

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING FOR TECHNOLOGY-BASED AND
MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME IN HONG KONG: A CHINA STUDY TOUR

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ABSTRACT

The preliminary study of the use of the China Study tour to enhance students to better understand the complicated matter in the areas of global supply chain operations in the textile and clothing industry on the basis of student centric learning method that emphasises on the development of personal competence through experiential approach. This project fits into the university curriculum re-design which allows students to learn complicated but interdependent hands-on textile and clothing knowledge experientially.

Keywords: experiential learning, curriculum re-design, developing student competence

Management Programme. This was in response to a demand from the textile and clothing industry to equip students with higher analytic and critical thinking competence, and develop global perspectives to deal with today's fast-paced innovation-based environment requirements. The main aim was to place students in the real world setting of global fashion product sourcing and distribution operations and to encourage them to think and to learn critically with multi-disciplinary approaches.

**BACKGROUND FOR DEVELOPING
PERSONAL COMPETENCE IN
UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS THROUGH
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

INTRODUCTION

In the early of 2005, a team of academic staff of the Institute of Textiles and Clothing at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University reviewed and re-designed the subject contents of a Bachelor level Fashion Business and

Conventional teaching and learning methods are much characterized by what is so-called surface learning skill that students are simply required to recall pieces of theories or even superficial information to handle the assessment requirements in "well-partitioned" knowledge domains (To, et al, 2001).

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Students still experience difficulty in understanding the theories and models from their textbooks and are unable to apply the textbook ideas and concepts into real life practice. On the other hand, an integrated business curriculum experiment has been developed to enhance student abilities to apply functional business areas in an integrated context (Jauch et al, 2000). Porter and McKibben (1988) further suggested that students may not be able to apply previous subject concepts or skills effectively into another subject and as a result they may not be able to demonstrate an understanding of the interrelationships of all functional business areas. Therefore, the project here aimed at vitalizing the knowledge contents and teaching strategies, especially in the areas of global supply chain operations, on the basis of student-centric learning methods that emphasized the development of personal competence through experiential approaches.

The team emphasized three fundamental issues in analyzing and re-designing such a multi-disciplinary programme: First, the identification of essence of nurturing students' creativity and global outlooks that competitively sustain advantages in today's global operations; second, the facets to the problems that impede effective competence development to tackle worldwide globalization issues; and third, the strategic use of experiential type of teaching and learning methods. In recent years, the university programmes have been advocated to put forth the aspects of worldwide issues like for example, social accountability and sustainable development, and to encourage students to understand and tackle such global problems or issues. As such diverse academic knowledge and personal competence development can be nurtured and integrated at deeper levels of thought during the students' early life and experience in university.

THE ISSUES ON ORGANISING COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT TRAINING IN UNIVERSITY

Traditional pedagogy of university programmes is mainly based on a comprehension of different sorts of generalized knowledge and concepts, which are mainly developed through theory modeling in different knowledge domains (To, et al 2005). Citing an instance in the studies of global fashion business and management, the team notices that the scope of teaching and learning primarily involve the methodological anticipation of market demand in global marketplaces, theoretic and pragmatic concepts of product design and engineering, management procedures for worldwide sourcing and buying process, merits and limitations of various methods for finance creation and transfer, and control mechanisms in production and transportation. All of these seldom come out or are closely associated with development of students' competence, like leadership, critical thinking, commitment and responsibility,

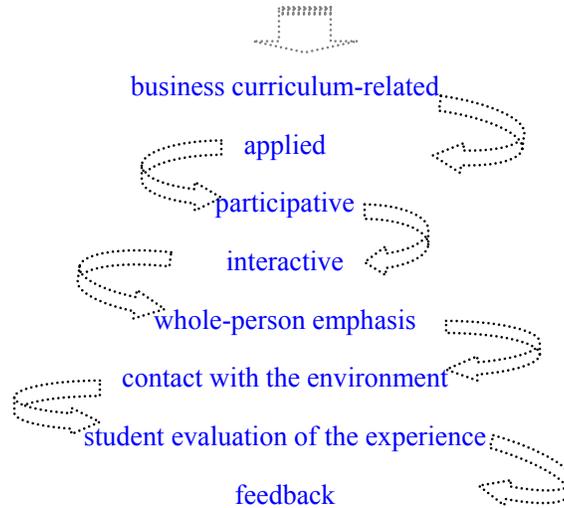
creativity, etc. In recent years, with the impact of innovation in technology and greater demand for entrepreneurship, university programmes have undergone tremendous changes (Abernathy et al, 2000, 2004; Berger & Lester, 1997).

