

An Atypical MBA Student's Self-Transformation

“Study hard, make friends, keep your eyes open while keeping your minds focused. CEIBS is going to change your life, as it has changed mine.”

■ By William Yan



On August 8, 2017, at the CEIBS MBA2019 Opening Ceremony, I extended on behalf of MBA2018 a warm welcome to the “future stars” of CEIBS and expressed my hopes for them with the words above. After an exciting 18-month MBA journey, I finally accomplished a switch from being a financial journalist to becoming part of the team at Tencent. In retrospect, these three phrases do not serve only as advice for freshmen, but also reflect the three transformations I experienced at CEIBS through which I completely remoulded myself.

My joining CEIBS is a testament to the diversity of the school's MBA students. Once, during our entry module leadership course, a German professor of management asked me,



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“As a financial journalist, why did you decide to pursue an MBA?” “Because,” I replied, “During my time as a journalist, I interviewed a number of important business leaders and I want to be one of them in the future.” My response was partly intended for fun; but as a journalist, speaking with notable people was my daily job. In an age where the economy is exploding, however, I wasn’t satisfied with just being an observer and I felt that pursuing an MBA was an ideal path to a successful career switch.

Studying & Thinking

Faced with “the last peaceful desk” in one’s life before the hectic pace of a professional career, “study hard” is undoubtedly an important piece of advice. CEIBS has never disappointed me in this regard. It would be an understatement to say that the management theories and business cases I studied during my MBA journey increased my level of understanding.

Management theories constituted my systematic understanding of

business from the very beginning. The mandatory MBA courses included a series of traditional ones ranging from Macro- and Micro-economics, Strategic Management, Marketing, and Financial Accounting to Management Accounting, Corporate Finance, and Operations Management. Adhering to a strategy of “focusing on the basics of business science”, I elected to take a number of foundational courses in financial analysis, including Financial Statement Analysis, Advanced Corporate Finance and Valuation, Investment Principles, Mergers & Acquisitions, as well as Fixed-Income Securities. Experienced professors interpreted everything in an easy-to-understand way, built a huge and compact knowledge jigsaw, and enabled me to see the underlying logic behind real problems.



I wasn’t satisfied with just being an observer.





Case learning vividly demonstrates the idea of “becoming enlightened by looking back at the past”. The disparity between the economic development of East and West Germany after the Second World War, Netflix’s path of strategic development, the approach to supply chain management at ZARA, the

thinking. Some of the most impressive management ideas I learned from the CEIBS MBA include insights into others’ needs, motivations, and constraints; that small and fast wins through rapid transformation; how to sort, combine, match, and attribute using systematic disassembly and hierarchies; process management and efficiency optimisation that takes ends as starts; how to calculate the ratio of input to output; how to judge cycles and trends; as well as incentive and institution design. These courses that combined learning with doing improved my thinking. And they profoundly influenced my choices and actions throughout my MBA journey.

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Experiences and theories eventually led to changes in ways of thinking.

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various ways in which Meituan.com and Dianping.com compete and cooperate with one another, the IPOs of Alibaba and Facebook — each of these business cases provides us with a God’s eye view, unpacking strategic choices made by each enterprise in the context of time, industry, and competition.

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Participation & Friendship

In an MBA programme that emphasises participation, willingly stepping out of one’s comfort zone is an inevitable part of self-transformation.

Over the course of 18 months, more than 180 students were

continually regrouped and reorganised into temporary high-pressure smaller teams. Some group members came from mainstream business backgrounds working with investment banks, consulting companies, Big Four accounting firms, or FMCG companies; some were second-generation business professionals working on the front line as entrepreneurs; and some used to be lawyers, doctors, journalists, soldiers, or civil servants. Throughout various types of collaborations, each person's attitudes and abilities needed to be honed. In addition, the experience of sharing both the sweet and bitter moments has given rise to some of the most sincere friendships on campus.

During our time at CEIBS, we shared the pressure of studying, helped each other cope with the arduousness of job-hunting, supported each other through the Gobi Desert and the field competition, and together we pulled all-nighters studying at the library and in study rooms. It was very important to "make friends" who would provide support throughout our shared journey. We entertained each other with wine and words after both small and big wins and shared our failures with each other, too. During our brief 18-month journey, we met each other at the crossroads of life and after only a short but happy time bid farewell

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With legendary economist Professor Wu Jinglian.

to embark again on new journeys. The only "enemy" we had was the lack of time.

Vision & Concentration

Indeed, the biggest constraint on the MBA journey is time itself. "Keep your eyes open and your minds focused" is a typical piece of advice given to MBA candidates. For those of us who are about to turn 30 years old, an MBA isn't just a springboard for promotion and salary increase, but also an entrance ticket to the marathon of life.

