data on talent cultivation quality, serving as the evidence-based foundation for revising educational objectives, optimizing curriculum systems, and improving teaching methods, thereby creating a robust closed-loop quality assurance system of "evaluation-feedback-improvement" that drives continuous program enhancement.

Simultaneously, dynamic program adjustment mechanisms must be created to enable timely modification of program directions and curriculum structures in response to civil aviation industry development trends and evolving talent demand patterns, ensuring the foresight and adaptability of talent cultivation. Zhengzhou University of Aeronautics' ongoing exploration of "constructing and practicing competency model-based employment guidance service systems for aviation specialty students" within its 2025 education reform research initiative provides valuable references for evidence-based evaluation reform. Furthermore, Xi'an Aeronautical Polytechnic College's pioneering approach of "integrating AI, big data, and other information technologies throughout the entire teaching process to achieve precise teaching evaluation through big data analytics" represents the future direction of evaluation reform through technological innovation and data-driven decision making.

5. Conclusion

The connotative development of Public Affairs Management in aviation universities represents a profound disciplinary revolution, requiring fundamental transformation of developmental philosophies from pursuing "comprehensive scale" to emphasizing "specialized refinement." The core of this transformation lies in closely aligning with the national civil aviation power strategy and modernization governance requirements, centering on enhancing talent cultivation quality, and comprehensively optimizing program internal elements through systematic initiatives including objective repositioning, curriculum restructuring, pedagogical innovation, faculty optimization, and evaluation reform.

Particularly within the context of rapid aviation industry transformation, program development must capture three major trends — digitalization, globalization, and sustainability — by integrating digital technologies, green development, and international cooperation into talent cultivation processes, thereby enhancing disciplinary contemporaneity and foresight. The Civil Aviation College of Xi'an Aeronautical University's establishment of China's first "SIA Engineering Targeted Training and Talent Cultivation Base" in collaboration with Singapore Airlines Engineering Company provides valuable insights for international talent development. Meanwhile, Xi'an Aeronautical Polytechnic College's exploration of digital upgrading in aviation programs represents future directions for disciplinary construction.

Only by persistently adhering to the connotative development pathway can Public Affairs Management in aviation universities break through current developmental bottlenecks, cultivate high-quality talents genuinely capable of undertaking civil aviation governance responsibilities in the new era, provide solid talent support for civil aviation power construction, and ultimately realize their inherent value and mission in serving national strategies and industry development.

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Author Profile

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