

# Study on **Management Models** of China's Tourist Attractions

## 中国旅游景区管理模式研究

(英文版)

Written by Zou Tongqian (邹统钎 著)

Translator-in-Chief: Wang Xiangning (王向宁 总主译)

Translated by Wang Yan, Feng Lei, Chen Yao (王燕 冯蕾 陈瑶 译)

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· 北京 ·

责任编辑:王艳

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

中国旅游景区管理模式研究 = Study on Management Models in China's Tourist Attractions: 英文/邹统钎著;王向宁等译. —北京:旅游教育出版社,2011.9

(中国旅游学术推广文丛)

ISBN 978 - 7 - 5637 - 2238 - 9

I. ①中… II. ①邹… ②王… III. ①旅游点—经济管理—研究—中国—英文  
IV. ①F592.6

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2011)第 193663 号

CHINA TOURISM ACADEMIC COLLECTION 中国旅游学术推广文丛

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出版单位	旅游教育出版社
地 址	北京市朝阳区定福庄南里 1 号
邮 编	100024
发行电话	(010)65778403 65728372 65767462(传真)
本社网址	www.tepcb.com
E-mail	tepx@163.com
印刷单位	北京中科印刷有限公司
经销单位	新华书店
开 本	787 × 960 1/16
印 张	19.75
字 数	231 千字
版 次	2011 年 9 月第 1 版
印 次	2011 年 9 月第 1 次印刷
定 价	41.00 元

(图书如有装订差错请与发行部联系)

## **Preface**

### **International Tourism Cooperation Needs More Academic Exchanges Between China and Other Nations**

—The Preface to China Tourism Academic Collection

In 1979 China started the policy of reform and opening-up. During these thirty years of development, the tourism industry has gained valuable experiences in all phases of modernization, industrialization and marketization. However, in the early years, the real focus of the policy was to earn hard currency from the inbound tourists. Today a new strategy has been initiated to develop the three main tourist markets—inbound, outbound and domestic markets. In the early stages, the tourism management organizations integrated the needs of both the government authorities and the private entrepreneurs. The current situation is that tourism associations and commercial enterprises cooperate under the supervision of the government authorities. In the early years, the tourism operations were labor intensive with management mainly based on experience. Today's industry is driven by business innovations and supported by modern technology and capital operation. China's tourism industry not only merges gradually into the nation's economic and social strategic development system, but also plays a leading role in international tourism community. In 2008, in spite of the impact of the worldwide financial crises, China achieved remarkable tourism records of 131 million inbound tourists, 45.84 million outbound tourists and 1.712 billion domestic tourists. Evidence reveals that China's tourism industry has now entered into a new phase

of development—mass-based tourism. This is undoubtedly the golden age for Chinese tourism, but it also presents old and new challenges. China has never been in such an urgent need to reinforce cooperations with other nations and regions, so that a nationwide sustainable development in tourism industry can be enhanced with more mature international experience, managerial expertise and technology. China's tourism industry has the capability as well as responsibility to make a more practical and effective contribution to the prosperity of the global tourism industry and distribute tourism's benefits to all.

China's tourism industry embraced the international community three decades ago with open arms. Likewise, its related academic research and higher education initially began by studying methods used in developed countries, but it was also closely related to the real practice. In the early 1980s, China's tourism study was after the western methods in almost all aspects such as basic concepts, academic framework, university level course books, training programs, faculty teams, and managerial staff. Until now, the research paradigm, evaluation system, and values orientation in the Chinese tourism academic were all based on the western academic system. Tourism in China has developed quickly, especially during the mid-1990s when domestic tourism was booming. Rapid growth in Chinese outbound tourism started early in the 21st century and was coupled with the government promotion of higher education and scientific research institutions. A group of tourism scholars with both indigenous consciousness and modern academic norms attempted to establish a tourism academic system with both Chinese characteristics and an international perspective. Beijing International Studies University (BISU) is one of the typical academic institutions established under this axiom.

