



Meet Jane Lu

- MBA student turned professor

■ By Marius Ziubrys

It's an early Friday morning in Shanghai. Professor Jane Lu (CEIBS MBA 1995) has just flown in from Australia where she now lives and works. She returns to China almost every other month. I greet her over the phone, and she sounds very excited to reconnect in some way with her alma mater – CEIBS.

Shanghai-born Lu received her bachelor degree in Economics from Shanghai International Studies University in 1990. After graduation, back then, students had to complete a five-year work assignment at state owned companies. Lu was assigned to Shanghai Animal By Products Import and Export Corporation. "I liked my position which allowed me to apply knowledge to real world situations, and we had very good perks," she says. "We always had entertainment and travelled business class."

Five years later, although she was doing well at the trading company, she decided it was time for a change. "I'm neither good at drinking nor karaoke, which are two important business components in China," she laughs. But curiosity of what it would be like to learn something new was the real motivation behind her decision to go back to school.

In 1995, Lu applied for a spot in

one of the very first batches of CEIBS MBA in Shanghai. She still remembers the admission interview. She was offered a slot and a full scholarship. At the time, CEIBS did not even have its own campus. The school was located in Minhang, at Shanghai Jiaotong University. Being confined in a location so far away from the centre of town, Lu and her classmates had a lot of time to bond over meals and other social activities. She still keeps in touch with most of them.

A few things stand out in her memory as she compares how different doing an MBA at CEIBS is today from what it was then. "We were studying business in our library but if you looked through the window you could see some kind of military training going on," she says. Things were also technologically different. For example, she had to do research using microfiche (journals recorded on film). But these limitations taught Lu one of the most valuable lessons learned during her CEIBS MBA – the importance of taking responsibility. She was a member of a group doing a consulting project for the Fosun Consulting Group. Her team did a really good job looking at the internationalisation of Chinese firms and the final step was doing a presentation at the company's office at 10 one morning. The only thing left to

do was to print the hand-outs because the Minhang campus did not have a printer they could use. They thought they would arrive early for their meeting and print the material at Fosun or nearby. They had an unpleasant surprise: the only available photocopy machine was broken, and it took quite a while to fix. Her group had to postpone their presentation by about an hour. The Fosun consultants were not pleased with the delay, and they blamed her team for being unprepared. "We felt it was not our fault but we were told we were the ones to be blamed," she recalls. "We eventually accepted that anything that keeps us from completing our job, anything that interrupts the process, is our fault. Later, in my academic career I have been guided by the principle that you have to take full responsibility, even if some things are beyond your control."

ANOTHER SCHOLARSHIP

In the early days CEIBS, which then relied heavily on part-time faculty, devised creative ways in which to increase its team of permanent faculty. Promising students were offered scholarships to study at top international schools, with the condition that they would ultimately return to CEIBS as permanent faculty.

Lu and another classmate were offered scholarships. Lu was not sure she could commit to the idea of becoming a professor, so she turned down the offer. But it did give her the idea of doing a PhD.

After graduation, with a brand new diploma in hand, Lu decided to go back to the job market. She targeted foreign investment companies, thinking they had more to offer and a different culture than state owned enterprises. She got a position at the Rabble Bank in Shanghai. But then she found out that it was not much different from her previous job after all. “If you want to do business, if you want a deal, entertainment is a part of it,” she explains. After a year at the bank, she decided to apply for PhD studies at Richard Ivey School of Business in the University of Western Ontario.



Lu on the golf course

Moving to Canada went smoothly. She fell in love with the natural environment – and another PhD student who was three years ahead of her. He later became her husband. “When he proposed to me he asked me what I wanted for the wedding; I said ‘I just want green grass,’” Jane remembers. He listened. Their wedding was on a golf course.

