

# A Critical Review of Chinese Language Textbooks for Tourism in Thailand

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## Abstract

As international Chinese education continues to expand under the “Chinese + X” initiative, developing “Chinese + Tourism” textbooks has received increasing focus. As a leading global tourist destination, Thailand increasingly requires professionals proficient in Chinese. Therefore, systematically tracking and analyzing the current state of “Chinese + Tourism” textbook research in Thailand is crucial to enhancing their practical value and aligning them with the specific needs of the tourism sector. This study critically reviews the development and application of “Chinese + Tourism” textbooks in Thailand, aiming to systematically evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, analyze emerging trends, and propose actionable recommendations. The research utilizes data from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and applies systematic literature review and comparative analysis methods. The findings identify three primary deficiencies in existing textbooks: insufficient intermediate and advanced-level content, inadequate localization tailored to Thailand’s unique tourism context, and limited integration of digital teaching tools. Moreover, this study recommends developing multi-level localized content, integrating cultural understanding with vocational skills, and incorporating innovative digital technologies to enhance learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** Critical Review; Chinese Language Textbooks; Tourism in Thailand

## Introduction

Since the turn of the millennium, China’s expanding economic influence has fueled a significant rise in outbound tourism. From 1999 onward, the number of Chinese tourists traveling abroad steadily increased, surpassing 100 million trips by 2014, with China consistently maintaining its position as the world’s leading source of outbound tourists since 2015. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) further accelerated this trend, positioning countries along the BRI route, particularly Thailand, as prime destinations for Chinese travelers due to their rich natural beauty and vibrant cultural heritage (Liu, 2020:175). According to the Thai Ministry of Tourism and Sports, over 10 million Chinese tourists visited Thailand in 2018, accounting for nearly 30% of all foreign arrivals before the COVID-19 pandemic (Krashen, 1993). Although the pandemic temporarily disrupted global tourism, by 2023, approximately 3.5 million Chinese tourists had returned to Thailand, signaling recovery and reaffirming the importance of Chinese travelers to the Thai tourism market (Richards, 2001).

Despite this recovery, significant challenges remain in catering to the needs of Chinese tourists. The growing influx of Chinese visitors has highlighted critical gaps in Thailand’s tourism industry, particularly in the availability of professionals proficient in the Chinese language and equipped with tourism-related vocational skills. Thai media frequently reports that local tourism agencies have resorted to hiring Chinese-speaking international students and

tour guides while also intensifying efforts to train local staff in Chinese (Bartlett, 1932:112). However, these measures have yet to fully meet the growing demand for professionals with dual expertise in Chinese and tourism, creating a pressing need for a more structured and specialized educational approach. The concept of “Chinese + Tourism” education, emerging from the broader field of international Chinese education, offers a viable solution to address this need. Under the “Chinese + X” model, which integrates language learning with professional fields, “Chinese + Tourism” extends beyond traditional language instruction for tourists to encompass a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach. As Li Yuming (2023) noted, the “X” represents specific professions or skills aligned with students’ career aspirations, positioning “Chinese + Tourism” education as a tailored response to the tourism sector’s increasing reliance on Chinese-speaking professionals.

However, this field’s existing research and educational practices reveal several critical challenges. Studies indicate that “Chinese + Tourism” education in Thailand lacks systematic integration of language proficiency with vocational skills, such as tourism management and guiding services (Ur, 1996). Furthermore, many educational institutions continue to rely on self-developed or outdated materials that fail to address the specific needs of Thailand’s tourism industry. These limitations highlight an urgent need for tailored curricula, localized teaching materials, and structured training programs to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and industry requirements (Liu et al., 2023:49). This study addresses these gaps by critically evaluating the current state of “Chinese + Tourism” education in Thailand, focusing on its practical challenges and the pressing need for improvement. By examining the deficiencies in existing educational frameworks and proposing actionable recommendations, this research seeks to develop more effective teaching models that align with the needs of Thailand’s growing tourism industry.

