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Sunday, May 1, 2005

HAWAII AND CHINA

Making Connections

**Language-savvy travel industry
students will find a wide-open
market in China**

From UH to a dream realized
'Local girl' follows her passion

By Heidi Chang
Special to the Star-Bulletin

As the world's fastest-growing economy continues to soar, everybody wants to do business with China. Chinese authorities say tourism alone in China is growing even faster than its economy as a whole.

"China will also have the largest number of tourists (100 million) traveling around the globe by 2015; that's five years ahead of the World Tourism Organization's 2020 forecast," according to Yao Yue Can, executive president of China International Travel Service in Beijing. Yao was an early trainee at the University of Hawaii School of Travel Industry and Management. Meanwhile, the relationship between China and the United

States as trading partners and economic competitors is evolving. So where does Hawaii fit in?

Chuck Gee, dean emeritus of the TIM School, believes Hawaii can capitalize on four main connections: as a destination for tourism, as a culturally compatible place to study, by exporting graduates, and by exporting professional services in resort architecture, engineering, consulting, training and other areas.

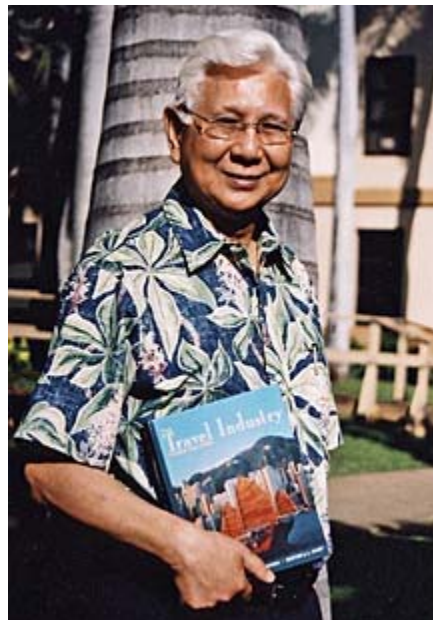
Gee also would like to see Hawaii get its share of Chinese visitors. While Europe, Southeast Asia and Australia have gained substantial market shares of Chinese visitors, circumstances both political and structural do not yet favor Hawaii as a preferred destination.

The state of Hawaii has tried to promote the islands as a tourist destination for China, but the visa issue remains a roadblock. No matter how much you promote Hawaii, if the U.S. government will not grant Chinese visitors visas, they can't come here. And ever since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, national policy has made it more difficult for international travelers to get visas. In the meantime, the United States also worries some Chinese tourists might overstay their visas and not return home.

However, China and the United States seem to be making some progress in easing the situation. They recently reached a reciprocal agreement that allows for multiple-entry extended visas. Before, under a single-entry visa, a Chinese visitor could stay only 28 days and would have to reapply to re-enter the United States. Now they're allowed multiple visits and longer stays, and they don't have to reapply within that one year.

Cost is another factor in courting the Chinese tourist. Most who visit the United States would like to come to Hawaii. However, it's a lot cheaper for them to travel to places like Bali, Thailand, Singapore and Hong Kong, where it's much easier to get a visa and they're welcomed there. And Hawaii lacks budget hotels for group tours.

In looking at ways to attract China's mass market traveler, local tourism experts say Hawaii is limited by its infrastructure. It has a limited number of Chinese-speaking tour guides and hotel personnel, for example, and many Chinese visitors complain that Hawaii lacks



COURTESY HEIDI CHANG

Chuck Gee, dean emeritus of the University of Hawaii School of Travel Industry and Management, says aloha is an asset in the hospitality industry.

good Chinese restaurants.

However, there is a lucrative market that Hawaii has begun to tap but hasn't fully developed, according to Richard Bahar, development manager at the state Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism. He's referring to the Chinese entrepreneurs, business people and government officials who come here for training, business meetings and conferences.

"They're coming here to prepare for all the changes taking place in China," explains Bahar. "Hawaii has had longer contact with China than any other state in the U.S. There's a greater level of comfort here because of the long historical and cultural links they share. Hawaii has the majority of its roots in Asia and the Pacific, whereas the U.S. mainland has its roots mainly from Europe."

