

MARKETING ACTIVITIES OF COUNTRIES TO ATTRACT CHINESE TOURISTS: TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

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Рассмотрены предпосылки динамичного роста рынка выездного туризма КНР, тенденции и структурные особенности его развития. Проанализированы маркетинговые стратегии и инструменты привлечения китайских туристов, применяемые в различных странах. Выявлены проблемы организационно-управленческого характера, возникающие в сфере приема китайских туристов.

The article examines the preconditions of dynamic growth of Chinese outbound tourism market, trends and structural features of its development. Marketing strategies and tools for attracting Chinese tourists, used in various countries, were analyzed. Management problems arising in the field of inbound Chinese tourism were identified.

Ключевые слова: туризм; туристский рынок КНР; туристский продукт; продвижение туристских услуг.
Keywords: tourism; tourism market of China; tourism product; promotion of tourism services.

More than one billion tourists cross international borders annually, and Chinese travellers are becoming a bigger and bigger part of this flow. Chinese outbound tourism is a phenomenon of the XXI century. Successful economic reforms, dynamic increase of disposable incomes and free time of working people, openness of China to the outside world have all contributed to the rapid rise in the number of Chinese citizens travel abroad. In recent decades the flow of Chinese tourists has been increased higher than the number travellers from any other countries. Despite the fact that recently the development of the Chinese economy is slowing down, its outbound tourism continues to grow.

The current *China's outbound tourist market* is already largest on planet. According to China Tourism Research Institute, in 2015, Chinese tourists made 120 million trips overseas, making it the third year in a row that China topped the list of international outbound travellers. Last year they spent 194 billion US dollars across the world [22]. This enormous spending of Chinese tourists abroad was achieved by only a small fraction of the country's population. Only 6 % of Chinese citizens possess a passport to travel abroad vs. 46 % of Americans who own a passport [4]. The Chinese and international forecasts are predicting that the number of visits overseas by Chinese tourists could exceed 240 million within a decade [10; 16].

With a larger number, the willingness to travel abroad as well as the capacity to spend more, Chinese tourists are able to raise the tourism revenues of great number travel destinations around the world considerably. This growth prospect has excited tourism players around the world.

A booming economy and expanding middle class with a newly disposable income and discretionary time has made China the number one most sought after outbound tourism market in the world. With an ever increasing buying power, Chinese tourists have become the most desired customers by all kind of companies around the world.

Due to this rapidly growing outbound tourism market of China, many countries and their tourism companies are re-architecting their tourism policies and doing their best to establish closer business relationship with China. Destinations around the world are fighting desperately to attract these tourists because they know Chinese big spenders will bring them money in the following decades. Number of countries with visa-free or visa-on-arrival policies for Chinese visitors reached 52 in 2015.

China is still a relatively new market and its culture still partly unknown to the many countries around the world. Some unique characteristic of Chinese tourists has become headaches for many foreign tourism companies. The Chinese have unique, special needs and travel habits that need to be understood and catered for. So studying what Chinese tourists like and how to comfort and attract them has become a trend in tourism industry worldwide.

Many Chinese people still have little experience as international travellers because they have begun to travel abroad in recent years. With a steadily growing middle class, more and more Chinese customers can afford to travel abroad and they gradually shift their preference from price to quality and experience.

In order to attract Chinese tourists and successfully communicate with them it is important to know their profiles, characteristics as well as the behavior during their trips abroad.

Tourists from each region of China have their own characteristics, but they can be generally divided into two groups: tourists from the north of China and those from the south. The major differences between Chinese tourists from south and north are in habit of travel and expense. According to the "Nielsen China Outbound Travel Monitor", most outbound Chinese tourists are from the south of the country. Amongst five key sources of outbound tourists, including cities of Beijing and Shanghai as well as southeastern provinces Guangdong, Zhejiang and Jiangsu, only the Chinese capital is located in the north. The stronger economic base and geographic location explain the higher outbound travel frequency of

Chinese tourists from the south. The north of China is bordered by Mongolia, North Korea and the Far East of Russia, destinations not popularly associated with tourism. At the same time, many tourists from North China spend on a trip more than tourists from the South.

