



Building Bridges

International MBA

2018 Students See

Opportunity in

China

■ By Janine Coughlin

When Go Nakanishi travels around China, he often studies local restaurant staff while dining. How efficient are they? Do they provide good service? These things indicate to a newcomer what it would be like to do business in that area, he says. Such details are important to an aspiring entrepreneur like Nakanishi. Born in Paris, he was raised in Japan, and while in university spent time in Sydney, Australia after being chosen by the Australian Embassy in Japan to serve as a student ambassador to promote exchanges between students in the two countries. Now, after two years working in Shanghai, he believes that China is the best place for him to start a business, and CEIBS the best place to polish his management skills.

“In order to be an entrepreneur I feel I need more experience in management,” Nakanishi explains. “A lot of my colleagues and my boss [from my last job] recommended this business school. Everyone said CEIBS is the best in China. The most important thing for me at this point is to improve my leadership skills in China. CEIBS is all about studying business here; it is part of the school’s philosophy, its ‘China Depth.’”

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Among the MBA 2018 cohort, 29% are international students, hailing from 20 countries and territories. Whether they are entrepreneurs like Nakanishi, or career switchers or just looking to boost their management skills, for many it was CEIBS ‘China Depth’ that brought them to Shanghai to study for the next year-and-a-half.

“I’ve always wanted to do an MBA and I believe in the years ahead the Chinese economy will only become more important to the rest of the world; it is already leading in some sectors,” says Dwight van Diem, an Australian with an engineering degree who spent more than nine years working in investment banking in London, before a job transfer with Credit Suisse brought him to Shanghai. “Having an MBA here is going to be invaluable in the future.”

Van Diem wants to move back to the engineering world after completing his MBA. “Previously I liked the finance world, its high energy, there’s a lot of problem solving which I used to get in

engineering. But there is just a lack of value creation, in my opinion. There is nothing tangible that you have at the end of it – it’s mostly just ones and zeros,” he says. “I want to take my finance experience and my engineering background and go work at a company where at the end of the day I can say ‘I helped create that.’”

Once he completes his MBA, he wants to work at a multinational, either in China or Europe. “I like working for multinationals because you get to work with people from different cultures who are on different teams around the world,” he says, noting that if he ends up back in Europe, it may even be with a Chinese company, as more of them go global and enter the European market. “I wouldn’t be surprised if in two or three years there are quite a few big Chinese multinationals around the world.”

One of the things he has been enjoying at CEIBS is its multicultural environment. “I’ve never been in a



situation before where you can meet so many different people from so many different backgrounds and have a chat with them about what they were doing before. I really enjoy it.”

Like van Diem, Nakanishi is also looking to leverage his engineering background while building on his



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management skills during his time at CEIBS. He began his career as an R&D engineer at BASF in Japan, which he says encourages employees to be entrepreneurial. It is where he first got the motivation to start his own business. His China journey started in Hong Kong, where he took a business development job with a start-up technology company. After two years he moved to Beijing where he studied Chinese full-time for a semester before taking a job in the Shanghai office of a Japanese pharmaceutical company. While there he spent a year leading a team charged with exploring merger and acquisition opportunities with local companies, and won a company award after successfully concluding a deal with a company in Shenyang.

In the future, Nakanishi sees himself being a bridge between Japanese technology companies and the Chinese market, perhaps first as a consultant. He hopes to eventually be able to put together enough capital to purchase technology or a particular product in Japan that he can introduce to China's fast-growing healthcare market.

Meanwhile his Russian classmate Dmitriy Likhachev is a career switcher with an entrepreneurial mind-set. After graduating with honours from Siberian Federal University in Russia as an Engineer in Industrial Heat Power he spent two years working at a research and development centre affiliated with the university. He got a patent for a technology he created there. His next step on what he thought would be a career in academia was to earn a PhD from Harbin University of Technology in China, and then a job with Zhejiang University, where he was awarded an RMB50,000 research grant from the Chinese government. But after six years in academia, he wanted a change.

“I was excited about mentoring students, managing their projects to the highest level of quality, and advising them on how to present their ideas to high-impact journals,” he says. “I think I could utilise these skills in the role of strategic planner or strategic planning consultant in the energy sector.”

His current plan is to look for opportunities in China once completing his MBA. “I haven’t lived in Russia for eight years, I have lost track of what is going on there,” he says. “When I go to Russia I look like a native but feel like a tourist. China is an environment that I understand.”

The China market is also a familiar one to Korean Yoonhee (Uni) Lee. He is lucky to be one of 30 Samsung employees chosen to receive a company scholarship to do their MBA study abroad. He says around 2,000 people applied; he is among the eight who are studying in China, and the first that the company has sent to CEIBS. “I was also admitted to Peking University but because I already had six- years’ experience studying there, I didn’t want to do that,” he says. “Also, I had heard that many of my customers have done the CEIBS EMBA Programme, so I convinced the HR person in Samsung to give me the chance to apply to CEIBS.”

Lee had been working in sales for Samsung Electronics’ semi-conductor division, and his clients have included Chinese mobile phone manufacturers such as Xiaomi and Oppo. Once he completes his MBA he will return to work at Samsung, which is required of scholarship recipients. He expects to be with the company for the rest of his career, which he says is typical in Korea.

While in Shanghai, he intends to savour every moment of his MBA journey. “One thing I have really thought about is how to have a good experience here,” he says. “Everyone has exactly the same amount of time – 18 months. Time is a resource. How to use this time is most important. To me, the GPA is not the most important thing – it is more important for us to get to know each other and to make the most of this experience.”

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