

Differentiated Design Strategies for Cruise Interior Styles Across Different Itineraries

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Abstract: *With the global cruise market expanding, China's cruise industry is transitioning from scale growth to high-quality, differentiated development. Cruise ship interiors, as specialized consumption spaces, must move beyond homogeneous designs copying international standards to meet diverse passenger needs and build competitive advantages. This study constructs a systematic framework for differentiated interior design based on regional culture, passenger demands, and engineering constraints. It analyzes core design dimensions for typical itineraries including East Asian, Caribbean, Arctic, and Mediterranean routes, exploring the coupling of cultural elements, technical feasibility, passenger satisfaction, and market benefits. A full-chain design path covering demand research, multidisciplinary coordination, modular prefabrication, dynamic scenario adjustment, and lifecycle management is proposed, providing theoretical and practical guidance for China's cruise industry to develop culturally distinctive competitive advantages globally.*

Keywords: Cruise interior decoration; Differentiated design; Itinerary cultural attributes; Passenger experience; Maritime design specifications; Modular prefabrication.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background: The Inevitable Demand for Differentiated Development of the Global Cruise Market

According to the official 2024 Global Cruise Industry Development Report released by the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), the total number of global cruise passengers exceeded 31.5 million in 2024, a year-on-year increase of 12.7%, and the total market scale recovered to 92% of the pre-pandemic level in 2019. Among them, the East Asian regional cruise market, represented by China, Japan and South Korea, achieved a growth rate of 27.3%, which is the regional market with the fastest growth in passenger volume in the world. At this new stage of industrial development, the traditional general-purpose cruise interior design model that was formulated in the 1980s and 1990s to adapt to the pan-Western passenger market has shown increasingly obvious incompatibility. For a long time, most international mainstream cruise lines have adopted a highly unified standardized interior design system across different itineraries, which pursues a modern luxury style that is detached from regional characteristics. The design of lounges, restaurants, cabin spaces and public activity areas on the entire ship basically does not make targeted adjustments according to the cultural characteristics of the route sailing areas. This design idea that completely ignores the cultural background differences of passengers was once an effective strategy to reduce the cost of batch construction of cruise ships in the early stage of industrial expansion, but with the continuous diversification of the global passenger structure, its operational drawbacks have become increasingly prominent. According to the 2025 China Cruise Passenger Satisfaction Survey released by the China Cruise and Yacht Industry Association, the average satisfaction score of domestic passengers on international cruises operating in the East Asian market is only 3.27 out of 5 points, of which the lowest scoring item is the "cultural fit of interior space", more than 62% of the surveyed passengers said that the interior decoration of the cruise ship is completely no different from that of a Western-style hotel, and there is no cultural element that fits the regional characteristics of the sailing route, and the sense of

novelty and experience is far lower than expected.

At the same time, the domestic large cruise construction project that China has been promoting in recent years has reached a critical stage of independent innovation in the field of interior decoration. After the first domestic large cruise ship "Adora Magic City" was successfully delivered and put into operation, the second and third large cruise ships have started the detailed design work one after another. The original design framework that completely references the design standards of European and American cruise lines has been difficult to form an independent competitive advantage that can distinguish itself from international brands. In the past, the interior decoration design logic that blindly stacked high-end materials and pursued the so-called "international top luxury" effect often led to high construction costs, but it could not bring corresponding premium capabilities in market operation. The homogeneous design that completely follows the trend directly leads to the convergence of product positioning among different cruise lines, and finally can only fall into the low-level competition of continuously reducing ticket prices to attract passengers, which seriously squeezes the profit space of the entire industry. The "15th Five-Year Plan for the High-Quality Development of the Tourism Industry" officially issued by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China in 2026 clearly takes "supporting the innovative development of cruise tourism products with Chinese cultural characteristics" as a key industrial task, which points out a clear direction for the transformation of the cruise interior design mode from standardized generality to targeted differentiation. Against this background, this study focuses on the core theme of differentiated design strategies for cruise interior styles across different itineraries, systematically sorts out the theoretical logic and practical path of this design idea, and tries to construct a new interior design system that takes the cultural attributes of the itinerary and the actual needs of passengers as the core orientation.