For decades, students from the Asia-Pacific region have been coming here to study travel and tourism. Under Gee's leadership as dean of the TIM School at UH from 1976 to 2000, the school gained an international reputation as a leading institution in its field.

"Travel is a global business and Hawaii has the expertise and the reputation in that," says Gee, who was born and raised in San Francisco in a Cantonese-speaking family. "At the heart is the education offered by the UH TIM School, Hawaii Pacific University, Brigham Young University and other institutions."

Throughout the years, many TIM School graduates have succeeded in leadership roles in all corners of the world, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. Gee says those who aspire to an international career in tourism need to be able to learn foreign languages.

"One reason why Europeans are so successful in going anywhere is they're usually multilingual and quick to adapt to other cultures. They seldom hesitate to relocate from country to country, thereby gaining valuable experience and insights, which travel and hospitality companies value in their general managers," explains Gee. "Americans, on the other hand, are less inclined to accept overseas posts, especially in 'hardship conditions,' and expect other people to learn English." Being able to work with people who have grown up under different economic and political systems is another important factor in succeeding overseas.

When China first opened up to the West in 1978, the TIM School was the first school invited to help train tourism personnel and assist China in developing hospitality programs. Back then China lacked the infrastructure for modern tourism and anything with creature comforts, recalls Gee, who visited the country after the cultural revolution (1966-'76) had ended. Outside of the state-run Daiyutai Guest House in Beijing (where President Nixon and other foreign dignitaries stayed), there were no modern hotels or resorts offering anything beyond basic amenities, according to Gee.

Now China's major cities have luxurious hotels that might rival or even surpass some of the best elsewhere. And as the 2008 Beijing

Olympic Games get closer, there's an increasing demand to renovate existing hotels and build new ones. There's also a strong need to train China's tourism personnel to upgrade service, a frequent complaint from international visitors.

Gee thinks the more insightful student in Hawaii will recognize that the current job market is a global one and can offer something special. "Graduates from this school have something to offer that we didn't necessarily teach them. They came with it, and that is the spirit of aloha. The true feeling of hospitality," says Gee. "In tourism, that may be the most important quality of all."

Compared to local students, Gee says foreign students tend to be more competitive and highly focused, especially if they've come from developing Asia-Pacific countries, where life is more competitive, education is a privilege and they've had to struggle to get ahead. Since the late 1990s, the largest international group of students at the TIM School has come from Japan. Earlier, most foreign students came from Hong Kong, Singapore and other English-speaking countries.

For those who want to pursue travel industry opportunities in China, Gee recommends going through a major hotel chain or a company such as American Express. "A foreign enterprise can apply for a work visa for you, if you have the qualifications they're looking for -- you can speak Mandarin, you read and write English well and you have an understanding of how to adopt a company's style of management, usually Western, tempered with the sensitivity of the local culture of China."

He notes that "students don't always understand the importance of connections." Some fail to take advantage of opportunities offered at the school through clubs, student projects and internships.

"Chinese have a word for it; it's called Guan-xi (pronounced Guan-shi), Mandarin for a relationship, a meaningful connection," says Gee. "In China, Guan-xi is everything. It opens doors."

The TIM School's Dean Walter Jamieson says the school already has been approached by the Beijing Tourism Group, which operates a number of tourism activities, including hotels, to help train its staff. The Beijing Olympics are bound to make the world much more aware of traveling to China. By 2020, China is forecast to become the world's top tourist destination.

"All predictions are that China and many parts of Asia are going to experience incredible rates of growth, and the opportunities will be significant," says Jamieson, who was born in Montreal. He has worked in Asia for more than 20 years, and believes understanding the Chinese market will help Hawaii in developing strategies to attract tourists from China. That is, of course, once visa problems and other governmental issues have been worked out.

Ever since Yen Chun began managing the China Business Program at the Japan-America Institute of Management Science (JAIMS) in

Hawaii Kai in 2000, enrollment has increased. The program prepares students to work in the China market and has a partnership with the UH-Manoa College of Business. Chun says it's the only program in the country that offers a China-focused M.B.A. degree, training in Mandarin and a three month internship in China.

Chun, who was born in Beijing to American citizens from Hawaii and speaks Mandarin and Cantonese, believes there are major financial and career opportunities in China. Although most multinational corporations try to hire local people, Chun says they're looking for overseas workers with good track records in China and global experience. But salaries in China are usually much lower compared to those in the United States.