Beijing International Studies University was founded in 1964 and has become fully committed to the business of tourism since 1981 when the National Tourism Administration of China became its governing body. BISU has also become China's leading academic center for higher education in tourism and tourism academic research. This is not only because it has a large number

of institutions including the School of Tourism Management, the Academy of Tourism Development, the Tourism Education Press, the Academic Journal (Tourism Edition), the travel agencies and the Beijing Hospitality Institute—the first independent college of hospitality in China, but also because of the many reputable and influential academic elites it attracts. For years, BISU has played a leading role in the areas of student enrollment, both undergraduate and postgraduate, academic theses, monograph and textbook publications and applied research achievements for both government authorities and private enterprises. These achievements symbolize BISU's ideology which emphasizes International Perspectives, Indigenous Consciousness, Problem-Solving Orientation and Academic Norms. It is the development of an energetic national tourism industry that provides higher education and academic institution, including BISU, a valuable foundation of theoretical research. Meanwhile, it is the best time ever for China to develop international communication and cooperation for the purposes of tourism academic research. It is acknowledged that the Chinese tourism market has been vital to the global economy during the past 30 years; equally, tourism academic research from China should also make a great contribution to the prosperity and development of the international tourism arena.

China's academic research in the field of tourism has achieved tremendous success in both the tourism industry and in the higher education of tourism. Nonetheless, due to the differences in research topics and methods, as well as the language barrier, a full understanding of the reality is yet to enlighten the mainstream of the international academic organizations. With that in mind, the Beijing Educational Committee has launched a visionary program to support Beijing International Studies University's efforts to promote China's tourism academic achievements internationally and to expedite the process of international academic communications. Therefore, the academic committee of the Beijing Tourism Development and Research Base has selected the academic outcomes that represent the academic works of the theoretical

construction and applied research reports. The selected works highlight the different research methods and comprehensively reveal the typicality of the research group and the diversity of the research methods. English translation of the first set of achievements is presided over by Professor Wang Xiangning and her team of ten experts and scholars from both China and overseas who have both language advantages and tourism knowledge.

It is our hope that this project will introduce Chinese tourism scholars' research achievements to the tourism scholars in other countries. We also expect to follow up with more frequent and larger scale academic exchange between the Chinese tourism scholars and the international experts. More academic exchanges and cooperation between China and other nations will promote further communication and strategic collaboration in the tourism industry.

Dai Bin

Professor, PhD

President of China Tourism Academy

6th July, 2009

# **The Tourism Caravan**

## **( Foreword )**

One of my most memorable moments doing research on the tourism industry occurred during a field trip to greater Shangri-La, Lijiang, Zhongdian, Deqian, Derong, Linzhi, Malgrogungdkarrdzong and Lhasa. While visiting Tibet and contemplating the landscape where Tibetans clambered up mountains—many dying along the way on their pilgrimage to Lhasa—a deep understanding came to me. I realized that our lives are enhanced by the dreams of visionaries. Without dreams, life is hardly better than death. Like a fleet of caravans, we tourism researchers trudge over mountains and across rivers to help people find joy. However, in the minds of “serious” academics, those of us who study tourism are a crowd of non-academic drifters. In today’s world, where vulgarity is vogue, in order to be truly joyful, one must keep a sense of wonder, of one’s self, and hold on to one’s dreams. Remembering those Tibetans who fell during their pilgrimages, and taking strength from the thought of those who continued, I went forward holding my head high, chanting, “Ohm mani padme hum.”

## **I. Caravans All Over the Map**

### **i. A New Field Finds Its Direction**

Employees of the tourism industry and academics in the field of tourism understand that tourism is one of the largest industries in the world. However, the public continues to believe that tourism is neither a major industry nor a serious academic discipline. Tourism professionals should take their field seriously, and should also believe that tourism is an endeavor that produces joy. Most people merely think that the tourism business is mainly about pleasing customers. Curiously, although their work helps produce joy, it does



not necessarily make the tourism employees happy. Tourism researchers are especially unhappy knowing that their work is viewed with contempt by more mainstream scholars. These researchers' contribution to society is equally or more practical than that of orthodox academics, but facing such an attitude, it is difficult to be happy.

