



RICHARD LAM/VANCOUVER SUN

David Lai, president of Sealand Flight School, sits in the cockpit of a trainer plane at Boundary Bay Airport.

Demand rises for Canadian flying schools

From D8

He agreed that getting permission to fly is prohibitively tedious for private pilots, even though there have been some improvements and concessions in recent years.

Most observers looking for a break in the market point to 2010. The Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) has broadly earmarked some regulatory changes that would open up more airspace at lower levels, or in certain areas. Details are vague, but the world's major small-plane manufacturers, including Hawker Beechcraft, are busy stoking interest in flying in China because they expect this could allow for a whole new class of high-flying commuters there.

For now, burgeoning Chinese schools cope by sending their best students abroad to complete their training, said Peare. Most are looking for commercial licenses, but not all.

At first, the U.S. was a key destination, but since visa restrictions were significantly tightened post 9-11, it is much easier for Chinese, and also Indian, students to consider Canada.

Peare, as chief flight instructor, has already tapped many of his Chinese contacts. One former PanAm student now does his training at Boundary Bay. Both Lai and Fung have been flying for decades, and have extensive

cross-Pacific contacts. (Another Sealand instructor, Pranavan Mohanraj, who immigrated to Canada from Chennai, India, in 2002 said that he regularly gets "cellphone calls from India saying that I am a friend of so-and-so and he said that I should call you about learning to fly in Canada.")

Sealand may appear well-positioned for this market, but it certainly isn't the only one angling.

There is another Boundary Bay school that is already four years into teaching mostly professional pilots from China.

Montair Aviation has contracts with four Chinese airlines, according to president Al Neufeld. The company website has a "CAAC (Civil Aviation Administration of China) Approved" icon, but Neufeld declined to disclose further details.

Francois Leh, a veteran B.C. flight instructor, said he has never seen such overseas demand for flight training, but for now, his Squamish-based company is "staying away from that market because once you start dealing with [it], they come in hoards. If word goes out, if you are good, they will want to come. And you cannot sustain it unless you have the facilities. We don't have that ... [but] Sealand has to watch that they don't over-commit."

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