Lu wanted to stay and work in Canada but her husband, who was obsessed with Asia, convinced her to join him in Hong Kong where he worked as a faculty member of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST). Lu got job offers from both HKUST and Chinese University of Hong Kong. However, something unexpected happened – Hong Kong’s immigration authorities rejected her application for an employment visa. “They said because I was Chinese I couldn’t work in Hong Kong... I know, it doesn’t sound logical,” she explains. The mass media picked up her story and she was even interviewed by *South China Morning Post*. Finally, the newly married couple decided to forego Hong Kong. Since Lu’s husband wanted to stay in Asia, the only alternative

available at the time was Singapore.

The couple received work offers from the National University of Singapore. After four years, her husband became the department head and, to avoid any conflict of interest, Lu took a job with Singapore Management University. During their 12 years in Singapore, they saw their two sons become teenagers and they watched the country change. “When we arrived in 2001, Singapore was a very hierarchical society, and the university tended to have tight control. For example, they wanted to know whether you were in the office or not. I was not used to this,” explains Lu. Over the years, it became less rigid with the focus shifting from controlling people’s behaviour to controlling the outcome of their actions, she says. But eventually, Lu got bored of Singapore and wanted to take her career to the next level. So they moved to Australia. She had dreams of doing something more entrepreneurial, something like starting a research centre. She was offered the James Riady Chair Professor position at the University of Melbourne. While conducting teaching and research as a professor in management, she also worked as the director of the Centre for Asian Business and Economics to implement the faculty’s Asia strategy. In Australia, there were even more cultural differences: “In Asia we are more used to explicit rules, regulations, and in Australia people tend to use their own judgement and trust you more,” says Lu. On the other hand, she missed being part of a well-organised system.

“When you want to do something [in Australia] nobody knows how to get it done. Basically, every time you have to do everything from scratch,” says Lu. She thinks Australians are a bit too relaxed, especially for someone like her who appreciates efficiency and consistency.

ACADEMIA

Practical by nature, once she received her PhD Lu started researching international strategy of Japanese FDI. It was a prominent phenomenon during her PhD study so data on Japanese FDI were readily available. Her goal is to find out what strategy can lead to firm success. She enjoys working with data, and she is quite pleased that more and more Chinese data is becoming available. “I look at the emerging markets... China or the so-called BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China), and I still look at the determinants and outcomes of internationalisation of these firms.” Another focus of her research is Chinese domestic firms. “Recently, I have been looking at CSR, environmental issues and also corporate governance as such issues are becoming important for many firms once they have secured their survival and basic profitability,” she says. She can relate to all these topics given her work experience and her genuine interest in market and non-market strategies. She thoroughly enjoys being an academic.

“We have a level of flexibility

that cannot be compared to any career in the world. I can decide when and where I want to go or even whether to go or not. I can decide my daily schedule. You can rarely find this amount of flexibility in companies,” she explains. She also loves the fact that her job gives her an endless opportunity to learn, and she has the option of focusing on teaching, research or administrative service. At the moment she is more interested in the latter. “I feel like an entrepreneur, but I do not have the risks of an entrepreneur who has to bear financial consequences if he fails. I don’t have these downside risks but I have all the excitement,” she says.

Lu has amassed a wealth of knowledge and experience as her career took her across three continents, so what would she say to a young Chinese thinking of doing a CEIBS MBA? Without taking a moment to think, she starts listing CEIBS’ advantages: “First of all, I would highly recommend a CEIBS education because of the career advantage it brings. During the year



Lu’s husband Andrew with their two sons
George and Andrew (left)

I spent at the bank, compared to the graduates from other schools or universities, I felt I could add more value to the company. Second, as early as 1995 CEIBS already had a full English-language-taught programme. Even today many Chinese schools struggle to offer an MBA programme in English. Also, the CEIBS faculty was and is very world class. Even if we didn’t have permanent ones then as they do today, we had professors from famous universities across the world. For anyone who wants to have a professional career, who really wants to learn and to make a career change, CEIBS is the best choice!”