In recent years, many colleges and universities have established Tourism Management programs to address the problem of limited employment opportunities for students in more traditional majors such as History and Geography. Employment in the tourism industry provides a brighter future for these students. Some historians and geographers have also been involved in tourism development planning, but this doesn't stop them from criticizing tourism study for being superficial. This is why few universities can afford to treat Tourism and Tourism Management courses as key core programs.

Tourism Management is a new field that it is still making its way and finding its place in the realm of academia. Early on, students in the field took degrees in economics and in management. Time and again, tourism management was subjugated to broader business disciplines and academic reforms. In 1998 university planning almost eliminated the field in favor of more established and accepted majors. An upsurge of department mergers and school reforms at the college and university levels in 1999/2000 caused many tourism programs to be absorbed into Industrial Management Institutes. This blow to tourism as a major field of study caused tourism scholars to scramble for a place in the new academic infrastructure. Moreover, a new rule requiring doctorate-granting institutions to apply for all degrees under the umbrella of business management had a serious negative impact on tourism's status as a separate field of study.

## **ii. Career or Job**

The caravan of Tourism is still wandering in search of its ultimate destination within the Chinese higher education system. Based on the current research level in tourism theory, it appears that most students in this major see the field only as a means for making a living.

In recent years, planning has become the most active area in the field of tourism. It has attracted numerous experts from such diverse academic backgrounds as geography (useful in regional planning), history, architecture

and horticulture (useful in planning tourist attractions). In general, planning plays an important role in the government's development of tourism. It also provides direct benefits for anyone who visits the planned sites. In addition, many foreign experts now participate in China's tourism planning.

In developing China's tourist attractions, however, there are many problems within the existing system. A cycle of five-year plans and in-fighting among planning units created political and internal strife. The planning unit is seen as being much more important than the planner, and to be chosen to work on a project, the unit must include prominent academics and numerous PhDs. The fact that the five-year plans coincide with election cycles makes it difficult to achieve progress. The selection of judges adds to their resentment since experienced teams will invite persons known to be in their favor. Inexperienced bid teams soon learn from experience the importance of exerting their own influence over which judges are selected. As more true scholars enter the field of tourism planning, overall standards should improve, which may eliminate some of these problems.

Tourism planning has already improved as greater numbers of tourism students are emerging to administer regional tourism. Now many of those in charge of regional tourism, from mayors and county magistrates to provincial governors, have a solid grounding in tourism management theory and actually hold some academic degree in the field. With their efforts and those of professors who are active in the field, tourism will surely someday be accepted as a serious academic discipline.

Active inclusion of another sort of expert, those local persons who are familiar with the sites under development and dedicated to advancing tourism, will also help establish tourism as a key vocation. These people are the real experts, who have learned the intricacies of their site by living there and appreciating it. Those who were removed to the country and re-educated by the local peasants during the Cultural Revolution learned their history and the significance of the area through practical experience and being there. Again, I am but a journeyer in this caravan. As one of the people who merely tells others' stories, I have much to learn from the locals.

As I see it, tourism planning requires endless creativity. I thus hold planning companies in high regard. Each plan demands new ideas, and

bidding on a project is just as difficult as writing a paper or essay for a professional journal. Moreover, with success rates being between 1/5 and 1/3, bidders face steep odds of winning a project. The competition is fierce and is getting even fiercer. Successful tourism planning companies have well-known advisors, vacation researchers and highly capable professional writers. The most competitive planners invite foreign advisors to participate in their project, demonstrating that they are combining the ideas of China and the West. Companies having the most success in the bidding system make full use of such experts and their understanding of the detailed rules of the process to expand their influence.

