

Asian Literacy, it's about developing strategies in deepening engagement and enhancing customers' experience, not language fluency

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Date: 24 September 2012

Preface: In response to the Tasmania's Place in the Asian Century Issues Paper, this commentary is written to address some of the questions raised and to outline a key focus of Tasmania's Place in the Asian Century – to develop strategies in deepening engagement and enhancing customers' experience. Numbers corresponding to specific discussion questions raised in the issues paper is used throughout this document.

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Tasmania benefiting from being non-Asian

<Response to 1.1: Should Tasmania consider itself part of Asia?>

Before we address the question of whether Tasmania should consider itself a part of Asia, perhaps we should ask ourselves if there are any benefits for Tasmania, or in fact, Australia to be identified as an Asian country.

Australia is often referred to as a part of the Asia-Pacific, this is something very much ingrained in peoples' minds through what we've learned in school and through other communications. An attempt to change this concept means that we may have to convince other countries to change their thinking and their textbooks. Is it achievable? It may be more worthwhile to consider the concept of whether Tasmania can benefit from being 'not Asian'?

Most Asians aspire to western values. Impressions of the west being civilised, fair, ethical, advanced, having equal opportunities and a higher standard of living are reasons why people seek freedom from communist regimes or war torn countries and want to come to Australia, rather than for example Indonesia or Malaysia. By being 'not Asian' and retaining western cultural identity, Tasmania can maintain its position as a place of the 'west', a free and advanced world, with high ethical standards. Therefore, its products and services can be seen as of a much higher quality and value. For instance, we care about both human and animal welfare any food contamination or cruelty to animals in abattoirs, or when we handle food. Our products are produced in an ethical and hygienic way, and people are happy to accept premium pricing for such an approach.

Don't put all your eggs in one basket

<Response to 2.2 Are Asian market opportunities for Tasmania sustainable? and 2.3 How can Tasmania manage the risks associated with Asian economic growth?>

The *issues paper* has already outlined the challenges of food security and climate change that Asian economies are facing. While the Australian mainland plays its role as Asia's food bowl, Tasmania is better positioned as a 'gourmet food bowl' targeting the high end of the market. Tasmania's unique opportunities are based on its clean and green credentials. However, its remoteness from international logistics hubs has created an added logistics cost in the value chain wherever our market is located. With high GDP growth in China and the swelling Chinese middle class, we are well positioned to produce high quality products to focus on the premium markets in Asia.

While Asia, particular China and Japan are our key markets, we should not put all our eggs into one basket. Reports of the Chinese-Japanese dispute over some islands in the East China Sea may increase political risks that may impact on economic growth in the region. We should seek to diversify our markets and focus on a few key markets (not stretching ourselves too far) and grow the total turnover (grow the whole pie) in a proportionate way. For instance, we could maintain efforts to grow markets such as the US and India.

In those key markets that Tasmania already exports to, it is best to further enhance the distribution channels and ensure premium prices. After all, in markets such as the US, China or South Korea, Tasmanian exports are just a tiny portion of their premium market demand.

All in all, even though Asian market opportunities may be sustainable, if possible, it is beneficial to consider diversification in case of short term or long term instability in any particular country or region.

Asian Literacy, it's about developing strategies in deepening engagement and enhancing customers' experience, not language fluency

<Response to 3.1 How well prepared is Tasmania to receive Asian tourists? and 4.15 What is the role of government in facilitating infrastructure, skills and training, entry into international markets, migration, land-use, and facilitating access to services from other levels of government.>

I was once an Asian tourist myself five years ago in Tasmania and I had a very enjoyable and memorable time in the state. My travel, however, was heavily assisted by my now husband, who showed lots of patience and effort to explain and simplify what was happening around me so I could make the many decisions I have to make every day such as 'What am I having

for lunch today’, or where is the ‘ladies room’? Although I’m a non-native speaker, I have acquired a high level capacity in English language through my education and workplace but I have struggled to understand Tasmanians due to it being a completely foreign environment, context, culture and accent from my previous experience. This situation persisted largely during the first year of my stay in Tasmania.

Asians, particularly a lot of the younger Asian tourists speak a certain level of English. In Tasmania, tourists want to test out their English speaking skills and comprehension; they would love to get around speaking to the locals and experiencing ‘western culture’. In many cases, this is not so easy in Tasmania. One example is visiting a bakery or a café. When ordering as a tourist, you may be asked what sort of bread you’re after, is it white, wholemeal, multi-grained, 8-hour, sourdough, walnut and fig.....the list goes on. After ordering a coffee, you might be asked if it is a latte, flat white, mocha, cappuccino, with full milk, skim milk or soy milk. As a tourist, you feel really interrogated and sometimes embarrassed by how much you do not know about ‘western culture’. In reality, it does not matter what type of bread and which coffee because the tourists do not usually have a preference and would just like to taste and enjoy some authentic western style fresh bread with a cup of nicely brewed coffee.

Another example is the difficulty faced by a tourist when reading from a restaurant menu such as this:

‘fruits of the sea’

blue swimmer crab cake with vanilla infused white balsamic

scallop baked in the half shell with champagne + vermouth

terrine of slow cooked octopus with carrot sorbet, walnuts + little leaves

While it is really exciting for a foodie to read this item on its entrée list, it is not easy at all for an Asian visitor to figure this out and come to a decision to order this dish.