The percentage of Chinese travellers by gender is changing. The proportion of males and females is becoming balanced. For example, in 2012, 51 % of Chinese tourists in France are women [12].

China's outbound travel boom is fueled mostly by a new young generation of travellers so-called *millennials*. According to Germany's largest market research institute data, half of China's outbound travellers are aged 15–29 years old while over a third are aged 30–44 years [9]. About 67 percent of China's overseas tourists in 2014 were born after 1980s. These people have not suffered the years of deprivation like the previous generations. They are more interested in improving their lifestyle and experiencing new things than simply working to survive. This is a sign of the newfound wealth of Chinese people. About two thirds of Chinese millennials belong to the high income category. Their financial standing is expected to increase as their careers advance, since most of millennials hold "white collar" executive or professional jobs. However, they have quite different consumption habits and visit different destinations.

Chinese millennials have sophisticated needs, and know what they are seeking. They are more ambitious than their predecessors and more hedonistic in their willingness to spend money to indulge themselves. The millennials are better-informed, travel independently and spend less on shopping. This new generation is also technologically savvy with almost everyone owning a smartphone and being highly involved in sharing experiences on social media platform.

Many increasingly affluent, young middle class Chinese are willing to spend money on their parents. It is seen as loyal, respectful and loving to send their parents on trips abroad. China has the largest senior citizen population in the world. There are about 200 million people over 60 years old living in the country. Travel agencies look to attract these Chinese *tourists of the third age* because they have more free time as well as inclination to travel during the off-season. Older Chinese tourists typically travel in groups and visit the most obvious and famous places around the world. These tourists are more sensitive to quality of tourism product than to its price.

Lots of Chinese tourists prefer traveling in groups, with their families or friends and select package tours organized by travel agencies. The main reasons of such behavior are language barrier, Visa filing, fear for risk and price as well as aim to avoid other potential problems in a place that is unknown to them. Tour companies can book cheap tickets in

bulk and bargain for hotels to get the best prices. Group travellers tend to travel on a lower budget, staying in less expensive hotels, take roundabout routes designed to take advantage of cut-price fares, and eat cheap Chinese meals negotiated with Chinese restaurants.

Chinese travellers are curious but they want to feel safe during the trip. The recent events of violence in major cities of France as Paris had a strong impact on tourists from China. Promoters argue that group travellers prefer to see iconic sites and things they have seen on TV and in the movies.

Instead of following tourist groups, more and more Chinese travellers, especially young, rich and educated Chinese people increasingly want to travel alone, in their own way. Independent travellers are not replacing group travellers, but are complementing them. Year after year the number of Chinese *independent travellers* as group travellers is growing in the world market. The division between the group and independent Chinese travellers is likely to remain fairly balanced as they gain experience, and at the same time as numerous newcomers begin travelling in groups [24].

Of the total number of Chinese outbound tourists near half are *travelling for business*. This type of traveller cares more about efficiency and the quality of business related services such as high speed internet access, 24 hour food delivery, and ticket booking services.

Leisure segment makes up a third of the total amount of outbound tourism from China. Compared with business tourists, leisure tourists more often buy tour packages, travel in groups and care more about entertainment, recreational facilities, and knowledgeable guides. Sightseeing is the most popular activity among Chinese outbound *leisure tourists*. They spend an hour or two at the selected location to take pictures and listen to the guide, then hurry to leave for their next destination. Three- to four-star hotels are the most popular form of accommodation for them. According to tourism experts the basic needs of Chinese tourists are slippers, hot water, a kettle in the room and mandarin speaking personnel. More and more attention they pay to the quality of the drinks and food and prefer Chinese restaurants.

The Chinese are very keen on *shopping* that is often a high priority on their agenda and the single biggest source of their spending abroad. An average Chinese tourist spends on shopping approximately US \$1,200 per trip [8].