It is highly regrettable that none of the most successful projects was planned by China's well-known tourism professionals. At the same time, while conducting this study, many stories of their failures came to my ears. Why should this be so? The reason is that most of the successes stem from the ideas of entrepreneurs and government officials, rather than the planning of scholars. As Henry Mintzberg stated some time ago, the most important thing in strategic planning is strategy, not planning. However, strategies are not worked out by planners, but by managers with the help of planners. Planners merely serve as a catalyst. The process of strategy planning requires that managers integrate the information they gather from all sources to guide the course of action the enterprise should undertake. Usually, strategizing is a learning process, which demands that the strategists explore and ponder possibilities. In other words, strategic planning should produce a general idea based on the idea of a changing environment, rather than proposing a specific course of action. According to Mintzberg, whether a tourism project succeeds or not is the planners' responsibility. The most successful Chinese strategic planners are Ma Zhimin (the Overseas Chinese Town), Huang Qiaoling (the City of Song Dynasty), Qin Yuhai (Jiaozuo), and Chen Qinghua (Bifeng Gorge).

Of all the tourism scholars of the older generation, it is Chuankang Chen's ideas and Laixi Guo's actions that I admire most. I hope now to develop Mr. Chen's academic theory of "placeality" to serve as a guideline for the entire tourism industry. At the same time, I would like to be as persistent as Mr. Guo, whose spirit is embodied in his highly respected site research. (I got a

sense of that respect during my trip to Ningbo in 2004.) It is said that the accuracy of his evaluation of local resources when planning for southeast Yunnan made him greatly admired and respected by the area's tourism administration officials.

As for legacy tourism, I am always guided by Xu Songlin's thoughts. The way he restructured legacy tourism is an untouchable achievement that I can only hope to refine a bit. After finishing my education at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, United States, I went on to study Resort Development and Operation, which increased my focus on making tourism planning profitable. To that end, I have proposed continuous tourism planning and research. I constantly have a strategy in mind and work to develop a concise management model and detailed instructions on how to achieve it. To me, the study of tourism is both a means of making a living and an important contribution to academic research. It is also a debt of gratitude which I owe to my motherland.

### **iii. Advance the Caravan Through Leadership**

Is there a pecking order in the tourism industry? If so, it is determined by those who are in charge of tourism site development. In the tourism academy, the leaders are organizers, people who call tourism development meetings and set their agendas. China is a formally a rank-oriented society. Those holding the highest positions are usually the most erudite, and this is also true of tourism scholarship. The entrance of outstanding scholars into tourism administration has been a common occurrence in the academy. Universities keep or attract talent by offering good posts to good leaders. Among the upper echelons, there are no scholars with exceptionally creative ideas or new theories, even though the tourism field desperately could use such people. Academic elites are too rare, and those who are willing to eschew official rank and the praise of others to advance important new ideas might make the greatest contribution to the field. Unfortunately, the drive for rank and fame in our society causes stagnation in the realm of ideas. Too often, once an academic secures a position, he calls on other ranked, famous personages to confirm his fame, rather than tackling the job of adding to scholarship in the field.

Contemporary men have created a sixth sense: "showing." In today's

world, everyone is attuned to this, and the key to “success” these days is a good showing. People who show off are viewed as the most talented. They play the system to their advantage, showing off whenever and wherever they want to. The most successful take advantage of timing, locations, and situations. “I show; therefore I am.” Because of this mentality, everyone uses all manner of behaviors, even things previously considered socially unacceptable, insane or stupid, to attract public attention. Scholars are also infected by the desire to show off. Public speaking becomes another episode of glory seeking. Everyone strives to do what’s fashionable, and talk shows are everywhere, including the field of tourism. Now we can often hear anyone saying “I’ve got something to say.” Guangdong people actually use “sao” for show; “sao” literally means show off. The day that this book was finished coincided with the finale of the TV series “Super Girls,” a smash hit which indicates too well how people are crazy to pursue a cult of personality.

I don’t advocate the western learning style, but their empirical method of seeking the truth can bring forth convincing conclusions. Conversely, we hold state management of business as a goal, when really the scholar’s mission should be to achieve enlightenment and offer explanations. As in medicine, where an untrained operator is likely to kill the patient, tourism scholars should conduct research to uncover the truth, rather than pursuing vain interests and seeking for personal fame.