What is helpful in cases such as these may be to present Asian tourists with translated materials. A more useful approach however may be making it easier for a tourist to make their decision. What the traveller is keen to experience is western culture and local cuisine. To assist them, it would be ideal for example to present a couple of tasting menu options with a different price point. A Tasmanian gourmet tasting menu where a full set of entrée, main and dessert with optional matching wines and clear pricing would be helpful to promote Tasmanian premium produce to these visitors. By the same token, making it easy for tourists to taste and buy Tasmanian produce could be achieved by offering pictured menus of local afternoon tea such as raspberry muffins or Brie cheese with quince paste in their hotel rooms – a much better idea than offering them Chinese snacks. Given the western cultural experience is one of the key reasons why these tourists come to Tasmania,

further research is required on whether full translation of menus or brochures is preferable or if a simple, plain English description with a more subliminal approach would lead to a better customer experience.

There are numerous legal, cultural, social and environmental differences between Tasmania and many Asian countries, for example China. Holiday calendars, the use of eye contact, the costs of living, the size of homes, the use of packaging, branding and distribution, the speed of service and what's considered as a good or bad omen, etc. are just some of the many differences and all of these have major impacts on the kind of expectations on products and services.

An example is superstition. In Chinese, the number 4 is considered a bad omen as it sounds similar to the Chinese word 'death'. In addition, 1 means 'for sure' and 2 sounds like 'easy'. This means that numbers such as 4, 14, 24, 44, etc are not very welcomed particularly by Chinese people in business. It is therefore, best to avoid taking a customer to tables with these number in a restaurant, or a room number in a hotel. In fact, it may be wiser to set a price tag of \$38 rather than \$34 as numbers like 3, 8 and 9 are lucky numbers for Chinese as 3 sounds like 'life', 8 sounds like 'wealth' and 9 sounds like 'longevity'.

Another example is that the Chinese New Year on the lunar calendar usually falls at the end of January or February in the Gregorian calendar. Due to Chinese New Year holidays, goods exported to China for that high consumption season need to be arranged well in advance before the holidays for customs clearance.

Other examples are the one-child policy in China and how it generates a massive demand for infant milk formulae from Japan and more recently the UK; or the frequent occurrence of trademark infringements in China and how that shapes your legal and distribution policies; and something as simple as weather differences of Asia and Tasmania and how we ensure our tourists and international students are equipped with the right gear and clothing to cope with the unforgiving temperature changes.

In the *Issues Paper*, it was identified that 'Asian literacy is considered not simply as an issue of speaking Asian languages, but in a broader context of having the cultural and institutional knowledge and experience to successfully do business in Asia'. It is a very sensible starting point and the current policies and programs to my knowledge have not taken up this position yet. For instance, programs and funding to encourage students studying Asian language courses may not be the most effective approach on Asian literacy. Due to historic reasons, English is generally accepted as the main language for communication in business globally. It is also the reason why reputable education institutions in many Asian countries have English language in their curriculum or English as the medium of instruction in their business courses. Anyone who speaks a second language knows that it takes a lot of time, effort and passion to learn another language and the chances of reaching the level of

fluency as a native speaker is rather slim unless one actually lives in that country for an extended period of time.

What is more important in the context of business is actually deepening your engagement and enhancing the experience of your customers through an understanding of their legal system, business practices, habits and cultural attributes. Having this knowledge would make local business better informed and able to make decisions confidently when dealing with Asians in business.

In terms of skills and training, the government has a key role in encouraging and funding Asian literacy training and programs that generate the best outcomes in Asian literacy. This does not mean offering language courses or supporting translation of communications materials in ten different languages for tourists. This could mean shorter knowledge-based training in Asian customs and business environment or supporting new and creative approaches and collaboration of businesses in developing Asian markets. These success stories and learnings can then be shared amongst local business, thus encouraging and empowering others with the knowledge to grow their business in these markets.

Opportunities to balance overseas investment and national interest

<Response to 4.18 Are there particular sectors where you believe foreign investment in Tasmania should be encouraged (or discouraged)?

The issue of foreign investment, particularly from Chinese investors in the agricultural sector, is a controversial one. There are very good arguments presented by both sides on the merits of such investments. In the face of food security and climate change threats in the next few decades, it is important for Tasmania to consider the pros and cons of such investment and their impact in the longer term based on national and state interests.

China itself adopts a dual land tenure system under which land ownership is independent of land use rights. Land is publicly owned and therefore there is no outright private ownership of land. The terms of usage rights of cultivated farm land is limited. Given property law in China does not provide reciprocal rights to Australian investors, it is understandable that the issue has caused so much controversy and debate.

While the number of farms up for sale in Tasmania has grown to a level never seen before in the state, is it in the best interest of Tasmania or the nation to sell its land to foreign ownership? Farmers who experience financial pressure due to shorter term business cycles or retirement plans may choose to sell their land now. However, as in any housing cycle, it may not be the best time to sell as it may be at the trough of the business cycle. In addition, some farmers may not have identified new business opportunities overseas whereas these

overseas investors have the knowledge and distribution channels to take the business to the next level. Selling the land unfortunately means a missed opportunity for the locals.

If there are real market opportunities in the longer term, perhaps the state government can play a role in facilitating investment in agricultural land domestically. One option is to attract Australian superannuation fund managers in buying land and leasing it to overseas investors for a limited number of years, say 40 or 50 years. The super fund can be promoted as an Australian property investment where Australians will be happy to invest and contribute domestically. The fund would benefit from a reliable and stable source of income from the lease, the investors would be happy to invest as long as the business can generate handsome profits while the locals would not need to worry about increasing numbers of overseas landowners.

About the author

Nicole Leung-Mullany is a senior project officer in the Department of Economic Development, Tourism and the Arts. She is involved in the content development of Business Tasmania, a new government website that will make it easier for businesses to access business-relevant information and to interact with government. Prior to moving to Tasmania, Nicole worked in product marketing and communications in various multinational corporations in Hong Kong including Sony and Philips. She has over fifteen years marketing experience in Asia, including the Peoples' Republic of China, and is familiar with both Asian and western business practices.

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