When Chinese tourists travel to other countries they want to bring home many souvenirs for relatives and friends. Chinese tourists are big buyers of luxury goods. They regularly spend money on clothing, shoes, handbags, cosmetics and electronics when they travel overseas. This craze for shopping is due to two main factors: a booming economy in China, and

a price differential of the taxation of luxury goods in China.

When Chinese people want to go abroad, they thoroughly plan their trips before travelling. For recommendation and reservation, about 60 % of them ask advice from their friends. Before choosing a destination, book a hotel or take a flight the Chinese always seek for information on the *Chinese Internet* consulting travel blogs and websites. According to China Internet Network Information Center, in 2015, about 260 million Chinese people booked their travel online and 80 percent of them did it through their mobile devices [21].

Most Chinese tourists are not really familiar with foreign travels. That's why they look after much information. They like to search for information before or during travel in the Chinese social network because they can find a lot of reviews and advice there. More than 90 % of 630 million Chinese Internet users are on social networks. The most used by Chinese people social networks are Weibo, WeChat, QQ and QZone. Microblogging platform Weibo had more than 600 million registered users in 2014. WeChat is the most used messaging application in China and can be accessible everywhere in the world because of its English version. In 2014, WeChat had about 470 million active users with 70 million outside of China.

When looking for information, Chinese tourists often go from basic information networks to specialised platforms. Tourism-related forums dedicated to tourism like Qyer, Tuniu or Baidu are highly appreciated by Chinese potential travellers. They use Baidu the almighty internet word of mouth (IWOM) and different video platforms to get a better idea of the destination.

Tuniu is the most active social network specializing in mass market online travel positioning itself on leisure travel. It offers a wide range of advices as well as places for Chinese tourists about leisure travel to discuss their latest experience of the hottest places to go to.

The Chinese are very impressionable and also listen to the advice of celebrities. Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) are usually present on Weibo or other Chinese social networks and post their reviews and opinions there about their trips.

Thus tourism professionals abroad wishing to attract tourists from China should be present and active on the Chinese Internet as well as to have a good online reputation and to develop a digital strategy in this country.

In 2006, the China National Tourism Administration issued manuals on proper *behavior for Chinese citizens traveling abroad*, which sought to remind them of the importance of complying with local etiquette and avoiding inappropriate behavior. According to this document every Chinese tourist must abide by the law and the social morality

etiquette, protect the environment, and respect the local cultures and customs of the travel destinations.

Cases of peculiar behaviour of Chinese tourists often arise as a result of cultural deviations and misunderstandings. For example, there is no tipping culture in China and it is often socially acceptable to eat food on public transport [8].

Therefore, to best serve travellers from this country need to be aware of Chinese culture.

On average, the Chinese traveller visits three locations during a seven-day trip, spending US \$3,000 per trip [6]. Chinese tourists are more used to travel to destinations which are closer their country. In 2015, the top overseas favorite destinations for them were Thailand, South Korea and Japan.

Thailand received more than 8 million Chinese travellers last year, over one third of the country's entire inbound tourists. The favorite things for many Chinese during their time in this country are the "sunshine" and local cuisine.

The number of Chinese tourists to *South Korea* numbered about six million in 2014. Inspired by the "Korean Wave" of culture exports, from soap operas and Korean pop music to food and fashion, price-conscious younger Chinese tourists, who consist of about 50 % visitors from China, are seeking in this country a more authentic and less expensive shopping experience. Upon their return home Chinese visitors become ambassadors for Korean brands [2].

Japan is another popular destination among the Chinese tourists that has enjoyed rapid growth in the past two years, particularly for group travellers. According to the Japan National Tourism Organization, in 2015, China has become the largest source of foreign visitors to Japan, with the number doubling to five million. Their total consumption increased to 1.4 trillion yen or 11.7 billion US dollars, accounting for 40 % of all foreign tourists spending in this country [17]. Factors driving the success of Japan in attracting Chinese tourists include weaker Japanese yen and easier visa rules for Chinese travellers as well as strong marketing campaigns. A study by the Japan National Tourist Agency indicated that majority of Chinese visitors purchased in this country cosmetics, perfume, cigarettes and medicine.