## **Research Objectives**

This review addresses the limited availability and quality of “Chinese + Tourism” textbooks in Thailand, which often rely on self-developed materials lacking depth and practical relevance. The specific objectives are:

1. To systematically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of existing “Chinese + Tourism” textbooks, identifying gaps in theoretical research and practical application.
2. To analyze these textbooks’ development trends and effectiveness in real-world usage, highlighting opportunities for future improvement.
3. To provide recommendations for educators and researchers to optimize and innovate teaching materials, ensuring alignment with academic and vocational needs.
4. To identify areas for future research that address the challenges and opportunities in integrating Chinese language education with Thailand’s tourism industry.

## **Research Methodology**

To achieve the study’s objectives, a multidimensional methodology was employed. It combined systematic literature review and comparative analysis to critically examine the development, content, and application of “Chinese + Tourism” textbooks. This approach comprehensively evaluated current practices while offering actionable insights for future textbook development.

### **1. Research Sample**

The research sample encompassed widely published textbooks targeting tourism-specific Chinese language learners, academic literature from databases such as CNKI, and supplementary teaching materials in tourism language programs.

### **2. Data Collection**

By conducting a comprehensive search using the keywords “Tourism Chinese” and “textbooks” as of August 1, 2024, 10 journal articles were identified, though none were published in core academic journals. Additionally, 78 master’s theses were retrieved, of which 42 were deemed relevant after rigorous screening. Published textbooks targeting tourism-related Chinese language learners were also collected from libraries, the market, and private sources. These resources were supplemented with additional teaching materials to ensure a robust and comprehensive analysis.

### **3. Data Analysis**

The analysis was systematically structured around thematic coding, categorizing data into cultural content, vocational skill integration, and digitalization. Gap analysis identified critical deficiencies in intermediate—and advanced-level resources and inconsistencies in standardization and practical application. Effectiveness evaluation further assessed the extent to which textbooks supported learners’ linguistic and vocational development. A multidimensional methodology was employed to achieve the study’s objectives. It combined systematic literature review and comparative analysis to critically examine the development, content, and application of “Chinese + Tourism” textbooks. This approach comprehensively evaluated current practices while offering actionable insights for future textbook development.

## **Research Scope**

This research is centered on thoroughly examining "Chinese + Tourism" textbooks used in Thailand, specifically focusing on their capacity to meet the linguistic and vocational demands of the country's growing tourism industry. This study critically evaluates the existing materials, analyzing how effectively they integrate language instruction with the practical skills required for tourism professionals. It investigates textbooks across various proficiency levels, from beginner to advanced, assessing their comprehensiveness, cultural relevance, and alignment with industry-specific needs, such as hotel management, tour guiding, and customer service. The research also explores how these textbooks incorporate localized content, catering to the Thai tourism sector's unique cultural and operational nuances. Furthermore, it examines the inclusion of digital resources and multimedia tools, evaluating their potential to enhance learner engagement and provide immersive, real-world learning experiences. By delving into these areas, the study aims to identify both the strengths and deficiencies of current textbooks, providing insights into how future educational materials can be optimized to foster a more holistic and practical approach to language learning in the context of Thailand's dynamic tourism industry.

## Research Results

### 1. Current Status of “Chinese + Tourism” Textbooks for Thailand

An analysis of the current state of “Chinese + Tourism” textbooks for Thailand reveals that the country’s booming tourism industry has significantly increased the demand for Chinese language skills among tourism professionals. However, the current “Chinese + Tourism” textbooks fail to meet these demands due to inadequate organization, outdated pedagogical methods, and a lack of complexity (Yang, 2022:32). Despite the promotion of the “Chinese +” initiative in international Chinese education since 2018, particularly in alignment with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), there remains a shortage of specialized materials tailored to tourism-specific needs (Geng, 2017:112). This inadequacy hinders the full implementation of the “Chinese +” program, particularly in tourism-related disciplines (Sun, 2023:41).

One of the critical areas for improvement in existing textbooks is their need for more professionalism and practical applicability. Many textbooks prioritize general cultural themes over industry-specific language skills. While introducing learners to traditional Chinese culture is valuable, this approach fails to equip tourism professionals with the practical communication skills required for their roles (Wu, 2019). For example, textbooks such as *Travel Around Thailand* and *Guide to Thailand—Bangkok* emphasize cultural context and background but lack the vocational focus to address advanced Chinese language proficiency and practical skills in tourism reception, hotel management, and scenic spot services. The research also highlights a significant gap in specialized content for tourism-related professions. Key roles, including international flight attendants, immigration officers, hotel receptionists, management staff, scenic area service providers, and tourism police, demand specific communication skills that are absent from current textbooks (Wu, 2019). Moreover, short-term Chinese training materials tailored to these professions are insufficiently developed, leaving a gap in the practical training resources for Thailand’s tourism industry.