To mention the significance of the leaning issues again, it is necessary and imperative to consider the changes in a typical textile and fashion supply chain practice. A decade ago a typical operation pattern in Hong Kong fashion merchandising and buying houses mainly had groups of merchandising staff that individually focused themselves on segmented apparel product categories. Upon receipt of overseas buyers' advice, they started to follow up on manufacturing and transportation processes. The duties and knowledge requirements of the merchandising staff were very local and skill oriented. However, such operations if still existed are now very vulnerable, facing the challenge of supply process globalization. While knowledgeable about developing and manufacturing global-dispersed textiles and fashion products, the merchandising teams have to be concerned with all forms of business issues, like sustainability requirements imposed by environmental standards, social responsibility for cross-country manufacturing, international legal and trade aspects, cultural and social integration, demand for entrepreneurial innovation and so on. Unfortunately, most of them cannot be easily represented by types of model in the university texts or discussed thoroughly during our lectures or seminars, as students have no prior experience of the types of nature of these issues and are not "intrinsically" prepared for processing, the handling, and solving such complex and complicated problems.

LEARNING PROCESSES THROUGH EXPERIENCE

Experience-based learning is a natural learning process that everybody uses from the commencement of life. In essence, the learning process is learner-centric and self-focused (Finch, 1999; Ludvigsson, 1999). This is also the main focus welcomed by authors in the theory Experiential Education (Warren et al, 1995). As such, the learners are 'framed' to take a high level of commitment for their learning, the majority of which is structured in real life training experiences. Students are arranged and committed to designated real case experience, like training, field visits and survey, site observations, etc. This is exactly the case in that students can learn from their experience (Gentry, 1990). Critical components to Experiential Learning entail the followings: Business curriculum-related, applied, participative, interactive, whole-person emphasis, contact with the environment, variability and uncertainty, structured exercise, and student evaluation of the experience, feedback (Gentry, 1990).

Gentry's Critical Components to Experimental Learning (1990)



Students review their learning progress and hypotheses regularly. In general experience-based learning process, learning activities are designed in phases: At the beginning, groups of students are given a new set of tasks or learning requirements and invited to discuss the underlying case issues, the hypothetic causal factors behind these issues, and any relevance that is perceived useful to understand the problems arising from the process. Then students learn and rationalize the issues experienced and start a further information search about the issues. After the process of real life experience, opinion sharing and examination of the issues and solutions, conclusions can be reached. Through

these processes, students hold the total ownership of knowledge acquisition, reasoning, and restructuring. Such type of experience-driven learning engages the students in the deepest level of thinking and demands the highest level of students' intelligence (Ludvigsson, 1999). Students experience the problems and improve their competence to resolve the problems, while simultaneously being trained with a number of external factors, like social interaction, the skill of opinion interchange, the self-assessment, and so on (To, et al, 2005). Wolfe and Byrne (1975) propose the overall experiential learning task structure which involves

Table 1: The China Study Tour Plan

The China Study Tour	
Title:	Comparison of Textile and Clothing Supply Chain Activities in Hong Kong and Pearl River Delta/Yangtze River Delta in China
Project Team Members:	Eight academic staff were involved.
Project Students Working Committee:	Nine students were involved.
Academic Staff as coach in Study Tour:	Five academic staff participated with students in the tour
Period of the study tour	From 15 th August to 22 nd August 2005
Number of applicants:	69 students submitted their application forms.
Number of participants:	45 students were accepted.

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four phases: Design, conduct, evaluation and feedback. Thus, Gentry (1990) argues that learning will be in force when all these elements are in place and reinforced again and again.

However, learning through experience does not entail perfect merits in all pedagogical aspects. In the learning process, students' competence development are loosely defined and structured; students are expected to take key role and input initiatives throughout all phases of learning. Students are prone to squander time and effort on identifying learning issues and unable to make use of types of personal competence for drawing conclusion in an experience. Learning is inclined to be vulnerable and reaching pre-mature conclusion. As such, the effectiveness of learning is much determined by how experience is developed and constructed, and how learning issues are perceived from the experience (To, et al, 2005).

Taking into account the above factors, the authors launched a Summer project on a Study Tour in China, entitled "Comparison of Textile and Clothing Supply Chain Activities in Hong Kong, the Pearl River Delta and the Yangtze River Delta in China". Table 1 shows the detail of the tour.