In 2015, 2.7 million Chinese visited *the United States of America*, compared with less than 400,000 in 2007 [7]. On average, one Chinese tourist spends about \$6,000 per trip to this country. California, Hawaii and New York City are the most popular destinations among Chinese tourists in the USA. The attractiveness of these and many other American destinations for all categories of Chinese travellers is extremely strong. The last significant change of Chinese tourists travelling to the U.S. is that they are travelling more often independently.

China and the United States announced 2016 will be the year of mutual tourism promotion. Both

countries have launched series of campaigns to boost the tourism development in both directions. The extension of American tourist and business visa validity for Chinese people in 2014 from one to 10 years has pushed up the share of Chinese travelling to the United States purely for leisure. Until this agreement, Chinese citizens had to renew their American business, tourist, and student visas annually.

Europe is the most popular destination for Chinese tourists outside of Asia, showing an increase of about 100 percent in the number of overnight visits in the last four years.

According to the official statistics, Europe received 12.5 million tourists from China in 2015 [5]. The European Travel Commission (ETC) is forecasting a 7.4 % increase of Chinese arrival numbers to Europe this year.

Rising incomes of Chinese people, cheaper flights and easing visa restrictions are increasingly turning their holidays in Europe from a luxury commodity into a mainstream Chinese consumer experience. The Schengen visa scheme gives Chinese travellers access to 25 countries with a single visa. Chinese tourists like to visit European destinations mainly thanks to their heritage and shopping opportunities. Moreover, a trip to the Old Continent is a symbol of their rather high social status.

China now plays an important part in contributing to the development of European mature tourism destination. France, Italy, Switzerland, Britain and Germany make up the top destinations for Chinese tourists on the Old Continent. During their first visit in Europe, most of them choose such attractive European cities as London, Paris, Barcelona or Rome. They prefer to visit as many countries as possible in a limited amount of time. Chinese credit cards are becoming more and more accepted in these cities.

France, the world's leading tourist destination, with 86 million foreign tourists in 2015, is one of the most favorite destinations for Chinese tourists in Europe. In 2015, this country received more than 2 million visitors from China [5]. Average spending by Chinese visitors to France remains far higher than spending by them to most other European destinations. In spite of security concerns such as terrorist attacks, Paris remains the dream destination for many Chinese tourists. In order to improve the safety of Chinese tourists stay in Paris and other cities the French government has started hiring police officers from China to protect tourists. The government also has sought to simplify the visa delivery process for Chinese tourists. In 2014, the waiting time was cut from ten to just two days.

Being outside the EU's Schengen single-visa bloc **the United Kingdom** is less popular destination than France, Italy Switzerland or Germany. According to Visit Britain 270,000 Chinese holidaymakers visited

this country in 2015 and they spent £585 million [5]. For 10 days the average Chinese tourist spent £2,688 in Britain. Britain's statistics proof that every 22 additional Chinese visitors support an additional job in the country's tourism.

The top five most visited destinations for the Chinese in Britain are London, Manchester, Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh. In 2015, London was the main target for Chinese tourists, with 45 % visiting the capital. London's landmarks, the Premier League and Harry Potter are all central to the UK's image among tourists from China. Lowering the cost of entry two-year visa for Chinese in four times Britain hopes to lure more tourists and business people who might be interested to visit this country. The new two-year visa will cost £85, the same as the previous six-month visa, and enables holders to make multiple trips to the UK. In order to serve the potential Chinese tourists the British government has also decided to expand the fingerprinting service necessary for tourists to obtain their visas from 9 to 50 Chinese cities.

Not only western destinations but also many Central and Eastern European countries such as the **Czech Republic and Poland** are seeing increases as Chinese tourists look to travel to more "novel" locations.

In 2015, the Czech Republic saw a record of 300,000 Chinese arrivals [5]. The country is looking to increase that number by hiring in hotels and stores in Prague Chinese employees or interpreters to communicate with Chinese tourists. Many retailers are also beginning to accept the Chinese bank cards. In order to facilitate the wave of interest from The Chinese, the Czech government opened more visa application centers in Shanghai and Beijing and plans to add more such establishments in other big cities of China.