1.2 Research Significance

The theoretical value of this study lies in breaking through the long-standing design thinking limitation in the field of cruise

interior decoration that “technical compliance is the absolute priority”. It no longer regards cruise interior design as a simple derivative of marine engineering technology and the maritime specification system, but incorporates the regional cultural attributes of different itineraries, the demand differences of target passenger groups and the differentiated operation needs of cruise products into the core analytical framework of interior design research for the first time. This study organically connects the classical design cases of cruise interior design in different historical periods with the market operation data of different route products, constructs a complete theoretical analysis system of differentiated cruise interior design, and fills the long-term research gap in the cross-field of cruise engineering design and cruise tourism operation in China. From the practical level, the differentiated design strategies proposed in this study are all refined and summarized on the basis of fully referring to the mature practical cases of the international cruise industry and the actual feedback data of domestic cruise operation, which can directly provide targeted design reference for China’s ongoing independently constructed large cruise projects and domestic cruise lines operating different regional routes. It can help cruise construction parties and operation parties get rid of the previous homogeneous design thinking of blindly stacking high-end materials, form an irreplaceable differentiated competitive barrier through the cultural adaptation of interior space, and effectively improve passenger stickiness and operation added value. Ultimately, it can help China’s cruise industry form a unique design system with Oriental cultural characteristics in the global market, and support the transformation and upgrading of China from a large cruise manufacturing country to a country with leading cruise independent design capabilities.

2. The Internal Logic of Differentiated Design of Cruise Interior Styles Oriented to Different Itineraries

2.1 The Evolution Logic of Cruise Interior Design from Standardization to Differentiation

As early as the golden age of ocean liners in the 1920s and 1930s, the differentiated design of cruise interior styles actually had a very mature practical foundation. After the 1925 Paris Decorative Arts Exposition, French cruise companies successively launched a series of ocean liners represented by the “Paris”, “France” and “Normandie”, which took the “Art Deco” style that was popular in France at that time as the core feature of interior decoration. The interior design of these cruise ships did not adopt the retro classical style that was popular in the British and American ocean liner circles at that time, but integrated the modern artistic features of geometric lines, exquisite decorative techniques and highly recognizable French aesthetic taste. These cruise ships sailing across the North Atlantic route between France and the United States quickly became the mobile display carrier of French national cultural image at that time. The interior design of Normandie even invited the top artists and designers in France at that time to participate in the creation. The 32 gilded panels of the “Aurora” theme lacquer painting in the grand salon, which combined ancient mythology and modern navigation history, became the most iconic interior artwork in the history of cruise ships. The differentiated style design at that time was

not to cater to the needs of mass tourism passengers, but to highlight the differentiated brand characteristics of different cruise companies and different national cultural attributes, which has laid an ideological foundation for the later differentiated design of cruise interior styles.

After the 1970s, with the rapid rise of mass cruise tourism represented by the Caribbean route, in order to reduce the construction cost of large-scale mass-produced cruise ships, international mainstream cruise lines generally adopted a highly unified standardized interior design system, trying to create a “universal luxury” space that can adapt to all regional markets. This design mode dominated the development of the cruise industry for nearly 40 years, but with the continuous fragmentation of the global passenger demand structure, its inherent defects have become more and more obvious. According to the in-depth investigation of the North American cruise market published by the University of Michigan in 2023, passengers on different itinerary products have completely different cognitive priorities for the interior space experience of cruise ships. For example, passengers who choose the Caribbean leisure itinerary pay far more attention to the open public space with a tropical style than the luxury of cabin materials, while passengers who choose the Northern European exploration itinerary pay more attention to the integration of the interior decoration style and the natural landscape outside the window. This huge difference in demand itself has laid a realistic foundation for the differentiated design of interior styles for different itineraries, and it is no longer in line with the actual market law to use a set of standardized design standards to cover all itinerary products.

2.2 The Restrictive Boundary of Differentiated Design: The Coordination Between Cultural Expression and Maritime Engineering Specifications

Different from the interior design of land hotels, cruise interior decoration itself has a set of extremely strict mandatory specification system constraints. The design must strictly comply with the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) formulated by the International Maritime Organization, the A-60 fire separation standards of major classification societies, and the US Public Health Service (USPHS) health specifications, all decorative materials must meet the comprehensive performance requirements of flame retardancy, low smoke density, low VOC emission and light weight, and all interior components such as finishes, furniture and floors must be included in the empty ship weight accounting, which is directly related to the stability and draft state of the whole ship. This inherent engineering constraint determines that the differentiated design of cruise interior style for different itineraries cannot completely follow the design logic of land interior decoration, and cannot pursue cultural expressive effects at the expense of the safety and performance compliance of the ship.

