
Tourism education in PR China

The dramatic growth of the tourism industry in PR China has not been accompanied by an adequate response from the education system. The numbers and standard of qualified tourism staff remain far below the required levels. Zhang Guangrui of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences describes how the tourism education system could be expanded and made more relevant to the Chinese tourism industry.

PR China's tourism industry has grown considerably since 1978. The overseas tourist arrivals increased from 1 809 221 in 1978 to 22 819 000 in 1986, including an increase in foreign tourist arrivals from 229 646 to 1 482 000. The foreign exchange earnings derived from the tourism industry rose to US \$1 450 × 10⁶ in 1986 from US \$260 × 10⁶ in 1978. At the same

time, domestic tourism developed even faster. According to one estimate trips made by Chinese residents within the country reached 270 × 10⁶ with a total expenditure of over RMB¥10.6 × 10⁹ (US billion) but a decade ago organized domestic tours in PR China hardly existed.¹ Thanks to the open policy implemented in recent years, tourism has become one of the major foreign exchange earners in PR China. These figures alone cannot give the whole picture of the development of tourism. In the last 10 years, governments, both central and local, have allocated a large sum of money to the construction of hotels, improvement

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On the whole, the technical secondary schools of tourism are too few compared with the higher-learning institutions, and the quantity of people needed in the trade, although neither has adequate capacity at the moment. Also, in the higher-learning institutions, more emphasis is put on foreign language studies and general economic management, neglecting the training of management personnel in microeconomics. It is evident that it is not necessary to take four years to train a tour guide, neither on practical grounds, nor when compared with the urgent requirement for guides working in the PR China tourism industry.

Poor quality

At present, the low standard of education produces graduates from the tourism educational institutions who cannot do what they are expected to do. There are three main reasons for this problem:

- shortage of capable teachers – most of the teachers have a foreign language education or training in general economics and they have little knowledge or practical experience of tourism;
- shortage of teaching material – tourism is a new phenomenon in PR China and so is tourism education. There are no ready made teaching materials available. Foreign tourism literature introduced recently is not relevant to the system in PR China. For some subjects, teachers have to collect material while teaching, so teaching material is far from comprehensive, systematic or accurate; and
- lack of opportunities for gaining practical experience so classroom teaching cannot be well linked with fieldwork. Most of the tourism institutions have no facilities or contracted enterprises for pro-

viding the students with practice. They still follow the old course that the teachers teach and students listen in the classroom. With only book-knowledge and no good understanding of the real work, the fresh graduates have to spend some time learning the job from the beginning after they are employed.

Insufficient investment

All these problems are the result of inadequate awareness of the importance of tourism education. For the last few years, investment has been made in infrastructure, eg hotels, tourist attractions and purchase of vehicles and aeroplanes, while education and training for tourism has been neglected. Some of the schools set up have been beset with various difficulties because of shortage of funds and rapid turnover of teaching staff.

Five-year programme

According to the plan for tourism development approved by the State Council, PR China will receive five million foreign tourists yearly up to 1990 and 10 million up to 2000, and foreign exchange earnings from the industry at the same time will be US \$3 × 10⁹ and US \$10 × 10⁹ respectively. In line with this plan, SATT has drafted a programme for tourism education and training for the next five years (1986–1990). The draft programme makes a tentative forecast of the personnel needed in the industry in the next 10 years (see Table 1).

The general task for tourism education as stated in the draft, is to take the improvement of the standard of education as the core, enlarge education scope in an appropriate way, place the emphasis on secondary tourism education and strengthen training of employees, in order to build up a

comparatively comprehensive tourism education and training system and lay a good foundation for future development. According to the draft, PR China's tourism higher-education institutions comprise three levels, namely institutes (two to three years), universities or colleges (four years) and post-graduate courses (two to three years).

Institutes and universities or colleges are to train mainly the medium and higher level managerial staff for tourist organizations and the industry, and the post graduate courses are to train lecturers in the tourism higher-education institutions and macroeconomic managerial personnel. These institutions are expected to turn out 3740 graduates within the next five years. Measures to be taken include developing the Beijing Second Foreign Languages Institute as a base for training economic managerial personnel and interpreter-guides, hoping to enrol 600 students in 1990, and developing the Shanghai Institute of Tourism as a key centre for training hotel managerial personnel, with 400 students expected to enrol in 1990. At the same time efforts are being made to consolidate the existing institutions and encourage local governments to run such institutions of tourism.

Secondary tourism education means secondary schools of tourism, polytechnics, vocational schools and technical schools of tourism. Training periods range from two to four years. These schools are to train medium and low-level managerial staff, and various service personnel and technicians like drivers, chefs, etc. Local governments of the major tourist areas are encouraged to run these kinds of schools and job-training centres with help from other organizations.

It is important to run adult-education centres to improve the quality of personnel working in the trade. Adult education needs to be developed, with a multi-level and diversified adult tourism education system being formed gradually. 'Night universities', correspondence universities, television universities and various training courses, should be set up and run well. Full-time centres for training managerial staff and catering techni-

Table 1. Forecasted personnel requirement for the tourism industry in PR China, 1986–2000.

Staff category	Now available	1986–1990	1990–2000
Interpreter-guides	5 925	9 680	19 000
Economic and administrative	20 455	35 700	70 000
Chefs	6 449	10 000	24 000
Other technicians	1 243	1 990	3 700

cians will be set up in Tianjin and Nanjing.

The improvement of tourism education does not only imply the establishment of some educational institutions or the addition of new departments of tourism in universities, but more importantly an increased quality of the teaching staff. In the next five years, most of the postgraduates from the higher-learning institutions of tourism will be added to the existing teaching staff, more teachers will be sent abroad to study, and more foreign experts will be invited to give lectures at the schools. At the same time, people will be organized to translate and prepare teaching materials.

