



Employee Interview

“Employee Interview” is a new section launched together by CEIBS’ President's Office and *TheLINK* with the aim of fostering a spirit of employee involvement and engagement, promoting communication between departments, and discovering the richness of the CEIBS spirit through interviews and reports on employees who have contributed greatly to the school during their years of service.





Conscientiousness is a Culture

■ By Lei Na

As the first class coordinator (CC) at the CEIBS Beijing campus, Zhou Yi has remained in her post for more than 20 years. During her interview with *TheLINK*, Zhou talked about her job interview at CEIBS when she couldn't find the office building with the CEIBS logo on it and the many days she spent at the Hilton, Dayuan Hotel, Raycom Infotech Park, and CEIBS' new Beijing campus. Zhou's memories are simple, yet pleasant. The most remarkable is that she and her colleagues have always warmed up to each other, moulded each other, and stuck together. As *Huffington Post* founder Arianna Huffington once said, "Your first 100 employees define your company culture". If the first 100 employees each contributed to CEIBS' culture in different ways, Zhou has contributed conscientiousness and faithfulness.

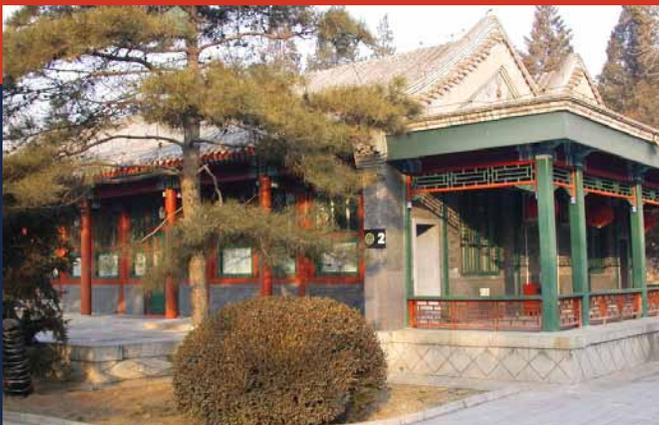
An earlier book about the history of CEIBS includes the following story:

"In the winter of 1997, the CEIBS Beijing office hosted

an HR management course at the Hilton. Professor Keith Goodall flew in from London and arrived in Beijing at 12 midnight to teach. That day, a heavy snow fell in Beijing. Teaching assistant (TA) Zhou Yi and office manager Yang Xiaoyan didn't have the classroom arranged in accordance with the professor's requirements until after 1 a.m. Snow lay thick on the roads. Zhou Yi was supposed to take a taxi back home, with the fare reimbursed by the school. Instead, she made a decision to sleep in the classroom. It turned out that it would take her an hour to get home. Fearing that she might fail to get back by 6 or 7 the following morning, she borrowed a blanket and quilt from the hotel and slept in the classroom for four or five hours."

Subsequently, the author of the book went on to conclude that "CEIBS employees have invested far too much of themselves in order to get courses in their best shape."

When we discussed the story more than 20 years later, Zhou confessed that this happened a lot during CEIBS' start-up days. These days, she says she is accustomed to



going to bed early and getting up early, but she will be online at midnight if there is work to be done.

She also shared with me some common sayings among CCs. “One who doesn’t have nightmares is not a good TA,” Zhou says. “Many of the TAs are obsessive and can’t relax until they’ve counted materials at least five times. The class is like a play. As stage managers, we ensure that sound, projection, and lighting equipment is well placed. CCs have to be a jack-of-all-trades, from organising classes to distributing materials. A myriad of details are handled in a standardised way with excellence and careful attention.”

Back in 1998, a Dutch colleague told Zhou, “What is professionalism? It’s when you wear a suit with light makeup, shake hands with students, and call them by name on their first day here.” She has since kept up the tradition and passed it on to more colleagues. I think that is probably what cultural integration looks like in an international organisation.

Below is a transcript of our interview.

What has your time at CEIBS been like?

I first connected with CEIBS in 1997 after graduating from Beijing Normal University. At that time, I attended an admissions event held by CEIBS at the Wangfu Hotel in Beijing, where I exchanged business cards with the head of CEIBS’ Beijing office. She soon contacted me and asked if I was interested in a position there. The position was as a TA for the EMBA class of ’96. Following the interview, I decided to take the job. That’s how I came to CEIBS.

The class of ’96 was very special. Its members – government leaders and top executives from various state-owned enterprises and foreign companies – couldn’t fly to Shanghai to take courses every month. So the school gave them special permission to take courses in Beijing. In June 1998, the class of ’96 graduated. The teacher who hired me asked me if I wanted to stay at CEIBS or join InterChina as a consultant. I was still young and I said I wanted to stay here, but I hadn’t given much thought to working at the school. At that time, there were no plans for the school to offer EMBA



programmes in Beijing. I worked as a CC in the Executive Education (EE) department for more than six months. I officially joined CEIBS in June 1998.

At the end of 1998, after giving consideration to the importance of the North China market, the school decided to offer EMBA programmes in Beijing. Soon, Mr Ma Yusheng (EMBA 1995) joined CEIBS as its chief representative. Together we recruited students at the Hilton and then offered courses at the Dayuan Hotel. As a CC and TA, I began class management with the class of 1999. Beginning in 2010, I worked as course manager responsible for maintaining the high-quality operation of courses. My work included administering academic rules at the Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen campuses, assigning TAs based on curriculum arrangements, sharing experience in curriculum management, acting as a substitute teacher or class manager, and providing support for events such as commencement, graduation, and other student activities. The job was simple, but no mistakes were allowed.

What kind of difficulties did you encounter prior to the construction of the Beijing campus?