Another central area for improvement lies in the disconnect between cultural content and vocational training. Textbooks focusing on cultural content often need more practical applications in professional settings, while those emphasizing vocational skills must pay more attention to cultural integration. This imbalance prevents “Chinese + Tourism” textbooks from meeting the dual language proficiency and professional expertise objectives.

### 2. Research on “Chinese + Tourism” Textbooks

The research revealed that studying “Chinese + Tourism” textbooks is still in infancy. An analysis of the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database as of August 1, 2024, identified only one relevant paper (Lai & Liu, 2024: 20), which focused on general educational challenges without addressing textbook development in depth. This scarcity of literature underscores the need for more systematic and comprehensive research in the field. Additional searches using the keywords “Tourism Chinese” and “textbooks” uncovered ten journal articles and 78 master’s theses, of which 42 were relevant after screening. However, no core journal articles or doctoral dissertations were found, emphasizing the limited academic focus and long-term research in this area. Most existing research is concentrated in master’s theses, which focus on four primary areas (Table 1), including comparative studies of textbooks, textbook compilation, localized textbook development, and linguistic approaches to the subject matter.

**Table 1: Statistical Overview of Master's Theses on "Chinese + Tourism" Textbooks**

Category	No.	Title	Author	Institution	Publication Date
Comparative Textbook Research	1	Comparative Study of 'Experiencing Chinese: Tourism Edition' and 'Tourism Chinese Express'	Li Zheng	Jilin University	2014
	2	Comparative Analysis of 'Study in China' and 'Wishing You Success' Tourism Textbooks	Wang Qiumeng	Yili Normal University	2017
	3	Comparative Study of Tourism Chinese Textbooks and Tourism English Textbooks	Qin Tingting	Guangxi University	2017
	4	Comparative Study of Thai Tourism Chinese Textbooks	Cai Guirong	Shanghai International Studies University	2017
	5	Comparative Study of Tourism Chinese Textbooks	Yang Hanqing	Soochow University	2020
	6	Comparative Study of Regionally-Based Tourism Chinese Textbooks	Liu Yuqing	Hunan Normal University	2020
	7	Comparative Study of Thai Tourism Chinese Textbooks	Li Xiaohan	China University of Petroleum (East China)	2020
	8	Comparative Study of Tourism Chinese Textbooks	Ming Hui	Heilongjiang University	2021
	9	Comparative Analysis of Primary and Intermediate Tourism Chinese Textbooks	Zeng Yanmei	Southwest University of Finance and Economics	2022
	10	Comparative Study of 'Chinese Study Tour: Beijing Edition' and 'Practical Tourism Chinese' Textbooks	Zhang Guomei	Southwest University of Science and Technology	2023
Research on Textbook Compilation in Tourism Chinese	1	Compilation of Short-Term Study Abroad Textbooks	Yang Chongjun	Central China Normal University	2011
	2	Research on Cultural Factors in the Compilation of Tourism Chinese Textbooks	Yao Shunshan	Liaoning Normal University	2013
	3	Theoretical and Practical Research on the Compilation of Primary-Level Tourism Chinese Oral Textbooks for Thailand	Hui Chu	Jinan University	2018
	4	Topic and Vocabulary Resource Construction for Tourism Guide Textbook Writing for Maritime Silk Road Countries	Liu Yali	Jinan University	2019
	5	Research on the Compilation and Applicability of Vocational High School Tourism Chinese Textbooks in Korea	Sha Linlin	Guangxi Normal University	2019
	6	Research on the Compilation of Tourism Chinese Textbooks	Tian Xiaoxiang	Guangdong University of Foreign Studies	2021
	7	Research on the Compilation of Tourism Chinese Textbooks for Free Trade Ports	Diao Shuo	Hainan Normal University	2022
	8	Research on Tourism Chinese Textbook Compilation	Jiao Yumeng	Jilin International	2022