According to the Polish Tourist Organization more than 60,000 tourists from China visited Poland in 2014; it is up from 7,700 in 2004 [25]. The Polish Tourist Organization attributes this success to its tourism promotion programs targeting the Chinese market. They include opening a centre of the Polish Tourist Organization in Beijing, establishment a Polish visa application centers in four Chinese cities, as well as constant presence in the Chinese media. In the latest development strategy for incoming tourism to Poland, China is on the list of priority markets.

Until now the small **Baltic countries** Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are not on the waiting list of Chinese tourists and few of them know where exactly these three countries are, and what they can expect there. In 2014, together they recorded 32,000 arrivals from China [15]. The Baltic countries can expect to be visited first of all by those Chinese tourists, who have already been to Europe a couple of times. Young Chinese people are the most potential tourists coming to the Baltics, because the older generation

still prefers the traditional popular destinations like France and Italy. Now in most cases tourists from China stop in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia for a couple of days on their way to bigger European destinations.

The Baltic countries are planning to market themselves on Chinese tourist market under the idea of three destinations in one vacation. Promoting themselves Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia seek to emphasize their exceptional features and are described as innovative, eco-friendly and culturally unique destinations. The most offered tour for Chinese tourist groups includes a visit to their principal city destinations like Vilnius, Trakai, Kaunas, Riga and Tallinn. In order to enhance the attractiveness of their traditional itineraries they plan to include them nearby tourism destinations of Poland, Russia and Scandinavia.

The Lithuanian government hopes that the number of Chinese tourists to this country will continue to grow more due to the intensive development of leisure and sports infrastructure, and growing sector of health services. The Lithuanian State Department of Tourism regularly organizes workshops for Chinese and Lithuanian tour operators in Vilnius and press trips for Chinese journalists to visit the most interesting and popular Lithuanian tourism objects to get new contacts and to present and promote Lithuanian products for Chinese tourists. In 2016, the Embassy of Lithuania in China extended its network of the Lithuania Visa Application centers to five cities in China including Shanghai, Hangzhou, Chengdu, Jinan and Shenzhen. More guided tours will be offered in the Chinese language, and more signs will be printed in Chinese to help guide guests in museums and hotels.

In 2015, More than 7 thousand from China visited Vilnius. The tourism industry of Lithuanian capital offers nice souvenirs and amber, European and local food and such inspiring unusual entertainment as hot air balloon rides above Vilnius Old Town [11].

A booming Chinese outbound tourism and its dynamic expansion in the world markets attract the attention of the *CIS countries*. *Russia* is a disputable leader among them in attracting Chinese tourists. In 2015, China held the fifth place in the structure of total inbound flow of foreign citizens in Russia which recorded 1.122 million arrivals from this country. The number of Chinese tourists has surpassed Germany, ranking first in several years, becoming the largest number of foreign tourists to Russia. Over the past five years the volume of tourist traffic from China has increased more than four times: from 158 thousand in 2010 to 677 thousand in 2015.

The main factors of the dynamic growth of tourism from China to Russia include effective public tourism policies, active marketing and promotional information activities as well as affordability of

tourism product after the declining of exchange rate of Russian ruble.

The intergovernmental agreement between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on visa-free travel group, signed in February 2000, gives Chinese citizens the possibility of visa-free tours to Russia for the period up to 15 days for groups from 5 to 50 people. Currently about 80 % of visitors from China, arriving in Russia for the purpose of tourism, visit the country within the framework of the visa-free tours. The average duration of these tours is 7 days with a group of about 35 people. From January to September 2016, the number of tourists from China, arriving in the framework of the visa-free tours has increased by 40 % and reached a total of 670 thousand.