Academics talk about truth, but never seem to go for it, settling instead for an unconvincing falsehood. In the field of tourism, there is additionally the drawback of proof. Many of our papers result in opinions, which may or may not be convincing, because there is no rigorous reasoning process, like the caravan, wandering about without a campsite.

## **II. The New Economic Era: Time for the Caravan to Pitch Camp**

Generally speaking, while tourism scholarship has undoubtedly had a positive effect on China’s tourism practices, theory remains weak and creates severe problems. A subject will have no status if it has no theory. The most disappointing thing about tourism research is that the field is lacking in

specialized theory both domestically and internationally. Tourism scholars repeatedly emphasize that the tourism industry clearly demonstrates that service management theory and experience theory come from the field of tourism study. However, other academicians are unwilling to grant these important ideas theoretical status. This lack of an independent system of theories is akin to the nomadic nature of the caravan. Tourism scholarship is currently akin to a lifelong and aimless trek.

Academic tourism research in China is like a short broad track, while the way of international tourism is high and narrow. China's research always can't be brought up to the standard of western countries because our methodology is lacking. The western world stresses wide investigation into numerous individual cases, coupled with hypothesis testing.

Before conducting research, related literature should first be reviewed in depth and then the conclusions of previous scholars synthesized to form a hypothesis. Based on this hypothesis, a questionnaire should be completed and SPSS or SAS should be used to conduct quantitative analysis of the results. Chinese scholars, however, look down upon such mechanical methods and think that Westerners overdo it. We mainly examine cases of Chinese business, international business, industrial strategies and systems theory, and it seems that we're far more interested in changing the world than explaining it, more interested in "how" than in "why".

As if lack of creative theory for tourism were not bad enough, even worse for the field is that the few theories in place were not developed by true scholars. The saying, "A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country," is apt in regard to tourism. The most widely accepted theories of tourism to date are those of scholars outside the field. The foremost theory is the American sociologist MacCannell's theory of staged authenticity first advanced in the *American Sociology Journal* in 1973. Another leading theory is the Canadian geographer Butler's Life-Circle Theory of Tourist Attractions first published in *Canadian Geographer* in 1980. The other major theory of tourism, the economic experience theory, was systematically worked out and put forth by American strategy management researchers Pinell and Gilmore in 1998 in the *Harvard Business Review*.

In conducting academic research, many people hope to find the truth.

Master scholars are always able to propose creative ideas, often developing theories but seldom testing their validity. Second-class senior students will either prove masters' theories or propose a hypothesis of their own. The third-class, or so-called junior students, develop numerous hypotheses, which will be proved neither by themselves nor others. The difference between the masters and the mediocre lies not in the offering hypotheses, but rather in whether the proposed hypotheses will be examined and by whom. We need both masters to develop the theories and numerous scholars to prove thoroughly the masters' ideas. More hands-on research in the field of tourism is required.

If people continue to accept unsubstantiated theories, the edifice of tourism studies will rest on shaky foundations. The majority of tourism scholars want to be the labor contractor. No one is willing to be the laborer, patiently doing practical work such as mapping, laying the foundation, making bricks and earthenware, mixing mud and purchasing wood. The end result of this faulty construction leaves us with a good-looking edifice, but one which has no true foundation. With a strong wind or too hot sun, it may crumble to dust. Tourism studies require a proper foundation. This foundation will shelter the discipline from storms and provide it with a home base from which to explore, rather than leaving us as aimlessly wandering caravaners.

Long-term drift has made tourism studies a rootless discipline with few strong decision makers. Even those who rise within the discipline appear to have little self-confidence. These people make their way to the higher ranks by attaching themselves either to important officials or to the rich and famous. High level tourism planners have begun writing to world leaders like Kofi Annan, former US President Bush, Premier Wen and other top ministers to rank and classify tourism projects. If the project is conducted by a national committee it is considered upper ministerial and is also tax-exempt. Regional projects, on the other hand, carry a 40% tax fee. If a foreigner is included in the team, the project is classified as international, and may become an academic status symbol. These projects attempt to attract government officials, major corporate leaders and international scholars. The trend is for the scholars to ride on the coattails of the rich, famous, or already highly ranked.