"You're usually taking a 20-40 percent cut in the salary. However, if you factor in other elements, you may be better off," explains Chun. The cost of living in China is much lower than in the United States. "I advise my students, don't look only at the salary, but the opportunity to learn and the exposure they'll get." Once they've acquired experience working in the China market, Chun says they'll be in demand by foreign corporations operating in China or Chinese corporations exploring the world market.

Companies in China are in need of middle management and are constantly looking for good managers, according to Chun. "If a person has some solid work experience and good bilingual skills, many companies would offer big bucks to take him or her away," says Chun.

In addition to her position with JAAMS, Chun is a partner in the Hawaii-based CMC Consulting Group, Inc., with local businessman Johnson Choi, who was born in Hong Kong, and entrepreneur Michael Zhang, a native of Shanghai. CMC recently co-produced a television documentary called "Hawaii's China Connection" with Shanghai TV's Documentary Channel. The four-part series is scheduled to air at 4 p.m. today, May 8, 15 and 22 on PBS Hawaii.

It focuses on Hawaii as a business, education and technology destination, and explores Hawaii's historical and cultural connections with China. Gee is one of the interviewees.

The Shanghai TV film crew also visited Iolani and Punahou, schools once attended by Sun Yat-sen, who is regarded as the father of modern China.

Since 1978 Punahou has been sending students on cultural exchange programs to China, inspiring teenagers like Jonathan Chuck, also interviewed in the series. During his visit last summer, the Punahou senior was amazed by China's rapid modernization and globalization, and by seeing a local Communist Party office right next to a KFC. Chuck taught English in a rural Chinese village.

"Language is everything to these kids, the key to their future. Experiencing their deplorable living conditions, these kids taught me how fortunate I am to live the way I do," says Chuck, who believes

his skills in both English and Chinese could be invaluable someday in the Chinese market. "The biggest thing I learned from them was an appreciation of the power that language possesses, and how it's able to change lives."

Heidi Chang, a freelance print and broadcast journalist, is a frequent contributor to the Star-Bulletin.

[BACK TO TOP](#)



COURTESY HEIDI CHANG

David Chan, shown in 2003 when he was general manager of the China Hotel in Guangzhou, now is G.M. of the new Hyatt Regency Dongguan.

From UH to a dream realized

**He kept his goal in focus
from his humble start to his
success with the Hyatt**

By Heidi Chang
Special to the Star-Bulletin

Starting out as a busboy at Hong Kong's famous Peninsula Hotel, David Chan never gave up on his dream of becoming a general manager. He's now general manager of the Hyatt Regency Dongguan, scheduled to open in China by the end of this year. The hotel is nestled in a beautifully landscaped new industrial park called Song Shan Lake. Dongguan is a thriving center for high-tech and manufacturing in Guangdong province. Centrally located, it's part of the booming economic corridor composed of Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Hong Kong.

Chan credits his education at the University of Hawaii Travel Industry Management School for helping him move up faster.

"It widened my scope and changed my life," says the 1983 TIM School graduate.

Chan worked at the Hyatt on Maui and Hong Kong, the Regent Hotel in Hong Kong and the Hyatt in Perth, Australia. In the late 1990s Chan was promoted to general manager at the Hyatt Regency Xian in China. One of his prominent guests was then-President Bill Clinton.

When I caught up with Chan in 2003, he was general manager of another five-star hotel, China Hotel by Marriott in Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province. Bubbling over with aloha, Chan was the perfect host, totally at ease, charming and joking with the group of journalists I was traveling with. The food and service at the hotel were fabulous, and it was bustling with visitors. Not so prior to our visit, when SARS broke out near Guangzhou, devastating China's travel industry for months. For Chan, that was a challenging time.

Born near Guangzhou, Chan was only seven in 1962, when his family fled China for Hong Kong. Educated under British colonial rule, Chan feels fortunate his parents took him out of China when they did. Otherwise, he says, he might have ended up working in the rice paddies during the cultural revolution.

Chan has witnessed China's transformation. "The major changes I felt were in the late '80s, when people could come to China more often. In the old days Chinese citizens were not allowed to move, even from village to village. Today they can travel freely within China -- a huge difference compared to 20 years ago."