Introduction of the Tour

The Title of this project is named as "Comparison of Textile and Clothing Supply Chain Activities in Hong Kong, Pearl River Delta and Yangtze River Delta in China". Eight academic staff participated in this project. Five of them traveled with 45 students in the study tour. 45 students out of a total of 69 applicants were selected and nine participants were elected to join the working committee.

Supply Chain encompasses all activities associated with the flow and transformation of goods from the raw materials stage, through to the end users, as well as the associated information flows. With the financial support granted by our University, this project mainly focused on two areas: namely the transformation of raw materials and the flow of goods within the supply chain in the region of Pearl River Delta, Yangtze River Delta and Hong Kong. The study included the visits to the enterprises in the industry, transportation facilities and customs operations both in Hong Kong and in the mainland as well as industrial seminars that invited industrialists to share their experiences in operating supply chain activities in different regions. Discussions on the similarities and differences of policies and operations among the three places of the supply chain management were carried out during and post visits to wind up the experience and observations. A reunion party was conducted after the study tour had returned to campus, to transfer and share their experiences with other students in the department and to make a contribution to the continuity of the forthcoming mainland learning activities in the department.

Objectives of the Tour:

The project aimed at

1. enhancing the knowledge of managing supply chain in retailing and manufacturing,
2. extending the understanding of industry practice in textile and clothing industry,
3. increasing students' experience in business operations in the mainland,
4. building up students' teamwork capacity and,
5. providing interactive academic activities outside the classroom.

To achieve the former three objectives, a series of visits and industrial seminars were organised. Two apparel manufacturers with vertically integrated supply chain models which were located in the Pearl River Delta and the Yangtze River Delta areas were visited. Students had great opportunities to examine different supply chain management in these two places.

Four logistics organizations which were located in Hong Kong, Pearl River Delta and Yangtze River Delta, were visited by students. Thus, the students had this great opportunity to observe and to understand the organization of these companies and the roles they played. The students could also have a real life experience to examine and to compare the services offered and provided by these companies in different locations.

To understand the quality control of import and export products in the Mainland, the Shanghai Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine Bureau of The People's Republic of China was selected as the site to visit.

An advertising organization, fabric market and a museum featuring hand printed products/textiles were among the places chosen to visit in order to broaden the students' views and knowledge related to the apparel industry. Three major fashion retail organizations were also selected to be visited by our students to enhance and update their knowledge in retail business operations.

Three guest speakers from two international apparel firms were invited to our seminar entitled "Supply Chain Management in Fashion Business".

To attain the latter objectives, a student working committee was formed and it encouraged students to be involved into the planning, organizing, leading, and controlling tasks which included the followings:

1. identified the organizations to be visited and the guest speakers to be invited.
2. organised the logistical matters for and during the trip.
3. teamed up groups for discussion and daily activities
4. monitored the expenses
5. prepared information for extra activities and catering in Shanghai.

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Study Tour Activities:

A study tour diary was prepared for fostering participants to learn and to examine the supply chain management practices in three places during the journey. Five academic

staff provided the liaison functions during the trip in order to achieve the aims of the programme. Table 2 and Table 3 show the tour schedule and seminars plus other activities respectively.

Table 2: China Study Tour Schedule

Organization Visited:	Type of business	Location
Hutchison Port Holdings	Logistics	Kwai Chung, Hong Kong
Kerry Logistics Network Limited	Logistics	Kwai Chung, New Territories, Hong Kong
Esquel Entreprises Ltd.	Retail & Logistics	Fu Shan, Guangdong, China
Yantian International Container Terminals	Logistics	Shenzhen, China
Inspection Center of Industrial Products and Raw Materials Dept of Administration, Shanghai Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine Bureau of The People's Republic of China	Government	Pudong New Area, China
Shanghai Iris Clothing Co. Ltd.	Garment Manufacturing	Industrial District, Pudong New Area, Shanghai, China
Shanghai Pudong International Container Terminals	Logistics	Pudong New Area in Shanghai, China
Chi Kwong Tso Tong		Zhejiang, China
Shanghai DongJia Du Textile Cloth Market	Retailing	DongJia Du, Shanghai, China
XuJiahui, HuiHai Road, XinTianDi	Shopping places	Pudong New Area in Shanghai, China
Shanghai LanLan Chinese Hand Printed Blue Nankeen Co. Ltd.	Retailing	Shanghai, China