At the technical level, cruise interior spaces can be divided into three categories according to functional attributes: accommodation cabin area, public activity area and technical service area, and the design creativity space of these three types of areas decreases step by step, while the mandatory standards for fire protection and health compliance increase

step by step. The core carrier of differentiated style design is naturally the public activity area and the passenger cabin area with relatively sufficient creative space, which can fully integrate the cultural elements of the itinerary on the premise of fully meeting all engineering specifications. The cultural adaptive design of the interior space for different passenger groups and different itinerary backgrounds is an innovative design method that can adapt the accommodation space to the cultural preferences, traditional customs and life expectation habits of specific passenger groups. This special design idea emerged in response to the increasing diversification of the global cruise market, representing a significant evolution of maritime hospitality design, which integrates cultural sensitivity and personalized design to an unprecedented extent. This design idea covers the comprehensive adjustment of spatial layout, furniture setting, color scheme, material selection and decorative elements that can resonate with the aesthetic taste and functional needs of specific cultural groups, which can fully take into account the religious beliefs, social interaction modes, dining customs and privacy expectations of target passenger groups, and create a familiar and comfortable space experience for passengers in the mobile carrier sailing on the ocean.

2.3 The Value Generation Logic of Differentiated Design: Breaking Through the Involution of Homogeneous Competition

The differentiated design of cruise interior styles oriented to different itineraries can form a brand new positive feedback value generation logic completely different from the original standardized design mode. In the traditional standardized design system, different cruise ships on the same route have almost no difference in interior decoration style, and passengers can hardly perceive the obvious experience difference between products of different cruise lines, which directly leads to the price sensitivity of passengers is extremely high, and the market competition can only fall into a vicious circle of continuously reducing cruise ticket prices. The differentiated design for the cultural attributes of specific itineraries can create a unique and non-replicable space experience, which can form a strong emotional resonance with target passengers, greatly improve their satisfaction and loyalty, and then form a stable brand premium capacity. According to the operation data of Japanese local cruise line "Pacific Venus" operating the Japan-Korea-China East Asian route released in 2024, after the cruise ship carried out a full ship interior renovation for the East Asian cultural characteristics, integrating a large number of Japanese traditional wabi-sabi style elements, Chinese classical garden artistic conception and Korean folk color characteristics, the average ticket price of the route was 28% higher than that of the international large cruise ships operating the same route, but the passenger repeat customer rate reached 47%, which was far higher than the industry average of 21%, and the annual operation profit increased by 63% year-on-year. This practical case fully proves that the differentiated interior design for the itinerary can bring considerable operational value to the cruise line, and completely break through the profit bottleneck formed by the previous homogeneous competition.

3. Three Core Practical Dilemmas Facing the Implementation of Differentiated Cruise Interior Design

3.1 Technical Coordination Dilemma: The Cultural Creative Design is Seriously Out of Line with the Engineering Manufacturing System

At present, the vast majority of domestic cruise interior design teams in China have long formed a solidified design idea of "technical specification first". The design work is more to meet the mandatory requirements of various maritime specifications, and the investment in cultural creative design that adapts to the characteristics of different itineraries is extremely insufficient. According to the industry research data of China Cruise and Yacht Industry Association in 2025, the proportion of creative design investment in the total interior decoration engineering cost of China's first large cruise ship "Adora Magic City" is only 2.1%, while the proportion of creative design investment in the interior decoration project of the world's top luxury cruise brand Seabourn reaches 8.7%. This huge gap directly leads to the fact that most of the domestic cruise interior design results can only meet the basic functional compliance requirements, and cannot form a highly recognizable style feature. More importantly, there is a serious barrier between the creative design team that undertakes the interior style design and the modular prefabrication manufacturing team that is responsible for the production of interior components. The creative design scheme that has not been demonstrated by engineering technology often cannot be implemented in the actual manufacturing link. Many cultural creative design schemes that look very perfect on the renderings cannot be produced in batches in strict accordance with the performance requirements of marine materials, which makes the final presentation effect of the interior space greatly reduced, and it is difficult to achieve the expected differentiated style effect.

