



Birds in Flight: The journeys of CEIBS' first MBA students

■ By Shelley Nie

CEIBS' first 58 MBA students began their study journey in the early spring of 1995, entering the first full-time MBA programme taught in English on the Chinese mainland then flying away, like fledgling birds leaving the nest. Where has their journey taken them? We recently caught up with some of them to learn how their lives and careers have progressed over these last 22 years, and what they are doing now.



*To what can our life on earth be likened?
To a flock of geese, alighting on the snow.
Sometimes leaving a trace of their passage.*

~ *Remembrance*, by Song Dynasty
poet Su Tungpo.





Daniel Xu: A Valuable Diploma

Kunyu Capital Partner

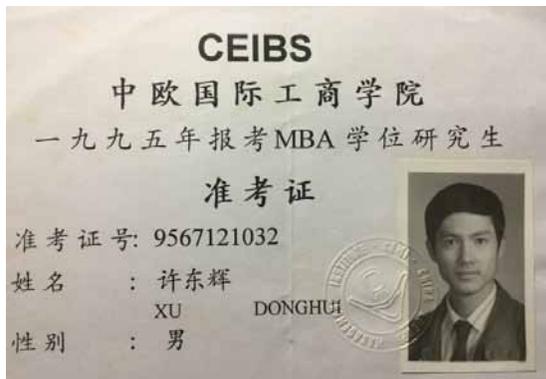
Daniel Xu saw the CEIBS MBA admissions information on a bulletin board at the Shanghai Jiaotong University campus, where he had earned his Bachelor's and Master's degrees. At the time he was contemplating a career switch to finance. The MBA programme seemed like it could help him to fulfil his plan, so he decided to apply. Once enrolled, he quit his job, which paid a salary of RMB2,000 per month, and cobbled together the RMB30,000 tuition from his savings and funds borrowed from friends and relatives.

"In the early 1990s, few people knew of an MBA; many couldn't tell it apart from IBM and the NBA," chuckles Xu. He still remembers that the year he began his MBA studies, he read a media report that said there were only about

1,000 MBAs in China, and most had attended the CEMI Programme (China Europe Management Institute) in Beijing, which was the predecessor to CEIBS.

Xu's decision to get an MBA from CEIBS proved to be a wise one. Foreign-funded enterprises flourished in China during the 1990s, and they had an urgent need for management talent, so most CEIBS MBA graduates were able to find a good job. Xu made a successful career switch into banking and his career has included stints at ABN AMRO, DBS Bank, Citibank and Morgan Stanley.

Though not a straight-A student, Xu says he benefited a lot from the teaching methods used by CEIBS faculty. "Our professors were not forcing things into our heads, instead they were freeing our minds," he says. "I was particularly



impressed by Professor Keith Goodall, who corrected all of our original ways of doing things: how we did case studies, written work, even how we spoke in class. He made us do those things again in a more correct way.”

Xu has stayed in touch with many of his classmates. Always one with an eye for detail, he still remembers the number he was assigned for exams, and can explain its meaning. “It’s 9567121032 – the 95 stands for 1995, the year we enrolled; 67 is my birth year; 121 stands for January 21, the examination date; and 032 merely means the order in which our names were listed.”

He can also explain in detail the impressive value of his CEIBS diploma. “There is no State Education Commission seal on our diploma, only the signatures of the two Presidents and the official CEIBS seal. Underneath

that are the signatures of ten members of the School’s Academic Committee including Professor Wu Jinglian, Prof Yang Xishan, and Prof Pedro Nueno, who is now President of CEIBS. All are world-class professors,” says Xu with excitement. “At that time, though CEIBS did not have the reputation it does today, few foreign companies would have doubts about CEIBS students once they saw the names of the Academic Committee members. This was how CEIBS showed her strength [in those days].”

Today Xu is actively involved in giving back to his alma mater, and helping future CEIBS MBA students. He participates in the Di Shui Quan project which provides low-interest loans to young CEIBS MBA students, so they won’t have to struggle as he did to come up with the funds to pay their tuition.



Jane Lu and Thomas Zhou: The Academics

Jane Lu is James Riady Professor of Asian Business and Economics in the Department of Management and Marketing at the University of Melbourne in Australia.

Thomas Zhou is Professor of Finance at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks.

