Echoes of the Rainbow certainly allowed this to happen for Wing Lee Street, but the researchers find that the subsequent media coverage was even more important. In the first two periods they study the street was rarely singled out, with most relevant news reports focusing on the conflict between the URA and the private developer over the proposed renewal project, complaints by the local community and the need to preserve buildings associated with the life of Dr Sun Yat-sen.

The third period, which commenced after the film award was announced, saw a notable shift. Wing Lee Street itself was now in the limelight, conservationists no longer struggled to make their voices heard and the public increasingly supported “the preservation of the street and its role in the collective memory of the community”. Director Alex Law’s extensively covered call for the street’s preservation almost certainly facilitated “the retention of collective memory”, effectively counteracting the previous framing of the debate in terms of urban renewal, the researchers believe.

Effects on the Local Community
The upshot of the post-award media coverage was that Wing Lee Street became the “standard bearer of collective memory”, with the public gradually forming “the perception that they had a moral obligation to preserve the past”. The researchers also note that the Urban Renewal Authority made no attempt to reframe the debate. The street is now designated a conservation zone in its entirety, and Echoes of the Rainbow is hailed as a heritage tourism success story.

Yet the story for the Wing Lee street tenants did not have such a happy ending. The media generally tend to focus on tourists and heritage preservation, and the coverage it gained

Points to Note
- Films can attract tourists and induce heritage preservation.
- Media framing shapes the heritage conservation debate.
- Echoes of the Rainbow helped to ‘save’ Wing Lee Street from development.
- New and consistent conservation standards are needed for sustainable film-heritage tourism.

Inclusive Approach to Preservation Need
Thanks to Echoes of the Rainbow and the coverage it gained in the Hong Kong media, the researchers can now describe Wing Lee Street as “a time capsule” in which “memories of the 1960s are waiting to be experienced by future visitors”. It is, they claim, “an urban cultural tourism asset in reserve”. However, the unintended consequences of that status point to the need for Hong Kong to restore buildings in a way that is consistent with both heritage and tourism needs and those of the communities affected. After all, the researchers reflect, “a happy and satisfied local community arguably plays the role of hospitable host”.

Strategic Planning Needed for Chinese Hotels
Hotellers in China are optimistic about the future of the Chinese hotel industry but there is still much to be done before China can become the world’s top tourist destination, according to the SHTM’s Kam Hung. In a recently published research article, Dr Hung identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with the hotel industry from the perspective of Chinese hoteliers. Her findings will provide the government with a better understanding of the issues that need to be tackled so that a strategic plan can be developed to direct future activities and improve performance.

Rapid Growth of the Industry
China is an increasingly popular tourist destination. It is currently the third most visited country in the world, and the World Tourism Organization predicts it will become the most visited by 2020. Unparalleled demand has led to rapid growth in the number of hotels. In 1981, during the early years of economic reform, the country had only 296 hotels. With the emphasis on hotel development in the Fifth Five Year Plan (1981-1985), that number increased dramatically to 300,000 by 2009. Dr Hung describes these achievements as “worthy of celebration”, but notes that the industry still has a number of shortcomings to overcome.

To develop effectively in China, the hotel industry needs proper planning to “utilize its strengths and opportunities” and “alleviate weaknesses and threats”. With that purpose in mind, Dr Hung set out to “help policy makers better understand the hotel industry in China and strategically plan hotel development accordingly”. To gain the most compelling insights into how the industry operates she sought the views of not government officials but hoteliers.

The Hotelier Perspective
The first step in strategic planning is to understand the business environment. SWOT analysis is a simple analytic tool that can be used to examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing an organisation. It is widely used to assess hotels in other parts of the world, but infrequently in China. Dr Hung formed focus groups with 47 hoteliers from 37 hotels in mainland China, asking them to brainstorm the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats they had encountered or were aware of in the Chinese hotel industry.

There are also a number of opportunities for the industry. The hoteliers suggested that demand from the domestic market is increasing, and “improved consumption power, living standards, and longer holidays” mean that Chinese people are travelling more both at home and abroad. The growing tourism industry has attracted “many international brands” to China. Although this has increased the competition for local hotels, some of the hoteliers viewed it as a positive development that would “benefit the overall Chinese hotel industry in the long term”.