The most popular Russian destinations among Chinese tourists are Moscow (212 thousand in 2015), St. Petersburg (49 thousand), and three border Primorye regions (239 thousand). From year to year in the Chinese market is increasing the popularity of the Irkutsk region and especially Lake Baikal. In October 2016, Russian tour operator Grand Baikal has made a deal with Chinese investors to create a "world-class tourism cluster" on the shores of the world's deepest lake. A pool of Chinese firms will invest \$11 billion in the project that will include traveller attractions, transport and logistics infrastructure around Lake Baikal to attract a significant number of tourists to the region.

Despite the high concentration of tourism from China in "two capitals" of Russia, geography of travel is gradually expanding. In 2016, with the development of direct flights "visa-free" groups of Chinese tourists arrived in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Yakutia [6].

It is expected that the "red tourism" will be an important component of future Russian-Chinese tourism cooperation. A cultural and educational eight grand tour with a visit to Moscow, Ulyanovsk, Kazan and St. Petersburg has been developed recently. The 100th Anniversary of the October Revolution in 2017 is supposed will bring lots of Chinese red tourists to Russia and the Red Square in Moscow to be turned into a Chinese Red Tourism Square.

An important role in the development of Chinese tourism in Russia plays national program China Friendly which appeared in 2014 as an initiative of the Tourist Association "World without borders" that encompasses over 170 companies located in 26 regions of Russia: from Moscow and St. Petersburg to the Far East. This program was designed to improve the safety and the quality of service and create a comfortable environment for the stay of Chinese tourists in Russia. Certificate program China Friendly, confirming the willingness to accept tourists from China, received more than 80 objects from 13 regions of Russia, including 45 hotels, 25 restaurants, museums, tour operators, shopping centers. Program

participants should not only have Chinese speaking staff, but also adapt the service programs for the Chinese tourists, taking into account their specific needs and travel habits including the traditions of Chinese cuisine, information materials and TV channels in Chinese, free Wi-Fi and, electrical outlets in Chinese adopted standard in the room, etc. Tourist Association “World without borders” has opened its representative offices in Beijing and Hong Kong.

Against the backdrop of the dynamic growth of tourist flows from China the problem of excursion service quality of Chinese tourists has worsened. There are not enough tour guides who speak the Chinese language in many Russian regions. Especially their lack is in the most popular tourist centers like Moscow and St. Petersburg in periods of high demand. In recent years revealed the problem of illegally operating on Russian territory Chinese “guides”, which compete with of professional guides-interpreters on the Russian market. In addition, unprofessional, illegal guides in many cases give Chinese tourists inaccurate information about the country, distorting its history and modernity.

In the face of mass tourism flows and inadequate control of excursions market from the State structures shadow business is formed around Chinese tourists. This issue has been discussed at hearings in the Civic Chamber of Russian Federation in July 2016, and at the meeting of the representatives of the Association of guides-interpreters, guides and managers of tourist companies with the representatives of the Department of national policy, interregional relations and tourism of the city of Moscow in March 2016. It is also being actively discussed in the media and on Internet forums.

Thus, the development of China-Russian tourism is characterized by high dynamics of tourist flows, predominantly organized group “visa-free” tourism, a high concentration of flows in Moscow and St. Petersburg and gradual “opening” of regions, as well as the formation of adapted tourism products to Chinese tourists, the important role of non-governmental organizations and the growing problem of shadow market of excursions services.

In the Republic of *Kazakhstan* the Chinese market is considered as one of the priorities of the fastest growing segments of demand for national tourist product, consistently implemented measures to promote tourism ties. At the end of 2011, Kazakhstan was officially incorporated by the State Council of China in a list of States recommended for visits by Chinese tourists, having received Approved Destination Status (ADS-status). In December 2015 between the Ministry of investment and development of Kazakhstan and the State Office of tourism of CHINA signed a memorandum on simplification of group tourist arrivals of Chinese citizens. The

Ministry approved a list of more than 60 companies of Kazakhstan, who will welcome Chinese tourists. China formed a similar list, which includes about 300 travel companies to guide tourists in Kazakhstan. Unlike Russia, which provides visa-free regime for the Chinese participants in group tours, Kazakhstan retains the visa formalities, but tourists from China can get special group ADS-visa. The arrival of Chinese tourist groups in Kazakhstan through the approved destination status (ADS) agreement takes place since August, 2016. The first group of 300 Chinese travellers primarily from Western provinces of China made a seven-day trip along the route Astana – Ust-Kamenogorsk – Almaty.