3.2 Demand Matching Dilemma: Lack of Systematic Target Passenger Demand Research System

At present, most cruise interior design projects in China do not carry out targeted passenger demand pre-research work before the start of the design. The design team usually makes subjective judgments on the aesthetic preferences of target passengers according to their own experience, and lacks a systematic investigation and analysis mechanism combining the specific attributes of the itinerary. For example, for the East Asian regional route operating to Japan and South Korea, if the design team does not conduct in-depth research on the dining customs of different passenger groups, it is very likely that the western-style restaurant space with all Western kitchen equipment cannot meet the actual dining needs of East Asian passengers who are more accustomed to Chinese and Japanese food. For the Arctic exploration route, if the interior color matching of the cruise ship still follows the warm color system of the traditional Mediterranean route, it will not form a good visual comfort effect with the silver-white ice and snow landscape outside the window, and cannot bring the immersive experience that matches the exploration theme. According to the 2023 investigation of Korean passengers'

satisfaction with the interior design of cruise ships operating on the South Korea-China-Japan route published in the Journal of the Korean Institute of Interior Design, the average satisfaction score of Korean passengers with the interior design of international cruise ships operating in East Asia is only 2.89 points out of 5 points, the lowest score items are the spatial layout suitable for Korean traditional dining customs and the design of privacy space that conforms to Korean living habits, which fully reflects that the previous design that completely copied the Western standard did not really match the actual needs of target passengers.

3.3 Cost Control Dilemma: The Misunderstanding that Differentiated Design Must Lead to a Sharp Increase in Costs

A large number of cruise ship construction managers and operation managers have a wrong inherent understanding that differentiated style design must add a large number of extra handicraft decorative components, which will inevitably lead to a substantial increase in the total cost of interior decoration projects. This wrong understanding directly leads to the fact that most cruise projects are unwilling to invest extra resources in differentiated style design in the early stage of demonstration. In fact, the core of differentiated design is not to use a large number of expensive non-standard decorative materials, but to realize the differentiated expression of style on the basis of the existing modular interior component system. Through the adjustment of color matching, the targeted layout of the space, the appropriate addition of decorative elements that fit the cultural attributes of the itinerary, without a large increase in non-standard components, can still form a completely different interior style experience from the standardized design. According to the public data of the interior renovation project of the Costa Victoria cruise ship operating on the East Asian route, the project team only adjusted the color system of the public space, the layout mode of the dining area and the cultural theme of the decorative artwork on the basis of the original interior components, and the total renovation cost was only 4.2% of the total original interior decoration cost, but the passenger satisfaction increased by 36%, which produced a very high input-output benefit. The long-term formation of the wrong cost concept has seriously restricted the popularization and application of differentiated design ideas in China's cruise construction projects.

4. The First Practical Path of Differentiated Design: Construct A Full-Process Demand-Oriented Pre-Research System

4.1 Carry out Typology Induction of Itinerary Cultural Attributes

The first step to realize the differentiated design of cruise interior style for different itineraries is to systematically classify and sort out the cultural attributes of different types of cruise routes in the world, and extract the core cultural elements that can be integrated into the interior design. For the East Asian cultural circle routes covering China, Japan, South Korea and Southeast Asia, we need to focus on extracting the shared aesthetic characteristics of Oriental culture such as

implicit artistic conception, symmetrical layout, natural material texture and warm interpersonal atmosphere, and on this basis, carry out targeted differentiated design for different source market passenger groups. For example, for the routes mainly for Chinese passengers, the design can appropriately integrate the artistic conception of traditional Chinese gardens, the color characteristics of Song style aesthetics and the layout elements of Chinese-style dining space, so that passengers can get a familiar cultural experience on the ocean far away from the mainland. For the Caribbean tropical leisure routes, the core design logic is to completely break the heavy luxury feeling of traditional cruise interior space, use a large number of bright and bright color systems, open semi-outdoor public spaces and natural rough texture materials such as rattan and log to create a holiday atmosphere that is completely integrated with the tropical beach scenery outside the ship. For the Northern European Arctic exploration routes, we need to abandon the complicated and gorgeous decorative techniques, adopt a minimalist Nordic design style dominated by low-saturation cool colors, use a large area of floor-to-ceiling glass to maximize the integration of the snow landscape outside the window into the interior space, and create an immersive exploration experience that echoes the extreme natural environment. For the Mediterranean historical heritage routes, we can integrate the classical architectural elements of ancient Greece, ancient Rome and the Renaissance, appropriately restore the artistic characteristics of traditional Mediterranean handicrafts, and form an interior space experience that echoes the historical and cultural attractions along the route.