In the period between 1990 and 2000, tourism education should be developed simultaneously with the growth of the tourism industry. Basically, the quantity and quality of graduates turned out from the educational institutions should meet the requirement in PR China and the level of education and training should be close or equal to international standards.

Urgent problems

Tourism is a part of the national economy of PR China, and the development of tourism will help the realization of the four modernizations of industry, agriculture, national defence and science and technology and thus become a part of the state strategy for development. So in the field of tourism education and personnel training, the problems outlined below should be tackled urgently.

Significance of education

Although the importance of tourism education has been talked about recently, it cannot be said that its significance is fully appreciated. This is reflected in investment. Although more funds have been allocated to tourism education this year, much or almost all of it will be used for the capital construction of schools, and little will be used for improving the quality of the teaching staff and preparation of teaching materials. Tourism education has not yet been put into the national and local education prog-

ramme. Some of the subjects related to tourism should be included in the national unified teaching materials in secondary schools so as to reduce the burden on the students in the higher-learning tourism institutions.

Educational objectives

The first step must be to define the distinct objectives of the various institutions. Then subjects should be adjusted according to the needs of the trade. The current situation of 'offering subjects according to the teachers available' must not persist. The language barrier is a big problem for overseas tourists and a lot of interpreter-guides are needed. These should be trained in foreign language institutes or universities instead of in the special tourism institutions. New tourism institutes and schools should be planned properly, making best use of the funds available.

Local governments should be encouraged to run vocational and secondary schools of tourism in line with their own requirements and conditions. The abnormal structure of educational institutions, ie more higher-learning institutions than vocational and secondary schools, should be changed. Tourism education cannot rely solely on state investment, or depend only on the tourism sectors. This is a matter for the whole of society. Industry and enterprises should also run their own training centres or schools. This applies particularly to hotel companies since they have the funds, capable teaching personnel, sites for gaining practical experience, and they are the companies who will benefit directly.

Staff and facilities

Standards of education, to some extent, depend on the quality of the teaching staff. The standard of teaching staff in tourism education is fundamentally deficient. So training of qualified teachers should be given first priority. One method is to send them to study abroad. In doing so, three things should be considered:

- the visit should be planned according to the requirements of the institutions and the plan car-

ried out thoroughly; the practice of 'learning whatever they can when they get there and teaching whatever they are asked when they get back' should be avoided; the subjects to be studied should be set out before they leave and then they should teach whatever they have been asked to study; if it is necessary, a contract can be signed between the candidate and the institution;

- the candidates should be preferentially selected from among those who have teaching and working experience rather than from new graduates;
- universities and colleges where the students are sent should be carefully selected and not always the same; and
- the study period should not be too long, eg one or two years.

But the number of people who are able to study abroad is limited. Most teachers should be trained at home. Many experienced managers, researchers and workers can be teachers for some subjects. They can be invited as part-time lecturers or teaching material writers. Periodically, the teachers should have a chance to update their knowledge through further studies or working in the industry.

Required subjects for the students should be carefully selected and prominence given to the major ones. Time allocated for practical experience for students while they are in school should be prolonged and guaranteed. The preparation of teaching materials should be carried out so as to combine uniformity with decentralization. At present, decentralization should be advocated. Due to the fact that PR China's tourism industry is young and tourism education is even younger, there are no such well-written teaching materials fitting PR China's conditions available. Teaching materials should be derived from practical experience and should be checked and improved in practice. One-sidedness is difficult to avoid due to the emphasis on uniformity in preparing teaching materials too early. Introduction of foreign teaching materials and literature is necessary, and they can even be

used in the original form if possible to save the time required for translation. But the contents should be analysed, and only what is helpful and useful selected. Teachers, researchers, professionals and people in the industry should be encouraged to offer teaching materials for the schools. Comparisons can only be made among different materials and only by comparing can one distinguish. A competition to find the best teaching materials could be launched for this purpose.

As for the teaching methods concerned, a combination of practical experience and theory – of classroom teaching and fieldwork – should be stressed. Necessary facilities and sites should be provided, and administrative organizations should act as go-between in communications between the educational institutions and the industry.

More international exchanges of personnel and materials with their counterparts abroad can help a lot in the fields mentioned above. PR China should invite foreign experts and professors to give lectures – particularly those in the fields of marketing, forecasting and overall planning. Due to the specific conditions of PR China – political, cultural and economic – the

invited lecturers should not only be provided with proper living conditions, but also good working conditions, including necessary data and facts and field studies in PR China, so that they can offer good lectures relevant to PR China's system which may be easier for a Chinese audience.

Adult education

A high standard of employees can be maintained in two ways:

- good education before taking up the job; and
- strict demands in the work.

These two ways should be combined. Students should feel the pressure that without good education they cannot find the job they want; and employees feel the pressure that they might lose the job they possess now if they cannot do the job well and update their knowledge frequently. At the moment it is not possible to send all personnel requiring retraining to formal schools, nor is it possible for all employees to be graduates. Low capacity of the educational institutions makes on-the-job training important and practical. With modern technology and media, a variety of adult education courses can be offered by

the state, local governments and other sectors.

Conclusion

Tourism education is a kind of science. PR China needs to make use of the experiences of other countries, but with particular respect to the specific conditions prevailing in PR China. While thinking of the present need, PR China has at the same time to be aware of the future demand for various personnel. In forecasting future needs, the trend of tourism development should be considered carefully. Education and training of the people required should be considered a higher priority than the development of the tourism industry itself.

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Note:

¹RMB – Renminbi, Chinese currency – Yuan, £1 = ¥5.7 at the time of this report.