Fortunately, pursuing an MBA at CEIBS doesn't limit our professional horizon. Compared with overseas business schools that more-or-less focus on career paths with investment banks and consulting companies, the CEIBS experience is rooted in "China Depth" and is perfectly suited to the opportunities presented by the new local economy. Thanks to the support of the CEIBS MBA Career Development Centre, internships and jobs offered to MBA2018 students covered a wide range of areas including private equity & risk investment, e-commerce, healthcare, cloud computing, new logistics, shared transport, online to offline (O2O), new retail, game industry, pay-for-knowledge, online video, sport industry, and online education.

However, when faced with an infinite number of possibilities,



we must still find the right course on which to concentrate. As a former media practitioner, from the very start of the journey I have targeted the media & entertainment industry as my desired field of work. It was through numerous attempts, self-reflection, and transformation focused on this goal over my 18 months at CEIBS that I was able to experience some unique and wonderful moments. These included:

- Founding the MBA Media & Entertainment Club, which organised 22 events within 9 months. The club received the most votes for the CEIBS MBA2018 Best Professional Club;
- Taking over the making of Season Two of the MBA short video programme “China Business 101” and as a producer creating 9 short videos for CEIBS Entrepreneurs;
- Working as a research assistant to former CEIBS Associate Professor of Strategy and Chief Strategy Officer at Cainiao Network Chen Weiru and

independently composing an MBA case entitled “Platform Strategy and Battles of Live Webcast”;

- As part of the CEIBS MBA Integrated China Strategy Project (ICSP), customising the sport marketing plan for AB InBev for the World Cup 2018 in Russia; and,
- Designing a “Media & Entertainment Industry Management Trainee Project” and working either full-time or part-time at numerous organisations, including China Culture Industrial Investment Fund, Qingting FM, Adidas, Xiaomi, IQIYI, and Tencent Games.

As an MBA student with a non-traditional business background, the pressure behind these efforts to transform is self-evident. However, I am quite convinced that what matters more than the speed of finding a job is the willpower and the patience to concentrate on your target. As a matter of fact, behind this series of

“impossible missions” I was able to put my management knowledge into practice along with a clear strategy and firm execution.

For example, the MBA Media & Entertainment Club was founded on a strategy of “frequently organising small-scale activities”. We successfully organised 22 activities covering the entire pan-entertainment industry, including film, video, animation, games, and sports.

As another example, in creating 9 short videos for CEIBS Entrepreneurs I drew on the model of Yitiao TV. By setting up the three principles of targeting CEIBS entrepreneur alumni, using interviews already available and existing video clips, I obtained a huge amount of material via the alumni network that ultimately enabled the production of low-cost and high efficiency videos.

The 6 internships have also been a part of my step-by-step advancement

towards my career goal. In particular, case writing helped develop my understanding of the Technology, Media, and Telecom (TMT) segment and gave me the opportunity to work as an intern at the China Culture Industrial Investment Fund despite a lack of prior investment experience. During my internship there, I got to learn about one of its investment targets, Qingting FM, and managed to get my first internship in the online industry. Designing a marketing plan for AB InBev enabled me — with no prior experience in this regard — to work with Adidas. Participating in the Adidas Terrex annual marketing competition encouraged me to try internet marketing at IQIYI. And thanks to the experience I acquired in the internet industry with companies like Qingting FM, Xiaomi, and IQIYI, I was able to join Tencent Games and make the leap from quantitative change to qualitative change in both learning and practice.

Of course, the number of applications and rejections far exceeded the number of internships. Also, internships are far from plain sailing and much of the experience is beyond words. Nevertheless, each internship facilitated breakthroughs in experience

and thought in areas such as strategy, investment, marketing, and branding. Much of the knowledge gained during the MBA journey came from these experiences.

I have to extend thanks to the CEIBS alumni network for its huge support as I made my way along the road of internships and job-hunting. All 6 internships came either directly from or on the referral of a CEIBS alumnus. These recommendations made it possible for me to get valuable opportunities. It was via feedback from alumni, EMBA mentors, and MBA career consultants as well as via trial and error that I grew to understand my own strengths and shortcomings. As a result, I was able to realise my personal development and transformation by small and fast wins, ultimately ending up at Tencent as I had initially set out to do.

A post I published on my WeChat moments timeline on August 8, 2016 was accompanied by the words, “From the Boya Pagoda at Beijing University to the Pyramid at CEIBS. For the infinite possibilities and for the calling of entrepreneurial spirit”. Looking back at the post, I cannot help but recall my dreams at that time and I have a strong sense of relief that I have now finally achieved what I had promised myself. Despite numerous twists and turns, my original dream has been fulfilled. For me, the CEIBS MBA programme was like a ticket for a ship sailing to the realisation of my dreams. I am grateful for that time in my life where I met and made friends with other CEIBS students and it is great to see that many of my former schoolmates are still supporting each other. The way ahead is long, but I’m both lucky and proud to be in the same boat with CEIBS.

