Conference “Chinese Guests in German-speaking Area - Perspectives on Rural Tourism” was held in Eichstätt

The conference, organized and sponsored by the Chair of Tourism and Center for Entrepreneurship of the Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt and co-organized by the School of Tourism Management, Sun Yat-sen University, was held on May 30th at the University Campus in Eichstätt, Bavaria, Germany.

Ms. Mao Jingqiu, Consul General from the Chinese Consulate-General in Munich, was invited to offer the opening address. Ms. Mao positively evaluated the efforts of the Catholic University in promoting academic research and education between China and Germany and expressed her positive expectation to witness a better mutual understanding and cultural communication among people from both countries by studying inbound tourists bilaterally. In an earlier meeting, Professor Gabriele Gien, President of the Catholic University, conveyed his heartfelt gratitude to the Consul General for her support of the meeting.

The main agenda of the meeting was chaired by Professor Harald Pechlaner, Director of the Chair/Center. The five invited speakers were: Prof. Wolfgang Georg Arlt from the West Coast University of Applied Sciences in Germany, Associate Professor Zhang Xiaoming from the Sun Yat-sen University in China (also a visiting scholar at the Catholic University), Professor Barbara Haller Rupf from the Chur University of Applied Sciences in Switzerland, Ms. Claudia Mitchell from the Bavarian Tourism Board in Munich, and Director Stefan Fredmeier from Füssen Tourismus und Marketing. More than 50 professionals, teachers or students, from the government organisations, travel agencies, marketing services, tourism operation sector, universities and colleges mainly in the German-speaking countries and regions, attended this conference.

The five keynote speeches have the following features worthy of attention and follow-up. First, multiple research perspectives complement each other: there are macro-analyses of the latest trends in China’s political, economic, social and cultural conditions, as well as micro-studies of specific groups (youth) or specific products (skiing). Second, the conference reflects the internal relationship of a “community of tourism realm”: not only experts from tourism destination marketing agency shared their rich experiences, but also the researchers from university or college provided their findings and ideas about tourism motivation, tourism decision-making, quality of tourism service and many other practical issues. Third, almost all the speakers have unanimously identified and emphasized the positive role of social media in decision support and experience sharing in Chinese outbound tourists. In fact, similar consensuses are not uncommon in this conference, and they will work together as a dialogic basis to promote future research on Chinese tourists in German-speaking area. Fourthly, some of the speakers highlighted some of the new phenomena in the Chinese visitor experience. For example, more and more tourists may no longer come to Europe for the strong purpose of sightseeing or finding and experiencing cultural differences. However, they are particularly concerned about the developed West - including the German-speaking countries - of its advanced experiences in terms of quality of life, recreational sports and physical-mental health, natural conservation and environmental governance, with the desire to gain a personal on-site experience and try to share it with more people in China. Although similar findings demonstrated at the conference are relatively preliminary and need to be verified by using more reliable methods with expanded data, the purpose of exchanging ideas and stimulating attentions has been well achieved.
The Catholic University and Sun Yat-sen University has kept a very good strategic partnership at the university level for many years, and the two partners’ tourism-related institutions has also been positively and frequently collaborating with each other. This conference initiates a new form of collaboration except for mutual visiting of scholars and exchange of students, which will be conducive to implement the further substantive cooperation in the field of tourism research.