In order to ensure transport accessibility air communication between countries is developing. Currently, Kazakhstan and China tie 35 flights per week [19]. In three years Air Astana plans to increase the number of flights between China and Kazakhstan till 60 a week.

A road show on presentation of Kazakhstan’s tourism potential was held in the summer of 2016. Year 2017 was announced the year of Chinese tourism in Kazakhstan. Promotion of the national tourist product of Kazakhstan takes place at international tourism exhibitions in Beijing and Shanghai.

Kazakhstan successfully develops mega-event marketing. In September 2016 in Astana was first held the Kazakh-Chinese Tourism Forum, which was attended by experts, businessmen, representatives of public administrations from Kazakhstan and CHINA, as well as speakers from Russia, had shared the experience of receiving Chinese tourists. In 2017, the country will host the XXVIII World Winter Universiade in Almaty and the world exhibition EXPO-2017 in Astana. It is expected the Chinese leader Xi Jinping will visit Kazakhstan In June, 2017 for participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit and the opening of the EXPO-2017.

Despite geographical proximity of China and considerable efforts made by Kazakhstan Government, the flow of Chinese tourists in the country was relatively small. In 2014, Kazakhstan was visited by 228 thousand Chinese citizens, 35 thousand of them stayed in hotels. For the period January to September 2016 citizens were issued 5 thousand tourist visas to visit Kazakhstan [1].

According to experts, for more successful promotion of Kazakhstan and its national tourism product in the Chinese market is necessary to simplify the procedures for obtaining a visa and registration, enter a 72-hour visa-free regime for transit passengers, to prepare guides with knowledge of Chinese language, to adapt accommodation facilities and supply, taking into account the requests of visitors from China, create a thematic online resources, maps and guides, pointers in the Chinese language, guarantee security, to form and actively promote the

tourism brand of country and its regions, as well as to develop a unique tourist product (acquaintance with the culture of nomads, monitoring the launch rockets at the Baikonur cosmodrome, ecotourism, etc.), offer shopping and gambling [3; 18].

In the Republic of *Belarus*, despite significant distance from China, the Chinese market is also seen as one of the priorities of the national tourist product exports [13; 14]. Republic of Belarus officially incorporated by the State Council of China in a list of states recommended for visits by Chinese tourists. However, Belarus has not yet succeeded in attracting tourists from China in competition with other countries, most of which have a more attractive tourism product, a powerful advertising and informational support and more effective tools for its promotion. Inbound tourism from China in Belarus, organized by tourist companies, does not have the mass character and sustainable positive dynamics. Belarus received only 375 tourists from China in 2005, 603 – in 2010, 314 – in 2012, 682 – in 2013, 266 – in 2014 and 690 – in 2015. In 2015, China held the 9th place among the main tourist-generating countries in Belarus. Its share was 0.7 % in the structure of Belarusian organized inbound tourism [20].

Experts estimate that a significant portion of inbound tourist flow from China in Belarus is not counted in official statistics, based on the statements of the Belarusian travel companies. This part of the visitors from China organizes their trip and stay in Belarus with the help of their compatriots who live and do business in this country. As noted a representative of one of the leading tour operators in an interview to the Belarusian Internet-portal “Tourism and Rest”, the Chinese turn to the Belarusian travel agencies very rarely, even if they travel in groups [24].

In recent years, against the backdrop of the dynamic development of bilateral political and economic relations, steps are being taken to create conditions for the growth of Chinese tourism in Belarus. An important practical task is improving transport logistics. Since May 2015, the airline Air China performs direct flights between Beijing and Minsk four times a week. The lion’s share of the passenger traffic today form the participants not thematic tours from China to Belarus but Chinese specialists working in Belarus, members of their families, businessmen and students.