The field of Tourism is plagued with the same dualistic trap as the Liangshan Heroes. Only in Liangshan were the famous chivalrous outlaws called “Heroes.” And, while they hoped for amnesty from the ruler, once they pledged loyalty to him, they could no longer be considered heroes. Tourism is in a similar position since it is still not considered a major academic subject. It seems that this field has vitality only when wandering; and with entry into mainstream academia, the vitality disappears. Even as a major within the top universities’ Schools of Commerce, Tourism is at risk of being absorbed into other programs, if not lost altogether. To strengthen our field, we must break away from related disciplines and stand on our own feet. Improved scholarship in the field is one fundamental way to help others see tourism studies as the valuable discipline. With the upsurge of the Chinese economy, now is the time for tourism studies to pitch camp. To do that, we need serious theories which are specific to our field, which will become the foundation of our home and allow the caravan to stop wandering.

### **III. Wanderers in Search of a Destination**

It is well for me to speak of wanderers, as I believe that my entering the field of Tourism was in some ways a random happening. When I investigated China’s North Pole, Muohe, I was involved in one of life’s many unpredictable incidents. I aimed at a rabbit for five seconds and shot it, but missed it, and at this time a wild goose fell from the sky, enabling me to still have a dinner. Tourism as my career was the same kind of happy accident. Early on I developed a human resource plan for tourism. By doing this, I later found a job at Beijing International Studies University. There I began the study tourism seriously. Someone once joked about me getting wet before I ever touched water. From that early plan which just happened to focus on tourism, I was plunged into the field. I began conducting serious tourism research out of the necessity of making a living. I had hoped to leave the field one day. However, as with an arranged marriage where the two parties ultimately come to love one another and live on to a happy ending, I at last fell in love with tourism. To be sure, not all tourism scholars are as enamoured of the field. Most also do not specialize in their areas of study, which range from Tourism Exploration to Hotel Management, Event Management to Time Shared Holidays, Crisis



Management to Invertebrate Linguistics, Feng Shui, Physiognomy, and even Witchcraft. Although some of these scholars may not seek to become experts, many, after having written one textbook, conceitedly claim to be the forefathers and originators of their particular subject. In some ways, I am such a scholar, and the breadth of my subject matter is even wider.

My academic background includes geography, which I studied from 1982 to 1989 and earned a bachelor's and master's degree. I mastered research methods like radio carbon dating, climatic pattern tracking, long-term ecological investigations using spore, pollen and tree ring evidence, chemical analysis using trace elements, and reading crystal surface features to understand hydroclimate characteristics. Rigorous as these various methods are, at the time I was studying them, I didn't think they had much practical value.

From 1987 to 1992, I studied sociology. I was addicted to Fei Xiaotong's Theory of Sociology, and extensively read many books on History of Sociology, Research Methods of Sociology and Theory of Modern Sociology. I was then studying to be a post-doctoral fellow under Mr. Fei. I had even gone so far as to swear that I would devote my life to the study of sociology. My extensive knowledge of scientific sociology theory was developed during this period. As late as my 1996 return from Hawaii, I still had the desire to get a doctoral degree in sociology. However, again somewhat haphazardly, I fell into another field, Management, where I obtained a Ph. D. which resulted in my reluctant farewell to sociology.

From 1989 to the present, I have studied tourism. In particular, I have studied and will continue to study tourism exploration and planning, hotel operations strategy, destination exploration, and internal tourism management. I am also currently involved in leisure and club Management, which is viewed by foreigners as one branch of the tourism industry that should be especially profitable. At this time, it seems like I'll spend the rest of my life studying destination management, strategic management, and leisure economy.

From 1993 to the present, I have also studies management. From September 1993 to July 1994, I took part in a training course, organized by the Ministry of Education and conducted by Peking University, for core higher education teachers of Economics. I systematically studied theories of