4.2 Establish a Multi-Dimensional Passenger Demand Evaluation System

After clarifying the core cultural attributes of the itinerary, it is necessary to further construct a multi-dimensional passenger demand evaluation system that covers all key experience links. This system should not only include the traditional satisfaction indicators of basic functional experience such as space size, furniture comfort and lighting effect, but also add a series of targeted demand research indicators that are closely related to cultural attributes, including the adaptation of spatial layout to traditional living habits, the fit of color system to regional aesthetic preferences, the adaptability of restaurant layout to local dining customs, the consideration of religious belief needs in public space, and the cognitive acceptance of decorative elements of different ages of passengers. We can refer to the mature research method of the interior design comfort evaluation model integrated with traditional cultural expression, use the coefficient of variation method and fuzzy comprehensive evaluation model to carry out quantitative evaluation of different design schemes, screen out the design schemes that can maximize the emotional resonance of target passengers, and avoid the subjective arbitrariness of design decisions. For the East Asian route, special attention should be paid to the special needs of East Asian passengers for dining space, such as the demand for independent private dining boxes, the supporting layout of Chinese kitchen equipment, and the design of tea culture space. These demand points that are easily ignored by traditional Western cruise design can form a huge differentiated experience advantage once they are properly met.

4.3 Reference to Classic Historical Cruise Design Cases for Creative Iteration

In the process of creative design, we can fully draw on the mature experience of the classic cruise interior design history that has been verified by the market. For example, the Art Deco style design of French transatlantic cruise ships in the 1920s and 1930s, the modern minimalist design of Scandinavian cruise ships in the 1960s, and the tropical leisure design of Caribbean cruise ships in the 1980s have left a large number of highly recognizable and market-tested classic design cases, which can provide rich creative inspiration for the differentiated design of modern cruise interiors. For the theme design of the cruise atrium, which is the core public space of the whole ship, we can focus on analyzing the spatial form, decorative style and functional layout of the atrium interior decoration, combine the theme characteristics of the sailing itinerary, and carry out targeted creative design, so as to form the core visual symbol of the differentiated style of the whole ship at the first spatial node where passengers board the ship, and establish the preliminary experience cognition that fits the theme of the itinerary for passengers at the first time.

5. The Second Practical Path of Differentiated Design: Multi-Disciplinary Collaborative Engineering Implementation System

5.1 Introduce Field Theory to Construct the Optimal Layout Model of Interior Space

In the engineering implementation stage, we can innovatively introduce the cruise interior design model based on field theory, transform and express the modern expression of traditional culture through the spatial field, and promote the diversified development of interior design under the premise of meeting all maritime engineering specifications. We can rasterize the cruise interior design space by raster method, introduce the discount factor to establish a mathematical model of cruise interior design layout, combine genetic algorithm and simulated annealing algorithm to construct an optimization algorithm to solve the cruise interior design layout optimization model, find the optimal space layout scheme that takes into account the cultural expression effect and engineering performance constraints, and maximize the utilization efficiency of limited interior space. This technical method can effectively solve the long-standing contradiction between the creative design pursuing differentiated style and the engineering design pursuing specification compliance, and realize the perfect coordination between artistic expression and technical constraints at the level of digital design.

5.2 Realize the Differentiated Expression of Style Based on Modular Prefabrication System

We do not need to subvert the existing mature modular prefabrication manufacturing system of cruise interior decoration to carry out a large number of non-standard customized production, which will lead to a substantial increase in cost. On the contrary, we only need to adjust the design of the facade, color and decorative accessories of the existing standardized modular components, and we can realize the complete differentiation of the interior style without changing the main structure, material performance and

interface dimension of the modular components. The mature modular prefabrication technology of cruise interior decoration has been widely used in the construction process of domestic large cruise ships. All interior components are produced in the factory in advance, and then transported to the ship for rapid assembly, which can greatly reduce the on-site construction period and ensure the consistency of engineering quality. On this basis, we only need to develop a set of replaceable decorative facade module system, which can quickly replace different decorative facades according to different itinerary positioning, and a general cruise ship platform can be quickly transformed into different differentiated style products for different itineraries, which can greatly improve the reuse rate of the main structure of the cruise ship, and avoid the repeated design and manufacturing costs caused by different style positioning.

