

New Zealand and Chinese Sister Cities and Their Implications for Tourism.

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Abstract

The central objective of this thesis is to achieve an understanding of the Chinese attitudes towards sister city relationships, and how to utilise the China-NZ network for tourism development. This area is under-researched, and thus this thesis attempts to establish a foundation for future research. China's economic development has grown rapidly, and Chinese cities have been forging sister city links with countries all over the world since the late 1970s, with the purpose of stimulating economic development. Since the early 1980s, local Chinese municipal governments have gained more jurisdiction in their decision making, coupled with the introduction of special economic zones. This has contributed to the explosion of sister city links. Chinese cities are keen to pursue international relations using sister city relationships as one way to leverage economic development, acquire technology and investment, and increase their understanding of the international arena.

The Chinese outbound tourism market is growing rapidly and it is predicted to be the largest source of outbound tourists by 2017 (Xinhua 2005). The utilisation of China-NZ sister city networks can potentially spearhead two way travel for both countries.

The sister cities movement as an important catalyst for tourism development and the Chinese perspective towards sister cities has been little considered within previous research studies. To meet the aims and objectives of this study, the method is two-fold: 1) a survey questionnaire was sent out to members of the New Zealand Sister City Network in conjunction with the Asia-NZ Foundation Grassroots Survey in July 2004. 2) In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in China with government officials from 23 China-New Zealand sister cities. The results indicate that both New Zealand and Chinese cities believe that sister city relationships can play important roles in fostering tourism growth, and are initiators of economic development. Chinese place importance on developing long-term relationships, thus tourism, cultural and educational exchanges are essential in building up a successful relationship that can lead to economic development. The involvement of high-level government officials is integral to the credibility of the relationship. Major issues Chinese had with New Zealand cities are the lack of funding, language barriers and understanding. To establish long term solid relationships with the Chinese, it is proposed that a reverse Colombo Plan be implemented. This thesis concludes that sister cities can be used as a place promotion technique to stimulate tourism growth and Chinese view the future of sister cities as evolving into integral tools to achieve their goals by peaceful and constructive means. In order to achieve the most effective sister city relationship, are provided including inter-city cooperation, tourism marketing, projects and funding.