Table 3: Seminars & Other Activities:

Events	Participants involved	Organization
Seminar: Sourcing strategies in Yangtze River Delta Region	QA Manager and General Merchandising Manager	Liz Claiborne International Ltd. Shanghai Branch
Seminar: Retail strategies in Great China	Head of Retail Division	Benetton Asia Pacific Ltd.
Discussion		
Coached by academic staff: Students discussed the findings of the trip and prepared the report of the study tour.	HKPolyU Academic Staff	Institute of Textiles & Clothing, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Dinner at the university invited by Donghua University	Participants and Guests Speakers	Donghua University Shanghai
Explored Shanghai City	Participants	
Visiting Textile Department,	Associate Dean and Academic Staff	Donghua University Shanghai
Wind-up Meeting at the University	Student representatives reported the findings of the trip	

Summary of Students' Report

Students were encouraged to give their feedback on their impressions of the different organizations that were visited as well as the different towns and cities traveled to.

1. Supply Chain Management Activities

a. Logistics organizations

The students were impressed by the wide range of professional services that were offered by the logistics organizations.

At *Hutchison Port Holdings*, it was highlighted to them how the company's operating procedures at the cargo terminal were structured and planned to maximize efficiency of the handling of the containers and minimizing the amount of time the containers spent on the site.

At *Kerry Logistics*, they learnt that the organization worked with many high-end luxury fashion retailers where Kerry, in their capacity as service provider added value by monitoring the inflow of inventory, repacked the merchandise into lots for delivery straight to the retailers' stores and minimizing the lead-time that the inventory is in transit.

The students recorded this new information they have learnt which reinforced their knowledge on logistics management and the application of the theoretical models learnt in the classrooms.

b. Apparel manufacturers

The students noted that it was extremely useful for them to visit the apparel manufacturers where they were able to observe and examine the real situation of the production process and flow, the applications and use of the technology and machinery on the floor as well as the set up and planning of the factory layout.

c. Vertically integrated manufacturing

At this selected organization, which manufactures for many international brand name clients, their business operations encompasses the entire spectrum of the fashion pipeline.

The students observed that the process begins with the growing of the organization's own cotton in Xinjiang province in China, and continues through spinning, weaving, dyeing, product development, manufacturing, packaging and retailing; working closely with research and development to create cutting edge technology in fabric finishes and performance quality, to create a competitive advantage for their products in the industry.

Students also noted the organization's commitment to social and environmental responsibility. Students commented that it was an eye-opener to see a total vertically integrated organization that paid much attention to its corporate social responsibility as well as its integration with research and technology.

d. Sourcing strategies in the Yangtze River Delta

Students examined the sourcing strategies in the Pearl River Delta (PRD) and concluded that the Outward Process Agreement (OPA) plays an important role in the industry in the PRD. In comparison, the industry in the Yangtze River Delta (YRD) are only now searching for a manufacturing model in their region to similarly increase the flexibility of the supply chain and to contain and lower the costs of manufacturing.

e. Support industry in Shanghai

Students examined the support industry (fabric supply, trimmings supply) in both Hong Kong and Shanghai and concluded that the Shanghai area was still underdeveloped and had to be supported by Hong Kong and overseas sources.

2. Organizational culture in international companies

- a. Students reflected that it was more useful for them to observe the different organizational culture by selecting a company and to visits its subsidiaries located in both the Pearl River Delta and the Yangtze River Delta.
- b. Students noted their favorable impression of the company culture of Esquel Enterprises Ltd reflected in their slogan "A Company of Fun People serving Happy Customers" and their commitment on social responsibility and environmental consciousness.
- c. The students also noted and admired the Shanghai Iris Clothing Co. Ltd, established by a Japanese company and which still embraces the life-long employment model for all their workers.

3. Cultural differences between Hong Kong and China Mainland

The students observed and noted the following dissimilarities:

- i. The Hong Kong workforce has had more international exposure and perspectives and possesses a better working attitude. The social systems in Hong Kong provide more comprehensive benefits than the Mainland's.
- ii. That in the retail sector, the level of customer service, fashion sense of sales staff and the customers, understanding of the importance of shop and brand image was at a developmental stage in Shanghai and trails behind Hong Kong.
- iii. That the awareness of hygiene was still not high.
- iv. The citizens of Shanghai do not follow the rules and regulations of transportation.