Weaknesses and Threats
Despite these strengths and opportunities, the hotel industry still needs to address a number of weaknesses and threats. Although service quality has improved, many of the hoteliers expressed concern over the threat from international hotel brands, which are considered to be “more professional, have better management structures, and are more willing to invest in staff training”. They also mentioned that many hotels in China have “magnificent architecture” yet they still “lack quality services and commitment from hotel investors”. As Dr Hung notes, a
The Chinese government uses tourism as a form of ‘soft’ diplomacy in its dealings with other countries. The SHTM’s Assistant Professor Tony Tse in a recently published research paper, by exerting control and influence over the development of outbound tourism, the government inextricably links tourist flows to its political agenda. Dr Tse surveys the use of tourism in Chinese international relations, showing how the country uses it to both offer support to and impose sanctions on other countries. Given the sheer size of the Chinese outbound tourism market, this has the potential to have significant effects at both the economic and political levels around the world.

The Soft Power of Tourism

With its huge population, rapidly expanding middle class and booming economy, China has an outbound tourism market with immense potential. Dr Tse points to a sevenfold increase in outbound numbers from only 10 million in 2000 to more than 70 million in 2011. Yet despite the huge economic importance of tourism, little attention is paid to its implications as a ‘major policy issue’. This is particularly surprising, Dr Tse remarks, “given the emphasis by politicians on tourism as a means to economic and regional development”.

As one of the few countries in the world with a public policy on outbound tourism, China is in an ideal position to use it to influence international relations. Dr Tse explains that the Chinese government uses tourism as a form of diplomatic influence, or “soft power”. Yet the government’s outbound tourism policy is never publicly articulated. “Even Chinese experts”, writes Dr Tse, find it “ambiguous”. It is hardly surprising, then, that international destinations wanting to attract more Chinese tourists often face inexplicable “difficulties and barriers”. To clarify the situation, Dr Tse examines the political nature of China’s outbound tourism and the effects that the country’s tourism policy have on various destinations.

Approved Destination Status

China controls its outbound tourism through the Approved Destination Status (ADS) scheme, a series of bilateral agreements with other countries that allow Chinese tourists to travel overseas in tour groups. The economic importance of the scheme is widely recognized. Dr Tse notes, as only countries that are part of the ADS are allowed to promote their tourism markets in China. By 2011, 140 countries had signed ADS agreements.

The withholding of ADS status is also an important political tool. Dr Tse describes how China delayed granting ADS status to Canada as a “reprisal” for the Canadian government’s criticism of China’s human rights record and for the Prime Minister’s meeting with the Dalai Lama. Eventually, Canada extradited Lai Chaiyang, who had fled to Canada following charges of corruption and smuggling. China granted ADS soon after. This, argues Dr Tse, illustrates that the Chinese government is prepared to “manipulate ADS to add clout to its soft power and advance diplomatic discussions”.

Providing Support

The government also uses outbound tourist flows as mechanisms to offer support to other regions and countries. Dr Tse highlights how it has done so to help its two semi-autonomous Special Administrative Regions, Hong Kong and Macau. Hong Kong weathered a series of economic setbacks following reunification with the mainland in 1997, and it was “no coincidence”, according to Dr Tse that China introduced the Individual Visit Scheme in 2003. Allowing visitors from the mainland to visit Hong Kong independently rather than as part of a tour group resulted in an increase of HK$30 billion in tourism income.

The government showed similar support for Macau after the return of sovereignty to China in 1999. To “prove that it could help boost the economy”, the Chinese government opened up Macau’s gaming industry to foreign investment and allowed mainland residents to visit casinos in Macau, even though gaming is illegal in the rest of the country. As a result, the number of mainland visitors increased from 5 million in 2001 to 16 million in 2011.

Points to Note

- Hoteliers recognise many strengths and opportunities for China’s hotel industry.
- Hotels are still falling to meet Western standards of service.
- Recruitment and training of staff present a challenge for the industry.
- The central government needs to develop a strategic plan to ensure continued success.