Though CEIBS is renowned for developing top business leaders, some MBA graduates have chosen to remain in academia after their studies. There are two university professors among the first batch of CEIBS MBA students, Jane Lu and Thomas Zhou.

“I had no idea what an MBA was when I enrolled,” says Lu. “I chose the MBA programme because I was

tired of my job. I had stayed in the foreign trade industry too long and needed to find an opportunity to try something different. I had no idea that my career path would end up changing so completely.” Lu is now James Riady Professor of Asian Business and Economics in the Department of Management and Marketing at the University of Melbourne in Australia, where she is responsible for the university’s Asian strategy. Her teaching and research focuses on emerging markets, corporate social responsibility, environment and corporate governance.

Zhou had a similar experience. “I was planning to join a multinational company in Shanghai after graduating from CEIBS, but while doing my MBA, I found myself very interested in finance, and decided to go abroad to take my studies further,” he says. Zhou is now Professor of Finance at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks.

Lu and Zhou are very grateful to their alma mater for bringing them new opportunities. Back in 1995, most



of the CEIBS faculty were part-time professors from abroad. School leaders realised that CEIBS wouldn't go very far without a strong, full-time faculty. Since there were so many outstanding CEIBS graduates, school leaders began to think about selecting faculty hires from among the alumni ranks.

Lu and Zhou emerged as ideal candidates. They were actively engaged in their classes and frequently communicated with faculty. Often they were chosen as group leaders to give reports, in part because of their fluent English.

As graduation approached, they were offered the opportunity to study abroad on the condition that they would return to teach at CEIBS. However they did not accept the offer, as they were not sure about the future. But this planted the seed for them to realise that there were other career paths open to them besides working at a foreign multinational. With letters of recommendation in hand from CEIBS, they went abroad to continue their



studies.

During her MBA studies, Lu experienced case teaching, and now she uses the same method in her own classes.

Zhou says he learned critical thinking while studying at CEIBS. He recalls the professor he respected most, Willem Burgers, often tried to get him and his classmates to think differently, sometimes in ways that were quite contrary to what Chinese students were used to; they found it thrilling! Zhou says he now preaches this to his own students, a legacy from CEIBS that he still finds beneficial.



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Bruce Hu: Serving by Mentoring

Managing Director of Natixis

The backs of a row of seats in the CEIBS Conference Centre on the Shanghai Campus are inscribed with the names of Bruce Hu and eight of his MBA 1995 classmates. The group decided to invest in their alma mater by sponsoring the seats as a way to repay some of what they gained from their time at CEIBS and commemorate their study journey together.

Hu also gives back to CEIBS by volunteering as a mentor in the CEIBS MBA “mentor and friend” programme. Established in 2004, the programme helps young MBA students to develop career plans under the guidance of experienced executives. Many students have benefited from it, and have successfully launched their careers after graduation. Hu has mentored MBA students through the programme for the last five years, and was given the “Outstanding Mentor Award” by the school’s MBA Department. He is currently Vice President of CEIBS Alumni Association Hong Kong, and is responsible for organising local alumni events there.

The time he has spent with young students reminds him of his own MBA

journey. “The students tell me that they are under a lot of pressure, but we were under the same great pressure 20 years ago. The CEIBS MBA hasn’t changed; it is constantly challenging students and has maintained high standards,” he says.

Thanks to his investment banking background, Hu is a popular mentor. The school has a rule that each mentor in the programme can only have up to three students at once, but sometimes more apply to be his mentee, and he will end up accepting them all. Despite his tight schedule, he is willing to set aside some time to get to know the students, and help them with their career development planning. He sees these as win-win relationships. “The problems faced by my students were perhaps minor for me, and easily handled. If I have been helpful it is nice, this is a good way to keep in touch with CEIBS. I also learn a lot from the students, I get knowledge about different industries and backgrounds.”

With the financial industry in a downturn at the moment and many companies paring back their staff, it is a challenging period for MBA students looking for jobs in this industry. Hu suggests students think about a Plan B, so that if they cannot immediately find a job in finance they can do something in a related industry while they await an opportunity.

“No matter which job students take after graduation, the two most important qualities to have are dedication and self-discipline. A trivial matter, properly or improperly handled, can make all the difference in one’s career path. One can never be too concerned about the details,” he said.

