

Kyle Baron: Into the Orient



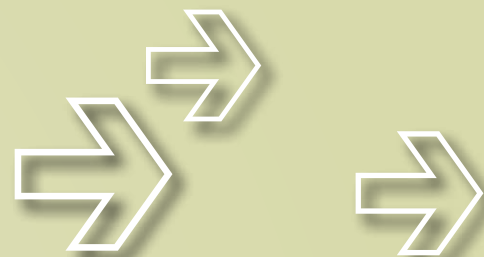
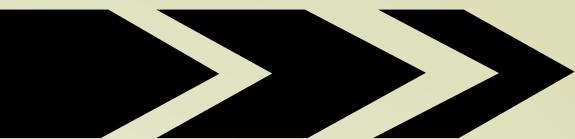
■ By June Zhu

Though he first set foot in China last summer as a CEIBS MBA freshman, this wasn't the young American Kyle Baron's first Asian adventure. He had spent almost eight years in Seoul, South Korea. He came away from that experience with an understanding of Korean language and Asian culture in general, and it also dawned on him that the continent offered so much more for him to explore.

With his obvious knack for taking on leadership roles and his fellow students' trust, he was elected President of the Student Committee for the CEIBS MBA 2016 class. Now after a year in China, he has learned enough about the people, culture and the economy to form his own unique opinions. But the journey that led him to this point in life began halfway across the world.

ASIAN ENCOUNTER

Right after graduating from UCLA with a BA in political science, Kyle's adventures took him across the Atlantic Ocean to Rome. It was a bit like going back home as he has European roots. "My family is from Europe, half of them went to North America, and the rest went to South America," explains Kyle. Two years' postgraduate study (he got an MA in International relations in 2007) at St John's University in Italy didn't quench his thirst for knowledge, so as soon as he graduated he flew to South Korea, where his career took off while he went back to the classroom – this time as a lecturer. He taught political history at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. But that wasn't all. He also co-founded the professional and educational services



provider Prodox LLC and got a second masters in International Commerce from Korea University. “I came to Asia almost by accident. I was interested to see what it has in store for me. I was quite surprised by the vast amount of opportunities here,” says Kyle.

M.A. degree in hand, he landed a job at one of Korea’s largest MNCs – Samsung Group. He began in global procurement, and then became marketing manager of Energy Business Development at Samsung C&T. This job provided him with a superb platform where he was allowed to “really blossom and grow in a very interesting way.” He worked with clients from every continent, and spent a lot of time travelling across Asia, Europe, South and North America as well as the Middle East. This was perfect for Kyle, who describes himself as a “travel buff”. “I really appreciate my experience at Samsung because I got to deal with clients directly on a day-to-day basis and started to really work in a very global environment,” he says.

MBA LIFE

But though the job provided great opportunities, Kyle felt it didn’t offer enough room for growth. “I realised that there were definitely gaps in my

knowledge and understanding and there were things I really needed to work on,” he explains. Never someone who’s afraid to take action, Kyle started looking around for a suitable MBA programme. He knew he wanted to work in the Asian market as he felt it offered tremendous opportunities. He also knew he couldn’t afford to miss out on the chances for professional growth available in Korea’s neighbour – China. So he applied to CEIBS in Shanghai. The school, and the city, did not disappoint.

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“Shanghai is very different from cities in the West, and has everything to offer,” says Kyle. Its international feel took him by surprise and he has found that living in China’s economic capital is a lot easier than he thought it would be. “It’s a mega city, with incredible infrastructure; quite different from

what you would find in traditional US or maybe even European cities. The subways are really great,” he says.

Plus after a year doing his CEIBS MBA, Kyle found exactly the level of personal growth he had been hoping for. “CEIBS always hands over the keys to the car to the students, and allows us to explore new types of programmes and opportunities,” he says. This past year, during meetings with representatives from top schools in North America and Europe, Kyle has also seen guests blown away by two things at CEIBS: the facilities and the number of international students, who represent many different nations. He has also deepened his knowledge of how business is done in China, and how it impacts and is impacted by the rest of the world. “As I worked with the different professors and my classmates, I started to understand some of the challenges – as well as the opportunities – that this market has with its growth. I started to become overwhelmed with possibilities, but I also have an overall understanding of what this means to the global market place,” says Kyle.