				Studies University	
				Southwest University of Science and Technology	
	9	Research on the Compilation of Region-Specific Tourism Chinese Textbooks	Huang Yueyi		2023
	10	Design of Tourism Chinese Textbooks for Chongqing Under the Perspective of Cross-Cultural Communication	Wen Zheng	Chongqing Jiaotong University	2023
	11	Design of Auxiliary Textbooks on Chinese as a Second Language Based on Chinese Architectural Culture	Wang Ting	Guangdong University of Foreign Studies	2023
The research on localized textbooks	1	Scenario Design Considerations in Japanese Chinese Tourism Handbooks	Wang Yiyi	Sun Yat-sen University	2012
	2	Proposals for the Development of Tourism Chinese Textbooks for Thailand	Wang Wenchen	Sichuan International Studies University	2017
	3	Analysis of Tourism Chinese Textbooks for Korean Professionals	Hong Duoyin	Zhejiang University	2019
	4	Research on Medical Tourism Chinese Textbooks in Korea	Xue Tongjian	Zhejiang University	2019
	5	Teaching Models of Tourism Chinese Textbooks for Nepalese Tourism Professionals	Zhou Huili	Guangdong University of Foreign Studies	2020
	6	Vocabulary Selection and Compilation in Chinese Guide Textbooks for Thai Tourism Professionals	Geng Xi	Yunnan University	2020
	7	Comparative Analysis of Specialized Tourism Chinese Textbooks for Thailand	Chen Yuhou	Guangxi University	2022
	8	Analysis of German Tourism Chinese Textbooks	Liu Yun	Qingdao University	2023
The research on the linguistic ontology of textbooks	1	Stylistic Research of Tourism Chinese Textbooks	Qian Jiajia	Jinan University	2013
	2	Analysis and Design of After-Class Exercises in Tourism Chinese Textbooks	Zhang Xin	Nanjing University	2018
	3	Subjectivity in Chinese Tourism Promotional Texts	Zhao Defang	Shanghai Normal University	2019
	4	Vocabulary Level Analysis of 'Experiencing Chinese: Tourism Edition'	Biao Biao	Sichuan International Studies University	2020
	5	Conversation Design for Cruise Crew Chinese Textbooks Based on Needs Analysis	Zhou Xiaoyan	Chongqing Jiaotong University	2022
	6	Vocabulary Research in Specialized Tourism Chinese Textbooks 'Tourism Chinese'	Liang Shuyi	Minzu University of China	2022
Textbook development and other	1	Issues in Tourism Chinese Textbook Development Based on ESP Theory	Liu Jingxuan	Liaoning Normal University	2011
	2	Proposals for Developing Intermediate-Level Tourism Chinese Textbooks Based on Problem-Solving	Zhang Ruorui	Yunnan Normal University	2015

related aspects	3	Analysis and Application of 'Practical Comprehensive Tourism Chinese' Textbooks	Liu Qiang	Ludong University	2016
	4	Research on Tourism Chinese Textbooks Based on Specialized Chinese for Specific Purposes Theory	Chen Yuying	Yunnan University	2018
	5	Television Program 'Travel in Chinese' as a Tool for Tourism Chinese Language Education	Zhang Keyang	Shanghai Jiao Tong University	2019
	6	Digital Tourism Chinese Textbook Development in a Multimodal Environment	Wang Siyi	Chongqing Jiaotong University	2023