Students' Feedback Survey on the China Study Tour

- v. The consumers of Shanghai do not understand the concept of quality and will purchase from any brands that are popular.

A survey questionnaire was conducted after the study tour. The findings were very promising and the major feedback was summarized in the following tables: Table 4 shows

Table 4: Students' Feedback Survey

The mean value of the survey questionnaire:	Mean Score
	High (5) – Low (1)
1. Overall, the study tour enhanced their understanding of the application of the subject area they had been learning.	4.32
1. Overall, the study tour had met their expectation.	4.25
2. Overall, the study tour had met the objectives.	4.10
3. Gained their understanding of textile business nature.	4.35
4. Broadened their view in Supply Chain Management.	4.35
5. Students had been aware of different culture among three places is.	4.32
6. Recommended to junior to participate the forthcoming +academic activities outside classroom.	4.32
7. Would join the forthcoming activities outside classroom.	4.25

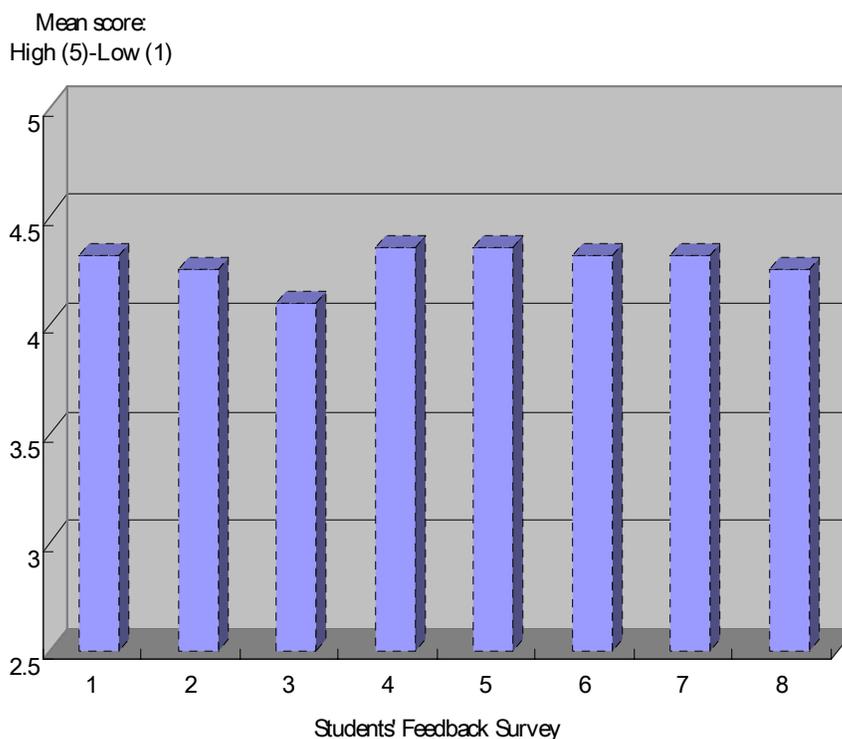


Table 5: Students' Written Suggestions

1.	to extend the length of time for the visits to the organization and the trip itself needed to be lengthened to 10 days or more.
2.	to decrease the number of team members in each group in order to have more opportunity to hear in detail the presentation talks during company visits.
3.	to provide more free time for participants to explore the local areas.
4.	to arrange some exchange activities with mainland local students.
5.	to invite more students helpers to be the committee members so as to know their needs, wants, and expectations etc.

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students' feedbacks and Table 5 shows students' written suggestions on the tour.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The Study Tour in China, entitled "Comparison of Textile and Clothing Supply Chain Activities in Hong Kong and Pearl River Delta/Yangtze River Delta in China" were well received both by the student participants as well as the faculty participants. In addition to that, the students' feedback survey was overall very positive.

On the other hand, this study tour really fits into what Gentry (1980) delineate the components of "experiential learning". The first component should be *business curriculum-related* as our tour intends to show our students the textile and clothing supply chain which encompasses all complicated activities associated with the flow and transformation of goods from the raw materials stage, through to the end uses, as well as the associated information flows.

The second component is *applied*. The design phase is important according to Wolfe and Byrne (1975) and Gentry (1990). Thus, we had adequate academic guidance and preparation since eight academic staff were involved in addition to a student working committee consisting of eight members. We also specified the outcomes of the study tour and how they were related to our curriculum in the area of supply chain management; considered a "hot" topic recently.

