



# Tanya Liu: Life of a Working Mom

■ By Charmaine N Clarke

**O**n the job Tanya Liu, Marketing Manager for the CEIBS Finance MBA programme, exudes professionalism. She is confident, poised, graceful, efficient. She speaks quickly and her communication style is more western than Chinese, she's very direct without being overly blunt or rude. Everything about her contributes to the appearance of a career woman who is warm yet not overly effusive. But talk to her about her eight-year-old son Yoyo Zhao, yoga and singing and she just melts, revealing her softer side.

“My major role is a mom,” she says without hesitation once our discussion moves away from her career. “Besides that, I focus on two things now; one is singing and the other is yoga.” She began doing yoga seven years ago simply because, with her background as an amateur dancer, she knew she was physically capable of doing it. At first she practiced three times a week but now yoga has become second nature to her, like breathing or eating, and she practices every day.

## Tanya's Wish List for CEIBS

There are three things that I would like to see happen this year as CEIBS celebrates its 25th anniversary:

- 1 I hope we can have continued improvement in the quality of students enrolled in all our programmes.
- 2 I hope we can see even more innovations at CEIBS. We have had the launch of the Real Situation Learning Method. If we have more new initiatives, from the marketing side we will have great stories to tell.
- 3 I would love to see more synergy across the school's various marketing teams and efforts. There has been an improvement over the last two years with the addition of the Marketing Synergy Committee but we could do more. We need to have big, strategically thought-out campaigns across our campuses around the world.

“I was an amateur contemporary and jazz dancer up to 10 years ago and I loved it. I spent most of my time on dancing, but later I found that it can actually be very dangerous. You can get hurt, and being a mom you can't afford to be sick,” she explains with a chuckle. “So I changed to yoga and singing.”

Tanya joined the CEIBS Maple Choir in 2015, and it brought back memories of when she used to sing in primary school. Always the perfectionist, she signed up for private lessons so she could make a greater contribution to the choir which is made up of the school's alumni and staff. She also sings in and has a management role with the Fudan Echo Choir, a student club at her alma mater. “They have totally different styles — the CEIBS choir has a lot of activities and Fudan Echo is a bit more professional about singing — but they meet my different needs,” she says.



Singing has also provided an unexpected bonus. It is a way to bond with her son whom she enrolled in the Spring Children's Choir a year ago. They harmonise at home and she hopes one day they will perform together on stage. Tanya is grateful for the strong support her husband Bill Zhao provides. It is his job to take care of their son for six hours every Sunday, precious hours when she can focus entirely on what she wants to do — usually singing. “Those are my personal six hours,” she says with a look of contentment. This is her time to recharge; it is what keeps her sane.

She needs those six hours every Sunday because at 8:30 every weekday morning when she slips into her role as a marketing professional, she puts her all into the job. Tanya first joined CEIBS in 2005 as a class coordinator for the Executive Education (EE) programme. She saw the CEIBS job as an opportunity to try her hand at the operational



side of the industry. But after two years as a class coordinator she was ready for a bigger challenge and asked for an inter-department transfer to EE's marketing team. "My boss, Joyce Li, was very supportive and she helped me transfer to Cathy Liu's team. There I handled all the department's offline marketing events for the next four years."

Then another opportunity presented itself. In 2011 CEIBS launched its part time Finance MBA programme. The goal: to find the rising stars of China's financial sector and give them the skills needed to shine even brighter. FMBA Deputy Director Michelle Zhu handpicked Tanya to join her team.

"I think she trusted me because we

had worked together on EE Company Specific Programmes; and maybe she thought we have the same chemistry. We both move very fast and speak very fast. And we're both very direct," Tanya chuckles.

The early days at FMBA were tough. Tanya likens the effort to running a start-up. They had a very small team of five, led by Programme Director Professor Zhao Xinge. They had no systems in place to effectively track and follow up with potential students, they had no glossy brochures — there was no content to put in them as they were just starting out—and no success stories to point to as proof that their programme was worth the trouble of studying while holding down a full-time job. Undaunted, they drew inspiration from what

other CEIBS programmes before them had done and, in the end, had an overwhelming response to their unknown, unproven FMBA. From hundreds of applicants they chose the best 60.

For Tanya, the opening day for that first FMBA class remains her best memory from her time with CEIBS. To this day she remembers the spotlight hitting students just right as they introduced themselves during the welcome dinner. "I remember clearly the spotlights just shining on everyone. They were really shining stars! And even today that first group has a special place in our hearts. They're like our babies even though many of them have now gone on to become very influential in the financial sector," she says, sounding very much like a proud mom.

“In FMBA we all work together as a team to make things happen.”

Now, eight years later CEIBS FMBA programme has a team of 15, and the number of applicants increases every year. Her team's advantage, she believes, has a lot to do with precise positioning and strong operational skills

The CEIBS FMBA Programme is tailored to the needs of mid-level managers with high potential in financial institutions, or those in other industries with work involving financial management. The curriculum is designed to incorporate financial depth and managerial breadth to satisfy the demands of the financial industry. Before CEIBS FMBA was launched, there were similar products in the market. But all of them targeted an audience with just two years or more work experience in any industry. When CEIBS FMBA entered the market, it focused on a niche segment. It is specifically for those working in the finance industry and they need to have at least five years work experience. As a result, the average age for CEIBS FMBA students is 33 years old and their

work experience is 100% from the finance industry. Compared to its competitors, CEIBS FMBA recruits the very best students.

The second factor behind the FMBA's strong operational capabilities, according to Tanya, has a lot to do with the fact that her boss Michelle is very data focused and provides the right atmosphere for her team to succeed. “She is very digital oriented, she wants everything to be tracked and evaluated,” she says of Michelle. “The third important factor is that we have a team member with an IT background, Annie Chen. She is the bridge through which we communicate with the school's IT department. She is very important, and in FMBA we all work together as a team to make things happen.”

But the hard work begins before they can harness technology and big data. The first step is connecting with potential students on an individual and very personal level, making that emotional connection.

“In the past, the role of a marketer was storytelling, now it's about having a dialogue, there is a two-way flow of information,” says Tanya. “I never start by promoting the programme to potential students, I start out by asking them about the challenges they are facing in their careers and then I show them how the programme can help them find solutions.”

And what of her son, how would she pitch the course to him when he gets older? Does she see him in the CEIBS FMBA classroom one day? That's entirely up to him she says, slipping effortlessly back into mommy mode. “His dad is in investment so he hopes Yoyo can also be a finance guy in the future. But who knows, the final decision will be up to my son.”