## 2.1 Key Contributions of Master's Theses in 'Chinese + Tourism' Education

Several master's theses in 2023 have examined the compilation and design of "Chinese + Tourism" textbooks from various perspectives, including regional cultural textbooks, multimedia resources, materials for specific language groups, culturally themed textbooks, and comparative analyses. Wen Zheng (2023) employed a combination of literature reviews, surveys, and field investigations to explore the development of Chinese language textbooks focused on Chongqing's regional culture and tourism. This study highlighted the importance of localized textbook compilation aimed at helping international students adapt to Chongqing's cultural and social life. Wang Siyu (2023) examined the evolution of traditional printed textbooks within a multimedia context, proposing several recommendations for the development of digital textbooks, with a particular focus on the benefits of integrating digital resources. Liu Yun (2023) researched Chinese tourism textbooks designed for German-speaking learners, assessing their structure and exercises and providing suggestions for improvement. Similarly, Wang Ting (2023) developed a supplementary textbook based on traditional Chinese architecture, demonstrating how cultural elements can be effectively incorporated into language teaching. Additionally, Zhang Guomei (2023) compared two Chinese tourism textbooks—*Chinese Study Tour: Beijing Edition* and *Practical Tourism Chinese*—focusing on differences in layout, phonetics, and thematic content. Finally, Huang Yueyi (2023) explored the principles of compiling "Tourism Chinese" textbooks and offered recommendations for future textbook development. Collectively, these studies illustrate the diversity and innovation present in the design of "Chinese + Tourism" textbooks and provide theoretical foundations for future research and practical applications.

## 2.2 Limitations of Master's Theses in 'Chinese + Tourism' Education

Despite notable contributions, the research on "Chinese + Tourism" textbooks still encounters several critical limitations that impede its development. First, the geographic focus of existing studies is overly narrow, with most research limited to specific regions like Chongqing or Beijing. This limitation restricts the generalizability of findings, as it remains unclear whether principles derived from these contexts apply to other areas, such as southern coastal regions or western minority communities, which may demand distinct approaches to textbook design. For instance, while Wen Zheng (2023) explored integrating Chongqing's regional culture into textbooks, its applicability to other regions must be adequately addressed. Moreover, the methodologies employed in these studies need more empirical depth. Most research relies on literature reviews, surveys, and interviews, with few longitudinal studies or practical classroom-based evaluations. This methodological shortcoming hampers the ability

to assess the real-world effectiveness of textbooks in enhancing learners' language proficiency and vocational skills. While surveys may offer insights into design preferences, they fall short of providing concrete evidence about how these materials perform in educational settings over time.

Another area for improvement lies in the integration of cultural and linguistic elements. Although cultural content is frequently emphasized in the research, specific and actionable strategies for effectively combining cultural and language instruction still need to be explored. For example, while Wang Ting (2023) proposed incorporating Chinese architectural culture into language learning, the study lacked detailed guidance on how this could be practically implemented in classroom scenarios. Additionally, more research on digital textbooks needs to be conducted. Studies such as Wang Siyu (2023) emphasize the potential benefits of digital and multimedia resources but fail to provide real-world evaluations or frameworks for their application in Chinese tourism education. This gap hinders the translation of theoretical advantages into tangible teaching outcomes, leaving educators with limited guidance on effectively implementing these resources. Finally, the scope of comparative studies remains limited, focusing predominantly on German-speaking learners while neglecting other major linguistic groups, such as English, Japanese, or Korean speakers. This lack of multilingual perspectives constrains international Chinese education's broader applicability and promotion, particularly in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

## Discussion

These limitations underscore the urgent need for a transformative approach to "Chinese + Tourism" textbook development that embraces innovation in content, delivery methods, and cross-disciplinary integration. Bridging the gaps between linguistic proficiency, vocational competence, and cultural understanding is essential to creating resources that meet learners' needs and support the broader goals of international Chinese education and the rapidly evolving tourism industry.

The advancement of international Chinese education has heightened the expectations for "Chinese + Tourism" textbooks, particularly in meeting the demands of high-quality development. Current materials exhibit significant areas for improvement, mainly their narrow focus on basic language skills and cultural content aimed primarily at tourists visiting China. This approach limits the applicability of textbooks for learners in specific regions like Thailand, where local cultural and professional needs still need to be addressed (Cai Guirong, 2017). A critical challenge lies in the need for more diversity and systematic progression in textbook content. Most materials cater to beginners, leaving a significant gap in intermediate and advanced-level resources. Uniform textbook compilation is also absent, resulting in fragmented and inconsistent learning experiences. For instance, phonetic annotations and heavy reliance on Thai explanations may assist in oral communication but need to support deeper comprehension of Chinese grammar and structure (Yang et al., 2022).