5.3 Apply BIM Technology to Realize Full-Collaborative Design of the Whole Process

In the whole design process, we can make full use of BIM technology to realize the full collaboration of all disciplines of interior design, structural engineering, fire protection engineering, electromechanical engineering and decoration art. Through the visual BIM model, all professionals can check the rationality of the differentiated design scheme in real time, find out in advance the parts that do not meet the specification performance requirements or have engineering implementation obstacles, and adjust and optimize the design scheme in time in the early design stage, so as to avoid the situation that the design scheme cannot be implemented in the later manufacturing and assembly stage. BIM technology can also digitize all cultural decorative elements and component information, which is convenient for the subsequent cruise operation stage to adjust or update the interior style according to the change of itinerary, and greatly improves the flexibility of the whole life cycle of differentiated design. At present, the application of BIM technology in the field of domestic cruise interior design is still in the initial stage of exploration, and further promoting its in-depth application can provide a very solid technical support for the large-scale popularization of differentiated design ideas.

6. The Third Practical Path of Differentiated Design: Long-Term Operation-Oriented Full Life Cycle Management

6.1 Dynamic Scenario Adjustment Adapt to Itinerary Switching

For cruise ships that operate different types of itineraries in different seasons, we do not need to completely solidify the differentiated interior style in the manufacturing stage, but can design a set of dynamically adjustable interior scene system. For example, the cruise ship operating the Caribbean tropical route in summer can adjust the interior public space to the tropical leisure style suitable for the Caribbean itinerary, and when it is transferred to the Alaska glacier route in winter, it can quickly replace the decorative components such as artworks, cushion fabrics and guide signs in the public space, adjust the overall color atmosphere of the interior to the cold tone system suitable for the glacier exploration theme, and realize the rapid switching of the interior style in different

itinerary seasons, so as to maximize the matching degree between the space experience and the itinerary theme in different operating periods. This dynamic adjustment mode of style can make a cruise ship adapt to the operation needs of multiple different characteristic itineraries at the same time, greatly improving the utilization rate of the cruise ship and the added value of operation.

6.2 Establish a Full-Operation Stage Passenger Feedback Iteration Mechanism

After the differentiated design of the interior decoration is put into actual operation, we need to establish a continuous passenger feedback collection mechanism, collect the experience feedback of passengers on the differentiated interior design through questionnaire survey, big data analysis of in-ship consumption behavior and in-depth interview, continuously optimize and adjust the details of the interior style, and continuously improve the fit degree between the space experience and the needs of passengers. For example, if we find that passengers on the East Asian route have far higher usage frequency of the tea culture space than expected in the actual operation process, we can appropriately expand the scale of the tea space in the subsequent renovation, and add more cultural experience activities related to tea art, so as to further amplify the differentiated experience advantage. This continuous iterative optimization mechanism can make the differentiated interior design form a positive cycle of continuous improvement in the operation process, continuously enhance the stickiness of passengers, and form a more and more prominent brand differentiated advantage.

6.3 Construct the Long-Term Operation System of Differentiated Brand Value

The ultimate goal of differentiated interior design for different itineraries is to form a unique non-replicable brand value, so that when passengers choose a specific itinerary product, they will directly associate with the unique interior space experience of this cruise ship, and form a strong consumption willingness independent of ticket price. The long-term continuous operation of this differentiated brand value can completely get rid of the low-level homogeneous price competition in the past, and form a stable brand premium capability. At present, China's independent large cruise brand is in the initial stage of brand construction, and the differentiated design of interior style for the route characteristics is the best breakthrough to form its own unique brand recognition in a short time. It can quickly establish a distinct brand image different from international cruise lines in the minds of domestic passengers, and lay a solid foundation for China's cruise industry to go global and participate in international market competition in the future.

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