At the time, we spent a lot of time discussing what kind of environment students needed in class. In terms of facilities, as high-class as it was, the Hilton was not a desirable venue as it lacked space for group discussions or projectors. So, Mr Ma selected Dayuan in west Beijing, which he saw as the most culturally rich area in the city. Located deep in a maze of hutongs – or narrow alleys –

Dayuan was a place of charm and quiet beauty. We did, however, discover a number of problems after moving in. Classes were offered in the hotel’s movie theatre. Before each class, we asked hotel staff to move the tables and chairs and we worked with them to arrange the classroom. Back then it was not easy to communicate with state-owned hotels. We once took the staff to watch and study five-star hotel services, such as handling coffee breaks and catering. At times, when we encountered unexpected issues, we had to offer courses elsewhere, which involved arranging other venues, equipment, dining services, and other things. That period was really challenging.

Xiao Bin, Director of Operations at the Beijing campus, once said that the campus “services were not up to standard despite having good facilities”. Was that when you started focusing more on services?

Exactly. The lack of CEIBS standards-compliant teaching facilities had been a problem for us. At that time, Mr Ma also called for staff to perform “multiple functions” and “multiple roles”. What we tried to do was to provide a better experience for students and professors through considerate services while working to improve facilities.

With more than 60 faculty members, the Beijing campus has a warm atmosphere. In response to an increased demand from students for more interaction, the faculty team put their heads together to create an executive forum, a campus newspaper, and to hold a New Year’s concert. The activities and products have remained



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in place. TAs also pick professors up at the airport on their first trip to Beijing and communicate with them about the details of their courses. For older professors who come here for lectures, we will even provide blankets if they want to take an afternoon nap. When National Chengchi University (NCCU) students went to Beijing for the first time for classes last year, our back-office colleagues prepared tanghulu – a traditional Chinese snack consisting of candied fruit on a stick – with the

words “Welcome NCCU students!” on it for coffee breaks. There are many such stories. I think these careful and considerate details are a kind of soft power.

Soft power is also reflected in conscientiousness. CEIBS’ motto is “Conscientiousness, Innovation, and Excellence”. From my experience, “conscientiousness” is very important. We take great patience to get repetitive work done well because “conscientiousness” – which is part of our culture – is like an underlying design or an operating system.

What kind of experience have you had in serving students?

Professors are certainly the most vital element for a good course experience. But curriculum management details and services are also vital. At the Beijing campus, the aiyis – or cleaning staff – even know which student likes iced Red Bull and drinks two cans at a time. On one occasion I saw dozens of board erasers lined up in the sun on the second floor terrace. It turned out that the aiyis regularly clean the board erasers after class. Such good intentions are certainly admirable.

For CEIBS Open Day events, the admissions office staff will

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prepare audio guides. They will show applicants around the campus and get to know each of them. A student once told me that he was impressed with the guidance and reception he received during his interview. We have also developed many activities, including learning forums, corporate visits, class committee meeting sessions, project post-mortem meetings, and forums for the EMBA programme. In short, we hope that with our hard work we will transform two years of school life into beautiful memories for students, so that they will recommend more people to apply to CEIBS after they graduate.

How do you view CEIBS' EMBA students?

We are not teachers in any real sense, although we possess some of the same qualities, like helping others succeed. Bearing this in mind, I look at students with more appreciative eyes. CEIBS champions conscientious and rigorous scholarship, a value shared by most of the students recruited. CEIBS students are excellent – they are middle and senior level managers from across a range of business sectors. Earlier this year, I met with members of the class of '96, who, in my view, were among the first to embrace reform and opening up. They and the companies they work for have made a huge contribution to China's economic development. Now more and more start-ups and private entrepreneurs are joining the EMBA programme, but their pursuit of excellence, studiousness, and rigorous

character are the same.

What are the most important things you've gained during your twenty-year career?

There are three:

First, self-improvement, self-learning, and self-growth. I have always kept an open mind and have constantly tried to improve the way I work, which has benefited me a lot. CEIBS is a leader in many areas. In the beginning, there were no standards to reference and we had to constantly improve our work in order to address students' needs and our pain points as we went along. Continuous improvement is key to operations management and it is a process of learning that goes on without end.

I've begun training new colleagues in recent years. I'm very introverted. Although I can do my job well, I also encounter challenges when working with others. I have gradually improved my communication skills and have learned to look at problems in a more rational and scientific way. These things – from getting my own job done well to working well with others, to sticking to principles in the face of conflict, to seeking out the best solutions – are important to me.

Second is friendship. Seven or eight of us have worked together at the Beijing campus for more than 15 years. We've worked together for so long that we have shared values and can cooperate well. These workplace friendships are valuable to me. Each time a new employee was added, Mr Ma would express the following three

hopes: 1) be happy at work, 2) learn and grow at work, and 3) contribute to the organisation. During my time with CEIBS in Beijing, I have developed a deep appreciation for this caring culture.

Third is the expansion of horizons. It's different to work at CEIBS compared with other organisations. Students bring a lot of practical experience to class and engage in discussions, analysis, and thought. We heard Prof Fang Yue talk about big data even before people knew what it was, Prof Chen Weiru talked about platform strategies, and Prof Xu Xiaonian talked about prospects for the service industry. All of them have been very inspiring. CEIBS professors are very forward looking and their ideas are frequently confirmed by market movements. In my view, CEIBS is unparalleled when it comes to expanding horizons.

Finally, I'd like to express my gratitude to CEIBS President Li Mingjun. During last year's New Year's concert in Beijing, President Li suggested that *TheLINK* should interview me. I didn't expect this to happen, as he is always busy with school affairs.

I'm just an ordinary member of the CEIBS team. I hope, through some of the scattered thoughts I've shared, to help others understand CEIBS in their own way.