Now 49, Chan says, "The challenge is to open the Hyatt Regency Dongguan with style, meeting the Hyatt brand standard with some local constraints." Because China had closed its doors for so many years, Chan explains, it takes a lot of patience and guidance to implement the quality of standards, such as hygiene and security, of an American hotel chain.

Since the earliest Chinese immigrants came from Guangdong province to work in the sugarcane fields of Hawaii, Chan believes Guangdong and Hawaii naturally share a lot of common connections.

After years of economic reforms, many in China now have more money to travel and enjoy the quality of life.

"Hawaii to them is paradise, and they'd love to go," says the hotelier, who speaks Cantonese, Mandarin, English, and some French and Japanese.

So what can Hawaii do to attract more visitors from China? Chan says promotion, incentives and exposure will make an impact. And he hopes there will someday be a direct flight between Guangzhou and Hawaii.

EDITORIAL

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May 1, 2005

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"Can you imagine 10 percent of 1.3 billion people going to Hawaii?" he smiles. "That's amazing."

And if Hawaii is interested in his ideas, Chan says, the state can contact him.

"I'm very proud that I stayed in Hawaii for nine years. And my roots are from Guangzhou, as well. I'd be delighted to be an ambassador of good will between the two."

[BACK TO TOP](#)

'Local girl' follows her passion

Roberta Wong Leung says networking can help when tapping into the job market

By Heidi Chang
Special to the Star-Bulletin

Following her passion for travel and different cultures, Roberta Wong Leung has led a successful career in corporate human resources and hospitality education. She's worked for five major international hotel companies and taught in Asia. Living in places like Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, San Francisco and New York has been quite an adventure for this local girl, who was born in Honolulu. Leung comes from a family of restaurateurs who have operated 16 restaurants, including Wong's Okazu-ya, Orson's and Byron's Steakhouse.

After being away for 15 years, Leung came home to Hawaii in 2004 so her youngest daughter could graduate from high school here. Leung now is an admissions representative at Hawaii Business College and teaches at Kapiolani Community College. Earlier she also taught at the University of Hawaii Travel Industry Management School, where she graduated in 1971. That's where Leung also learned about the importance of networking, which she encourages her students to do.

Leung landed her first job with



Regent International Hotels when Chuck Gee, then dean of the UH TIM School, recommended her for the position. She went on to work for Century International Hotels, Radisson Hotels, Inter-Continental Hotels and Westin Hotels. She also was hotel manager for the Lodge at Koele on Lanai.

Roberta Wong Leung:
Teaches others how to succeed

As some parts of the world are experiencing rapid change and globalization, Leung advises people to look for work internationally, where the opportunities are. With Disneyland opening in Hong Kong later this year, the hotel boom under way for the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai, and more Las Vegas-type casinos opening in Macao, it's creating a lot of opportunities.

"I think China and Hong Kong are such dynamic and exciting places to work, that's where the future is. You have to really be on top of your toes to survive there," says Leung, who understands some Mandarin, Cantonese, French and Spanish. Leung believes it's definitely an advantage to speak Putonghua (Mandarin) in China. However, English is the language of the international hotel business.

One way people can learn more about jobs in China and Hong Kong is by looking up executive search companies in the hotel field on the Internet. But working overseas isn't for everyone. It can be a major cultural adjustment.

"Many countries in Asia, like China, still have a very strong communist influence, so you have to be politically correct," explains Leung, adding, "You have to understand the culture."

Leung says many ex-patriate managers often fail when they come to work in a foreign country because they don't come with an open mind and they're too arrogant. "Don't come charging in like a bull in a china closet," she says. Instead, she advises people to be more receptive to learning from the country they're in and have patience and humility.

Along the way, Leung has earned an M.B.A. and a D.B.A., and has taught at nine colleges, including Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong University and Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.

Now that Leung's daughter is set to graduate from St. Andrew's Priory, Leung soon will be headed back overseas. She'll be the director of a new hotel and tourism school opening at Shunde Polytechnic. It's part of the Pearl River Delta, China's top manufacturing region in Guangdong province. Once again, Leung plans to bring the aloha spirit and the quality of the TIM School legacy to China.