The third component is *participative*. The study tour was organised and led by the student working committee. They had been actively participating in different stages of planning and coordinating with their fellow students. All of the participants were involved.

The fourth component is *interactive*. The interaction in the study tour involved all the aspects stipulated by Gentry (1990) and that is student to student, student to client, student to environment as our study tour exposed our students to different business organizations, a university, and cities.

The fifth component is *whole-person emphasis*. We believe our students had benefited a great deal in the behaviour and affective dimensions as well as the cognitive dimension, the interpersonal and other non-cognitive skills, since the tour lasted for eight days and took place three different cities.

The sixth component is *contact with the environment*. Our study tour allowed the students to have a real world contact. The factory visits, the site visits, guest speakers, and the seminars provided our students with first hand information.

The seventh component is *student evaluation of the experience*. As the study tour was organised and led by the student organizing committee, students had tremendous opportunity to articulate their ideas and feelings as to what their experience involved.

The last component is *feedback*. In our study tour, importance had been put on the feedback. We had feedback

from survey questionnaires, written suggestions/comments, and the re-union party in which the participants brought in one or two guests to share their experiences from the trip.

Above all, the China study tour fits into our so called non formal workplace education system, which allows our students to learn complicated but interdependent hands-on textile and clothing knowledge experientially. As proposed by To, et al, (2005), the curriculum integrated with non-formal workplace learning can ensure the following qualities for the development of the students' competencies on top of the conventional program contents. These entail the followings:

1. change orientation that means capability to modify and adapt behavioral styles and approaches in order to accomplish goals;
2. communication that effectively facilitate the exchange of information, opinions and ideas;
3. creativity and innovation that refers to a broad view of using logic and intuition to define problems and seek solutions;
4. effective decision making;
5. initiative and follow-through that much relates to students' willingness to set specific, stretching objectives and to meet or exceed them;
6. leadership;
7. productive planning both in term of efficiency and priority setting for personal values;
8. technical and ethical mastery;
9. integration of theory and practices; and
10. working effectively with others.

A list of students' work and preparation for the tour in Summer of 2005 is attached in the appendix.

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Students' preparation work for the China Study Tour from December 1, 2004 to August 8, 2005

Associated Materials

Comparison of Textile & Clothing Supply Chain in HK, Pearl River Delta & Yangtze River Delta

Date: **16/8/05(Tue) to 22/8/05(Mon)**

Participation Fee: Around **HK\$1600** per person

Registration Period: **18/4/05 to 31/5/05**

Registration Fee: **HK\$100 (Refundable)**

Opportunities Available: **80**

Registration forms are available at **QT715**

All full-time ITC students are welcome
Acceptance will be on a 1st come-1st served basis
Seize the opportunities and take action now!

Contact: **Ms. Joyce Chan QT715**
 Tel: **27938522**
 E-mail: **torachan@inet.polyu.edu.hk**

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Poster



Leaflet-front

Registration of ITC
 8月16日至22日
 8月16日
 22日

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8月16日至22日
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Leaflet-back



Banner for the trip



Design of T-shirt & Diary cover

Diary: Welcome message

*Students' Learning Experience on Chinese Mainland
Comparison of Textile and Clothing Supply Chain in HK and Pearl River
Delta/Yangtze River Delta
15th – 22nd August 2005*

Welcome to the Study Tour for Students' Learning

Experience on Chinese Mainland: "*Comparison of Textile and Clothing Supply Chain in HK and Pearl River Delta/Yangtze River Delta*".

Our objectives are:

- enhancing the knowledge of managing supply chain in retailing and manufacturing,
- extending the understanding of industry practice in textile and clothing industry,
- increasing students' know-how in business operations on the mainland,
- building up students' teamwork capacity,
- providing interactive academic activities outside the classroom.

The programme is sponsored by the University and organised by ITC staff and student committee of this tour. We hope that the tour will be interactive, fun and help you to better understand the industry practice. Have a good journey.

Experimental Learning Model:	
Preparation stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form a student organising committee • Set the programme • Established logistic plan • Carry out a brief session for participants
↓	
Implementation Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group participants into three teams for all planned visits • Provide one day free time for participants to explore the city of Shanghai
↓	
Closing Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each group reports their findings and conclusion of the study tour
↓	
Reunion Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the visits • Share the findings with academic staff, participants' friends • Exchange ideas for planning forthcoming experiential learning programme