According to data of National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, the number of Chinese students in institutions of higher education of Belarus in the past few years, decreases: 2010–2011 academic year – 1227 students, 2011–2012 – 1285, 2012–2013 – 1146, 2013–2014 – 939, 2014–2015 – 801, 2015–2016 – 722. The share of China in the structure of foreign students studying in Belarus declined from 13.1 % in 2010–2011 to 4.9 % in 2015–2016. However, China still takes 3th place in the list

of countries that make up the largest flows of foreign students in Belarus. For a substantial increase in the flow of Chinese students in Belarus is needed the development and implementation of effective measures, including both higher education either in Russian or English, and other programs, for example, Russian language courses at more attractive terms than in Russia.

In accordance with the Decree № 338 of the President of the Republic of Belarus from 21.07.2015 “On establishing visa-free order of entrance and departure of individual citizens” tourists from China arriving direct flights from airports of this country with a valid visa of the states of the European Union or members of the Schengen Agreement are given the possibility of visa-free entry, transit and temporary stay in the Republic of Belarus for a term of up to three days. This measure could increase transit flows through the airport “Minsk”, however, first and foremost, it satisfies the interests of the airline Air China, organizing direct flights from China. For example, a visa-free regime of the 3-day visit will not apply to Chinese citizens, who arrives on a flight with any another airline from Russia or the countries of the European Union.

Despite the existence of “The agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the Government of the Republic of China on mutual visa-free tourist group trips” from January 11, 1993, visa-free regime for tourist groups, until recently, was not used in practice. In November 2015 was signed a Protocol to the above-mentioned intergovernmental agreement. In 2016 for its realization algorithm of organization mutual visa-free trips for groups of Belarusian and Chinese tourists was developed, lists of tourist companies of Belarus and China, authorized to organize visa-free visits of tourist groups were approved.

In September 2016 the capital hotel “Minsk” became the first and so far the only company in the country, which received a certificate of program China Friendly, confirming the existence of adapted service tailored to the needs of Chinese people. In addition, mainly for Chinese tourists in 2014 in Minsk was opened a five star hotel “Beijing”, created by investors from China. Formally “Beijing” is not a participant of the program China Friendly, but the hotel fits its criteria.

The construction of “Beijing” in Minsk is an example of effective cooperation between Belarus and China. Decree No. 421 of the President of the Republic of Belarus dated 17.09.2010 “On the construction of the hotel complex ‘Beijing’ in Minsk” was allocated a territory in the city centre in a picturesque park area on the bank of the river Svisloch, and granted special preferential conditions for the investor. The Chinese investors were exempt from value-added tax and customs duties goods imported for the design, construction

and equipping of the hotel complex. The amount of Chinese investment in the creation of the complex amounted to about 100 million dollars. The project was successfully implemented for three years.

The National agency of tourism of Belarus published the first booklets for travellers in Chinese. At the Institute of Entrepreneurial Activity were opened training courses for guides-interpreters to work with Chinese tourists.

Thus, despite the measures taken, there are a number of problems which limit the growth of tourist flows from China to Belarus. Among the most important of them are a little-known image of Belarus as a tourist destination and lack of popularity of its tourism centers and attractions, the limitations of the natural, historical and cultural heritage in comparison with Russia and key European countries, the lack of branded goods for shopping, very small number of certified guides with knowledge

of the Chinese language, the almost total absence of promotional materials in Chinese, etc. Finally, it should be borne in mind that the mere repetition of the Russian experience is unlikely to be successful in the conditions of Belarus.

The successful promotion of Belarus and its national product on the market of outbound tourism of China requires efforts of the entire professional community with the assistance of expert practitioners to develop the original strategy to attract Chinese tourists, which considers Belarus as the target destination, and as one of the transit centers in the context of cross-border routes of tour operators of Russia and countries of the European Union. In the light of contemporary trends in the development of tourism and changing patterns of consumer behaviour, attention should be given to the creation of a favorable environment for independent tourism which is increasingly popular among young people.

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