Digitalization remains an untapped potential in "Chinese + Tourism" textbooks. Despite global trends toward integrating multimedia and interactive tools in education, these textbooks rely heavily on traditional printed formats, offering limited engagement for learners and educators alike (Li Hua, 2024). The lack of dynamic, interactive learning platforms exacerbates the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Localization and integration are also critical areas for improvement. Existing textbooks rarely incorporate



region-specific content or cross-cultural comparisons that enhance learners' ability to navigate real-world professional contexts. For example, the absence of modules on Thai-specific tourism practices or comparative cultural insights limits learners' readiness to engage effectively in intercultural communication within Thailand's tourism sector. Addressing these challenges requires a systematic and multi-faceted approach to textbook development. Future efforts can better align textbooks with the evolving demands of learners and the tourism industry by focusing on diversity, digitalization, and the integration of vocational and cultural education.

### **Suggestions for Future Development of “Chinese + Tourism” Textbooks**

As the “Chinese + Tourism” field grows, textbook development must innovate across several dimensions to address current and future challenges effectively. These efforts should focus on content diversification, digital transformation, and the integration of vocational and cultural education, ensuring a comprehensive learning experience for students and meeting the evolving demands of the tourism industry. The following suggestions outline vital areas for improvement:

#### **1. Diversification and Localization of Content**

To meet learners' distinct cultural and professional needs in different regions, “Chinese + Tourism” textbooks must move beyond generalized approaches. Current materials often need more intermediate and advanced-level content, leaving learners with basic proficiency unable to acquire the specialized language skills required for professional roles. Future textbooks should prioritize localized content incorporating region-specific cultural nuances, industry vocabulary, and practical scenarios. For instance, textbooks tailored for Thailand should reflect the country's customs, tourism practices, and hospitality standards, offering learners insights into real-world tourism contexts. In addition, including advanced modules, such as hotel management, tour guiding, and customer service, can bridge the gap between language proficiency and vocational competence, creating a more dynamic and relevant learning experience.

#### **2. Embracing Digitalization and Interactive Learning**

Integrating digital tools is essential for modernizing “Chinese + Tourism” textbooks. While still valuable, traditional printed materials often need to meet the demands of a technology-driven world. By incorporating interactive and immersive technologies such as virtual reality (VR), educators can simulate real-life scenarios, such as interacting with tourists or managing hospitality operations, offering students experiential learning opportunities that enhance language skills and vocational readiness. Digital textbooks should also feature real-time updating capabilities, ensuring content remains relevant to industry trends. Online platforms can provide learners personalized resources based on their proficiency and career goals, enhancing engagement and outcomes. Furthermore, leveraging data analytics in digital learning environments can help educators identify students' strengths and weaknesses, offering tailored support to maximize learning effectiveness.

### **3. Integration of Vocational Skills with Cultural Education**

Language learning in the tourism sector requires a dual focus on linguistic and vocational training. Future “Chinese + Tourism” textbooks should adopt an interdisciplinary approach that combines cultural education with practical skills. For example, instructional modules could include customer service etiquette, event planning, and tourism operations management, taught entirely in Chinese. This approach ensures learners gain language proficiency and develop the industry-specific competencies needed for their careers. Drawing lessons from successful models in South Korea and Japan, where language education is tightly integrated with vocational training, can offer valuable insights. These countries have demonstrated how combining theoretical instruction with hands-on practice equips students with the comprehensive skills necessary to succeed in competitive global industries.

### **4. Strengthening Collaboration Between Education and Industry**

Effective textbook development requires close collaboration between educators and industry professionals. By incorporating industry insights into textbook design, materials can better reflect real-world challenges and equip learners with skills directly applicable to their careers. Partnerships with industry stakeholders can include case studies, practical scenarios, and expert contributions, enriching textbook content with authentic and up-to-date information. For example, featuring real-world tourism case studies or insights from hotel management experts can give learners a more practical understanding of the field.

The future development of “Chinese + Tourism” textbooks hinges on content, technology, and pedagogy innovation. Diversifying and localizing content ensures textbooks are relevant to regional needs. Embracing digital tools enhances interactive learning and provides dynamic educational experiences. Integrating vocational skills with cultural education prepares learners for the complexities of the tourism industry. Finally, fostering more substantial synergies between education and industry ensures that materials remain relevant to professional demands. By implementing these strategies, “Chinese + Tourism” textbooks can become a cornerstone of international Chinese education, equipping learners with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in the rapidly evolving global tourism sector.

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