But he stresses that a CEIBS MBA is not just about business knowledge; the numerous school activities on and off campus are just as important. He believes every student who joins a club,



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serves on the student committee or starts a new initiative on his own finds a lot of joy in learning through the process.

As Student Committee President, Kyle has been working closely with his classmates on various projects and events that benefit the entire student body. One of these is the Global Business Conference, the largest MBA

forum in the world. “The uniqueness of this conference is that it is for the students and by the students,” Kyle explains. The event was held on CEIBS Shanghai Campus, the first time ever in China, from May 21-24 and it was a huge success. There were 30 events held across Shanghai for more than 100 guests from the world’s top 72 MBA programmes, and all in 72 hours. GBC

founder Jim Deveau described it as “probably the best GBC in 32 years.” As a member of the GBC organising team, Kyle had an opportunity to meet student leaders from the world’s top universities. But more importantly, the project helped hone his and his team’s management skills. “It gave us an opportunity to put together a conference, on a global scale, that’s going to have a very large impact,” Kyle says.

READY TO MAKE AN IMPACT

His determination to do things that have an impact spills over into his plans for the future, for his life after



MBA. With what he has learned about the Chinese market from living in the city's economic capital, plus lessons from the CEIBS classroom, he has his sights set on doing something that will affect the lives of millions. As he points out, if China goes down the same path as Western countries before it, there will be more than one billion cars on the road. Plus, in the coming decade, another 500 million citizens will be moving into its cities – all of which will put enormous pressure on electricity production and transportation. “Trying to understand the impact that the local population might face, such as the environmental problems, is really something to wrap your head around,” says Kyle. It’s an area in which he already has some expertise. “My current decision is to stay in the energy field where I have worked in the past. I’d like to work with renewable energy or with a firm working to enhance and tackle some of their sustainable issues.”

Born in Los Angeles, a city which has conquered serious pollution and smog problems in the last century, Kyle believes there are lessons for China to learn from his hometown. Meanwhile, he also believes that as Asia and China grow, they will also be able to teach the

West a thing or two. He’s hoping he will be able to integrate both sides, to either come up with his own model and/or be able to make an impact at a global level.

CHINA CAN'T BE IGNORED

Eager to learn all he can from his China experience, Kyle is convinced that the country's increasing global role has made it a force to be reckoned with. “People cannot afford to ignore China anymore,” he warns. “The West is starting to learn about Chinese companies that are becoming local names, such as Huawei, Haier, and Alibaba. You are going to hear a lot more. Obviously, there are thousands upon thousands of companies here in China that are very large and very successful, and they might not be that well known in the West. It would be a very big mistake for any corporation outside of China to bypass what is happening here and just assume that the Chinese economy and companies are specific to the Chinese market.” Those who fail to grasp China's significance will be left behind, he says. “I would strongly recommend that companies start to change their strategy and focus. Along with my classmates I

have come to realise that China is a very powerful market place. It's going to be very important in the 21st century and beyond.” One of the keys to cracking the China market, he says, is a CEIBS MBA.

In fact Kyle has recommended CEIBS to a few of his friends in America, one of whom has actually applied and been accepted. “If you want to do a global MBA, I recommend that you put CEIBS on your list,” he says. “As Chinese companies continue to globalise, they are going to be part of every market. If you are from the US, Europe or anywhere else, come spend 18 months at the minimum, learning the culture, language, as well as all of the business knowledge, and you'll be much more prepared to go back to your local market and be able to work more seamlessly because you will have a much better perspective.”

He adds: “One of the most interesting things about the CEIBS MBA is that maybe you begin the programme with an idea of what you'd like to do, but this anticipation continues to change as you are going through your MBA journey. It changes with every new course and every new opportunity that comes up.”