



A foreigner's guide to working at WeChat

■ By James Kent

Kevin Shimota landed his dream job after graduating from the CEIBS MBA programme.

In his own words, he went from being “a lowly supply chain coordinator at Boeing in the US” to working with the likes of P&G’s CEO, Burberry’s CTO and the ‘Father of WeChat’ Allen Zhang at Tencent’s offices in Southern China.

Following a four-year stint heading up We-

Chat’s global marketing and partnership efforts (a role which involved, amongst other things, creating what was possibly the biggest QR code ever), the MBA 2016 alum penned a book about his experience entitled, *The First Superapp: Inside China’s WeChat and the New Digital Revolution*.

While it has taken him both far and wide, Kevin’s involvement with Tencent (and WeChat) all began with an MBA student-led business case competition called INNOVATEChina.



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“That year the competition was sponsored by WeChat. There was a competition to decide which team of students would have the privilege of working with the sponsors to organise the event. My team won, and it quickly became apparent that WeChat was eager to use the competition as a platform to build international relationships,” Kevin recalls.

To promote INNOVATEChina, Kevin and the WeChat team took a trip to the US to encourage MBAs from other top schools to enter the competition. The collaboration soon turned into a summer internship, and eventually an offer to relocate full-time to Guangzhou.

As one of the first foreigners ever to work for the ubiquitous Chinese platform, Kevin says his experience necessitated both a personal balancing act, as well as a great deal of introspection.

“I think it's important to embrace the uniqueness you have as an international talent at a Chinese company. I don't think you need to become Chinese, and you also don't need to reject Chinese culture, but rather discover what you think as an individual is right and wrong. Be honest and open in your communication,” he says.

Kevin's time at the app also allowed him to grow his international network, including the chance

to work on a unique campaign to attract visitors to the world's tallest building. When Emaar – the real estate company behind the Burj Khalifa in Dubai – recognised that 600,000 Chinese tourists were visiting the tower each year, they wanted to offer something special.

“They wanted more engagement, so we came up with the idea of a mini-programme for Chinese visitors. It offered them easy access to purchase tickets for nearby attractions and Mandarin-language audio guides. As part of the launch, a video was displayed on the building's 33,000-square-metre LED screens, closing with possibly the world's largest call to action – a QR code to open the mini-programme,” Kevin recalls.

For many, WeChat is today nearly synonymous with the phrase ‘superapp’ (a term first coined by Blackberry founder Mike Lazaridis in 2010 to describe an app that would offer a ‘seamless, integrated, contextualised and efficient’ experience). But, while the ‘Swiss army knife of apps’ continues to enjoy its incredible utility and popularity in China, Kevin says he doesn't see the rise of a non-Chinese superapp as a given any time soon.

“If we are talking about the first superapp born outside of China, on the surface, it looks like Ap-



ple or Google are in the driver's seat. They have large ecosystems, they have payments, they have software, and they have great user experience. They are perfectly positioned," he says.

"However, Apple and Google are already operating systems. A superapp is an app that sits on top of those operating systems. It seems a bit weird for them to have the operating system and then develop an app which functions like an operating system to sit on top," he explains.

In addition to potentially ruining the neutrality of their ecosystems, Kevin adds that he believes big tech companies like Apple, Google and others are too attached to their current business models of advertising revenues and selling hardware to make a serious foray into the world superapps.

"Instead, I think the next superapp will be a totally new platform that can start off with the same platform strategy and friendly user experience, anchored around a central service of chat or e-commerce, or organising people's lives, and then slowly adding on more functionality. In short, iterating towards superapp status will be crucial for its success," he says.

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a consultant, author and co-host of his own Asia tech podcast, Kevin says the time he spent studying as an MBA at CEIBS has continued to play an integral part in his career wherever he goes.

"For me, I wanted a career in China. So, CEIBS was a no brainer, given the strength of the brand and its alums working across all the major verticals. Now, I'm in Sydney, but still working in a role related to China. I continue to leverage the school's name and reputation as I connect with those involved in China-related business all around the world, accessing, for want of a better phrase, a super network."





e-Banking in China's Greater Bay Area with GEMBA 2021's David Zuo

■ By Effy He

According to ePayLinks CEO and e-banking specialist David Zuo (GEMBA 2021), entrepreneurship is not just about enthusiasm or a dream, it is also about understanding local culture, the industry/market you're walking into and allocating resources.

Prior to getting into the payment business, David

acquired a technical background. After studying computer sciences and working as a software developer in Canada, he developed an interest in finance which ultimately led him to the banking sector. David then spent five years with ATB Financial, a well-recognized Canadian financial institution as a system analyst.

A strong desire to do something new, however,

led him on a winding entrepreneurial journey through mobile gaming, coffee and e-commerce. During his time as an entrepreneur, he saw many people succeed in starting their own businesses, but he also saw many fail.

“When we talk about entrepreneurship, it’s not just about enthusiasm and dream – you also need to understand culture and the status quo of the industry/market you’re walking into. You also need to utilise and integrate resources, including interpersonal relations, financial resources, and teams,” David explains.

Doing business in one of China’s most dynamic regions

Originally from China’s Hubei province, David eventually returned to China and settled in Guangzhou almost ten years ago. Since then, he has experienced first-hand the attraction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area as a hot spot for business and investment.

“The favourable policies of the local government provides businesses with more freedom to innovate, and substantially encourages companies to expand in the region,” David says.

The region’s numerous ports also facilitate the free flow of goods and services, which require cross-border payments and transactions, he adds.

The future prospects of e-banking

David joined ePayLinks as CEO in 2022, overseeing the company’s strategic planning and operations. Established in 1999, ePayLinks is a third-party retail and internet payment service



provider, providing domestic and cross-border payment solutions for Chinese and international companies.

“In the next three to four years, e-banking will be required more than ever, as clients will be in greater need of more solutions, especially those providing better transaction charges, lower interest charges, and more streamlined procedures,” he says.

Although Chinese digital payment platforms such as WeChat and Alipay have made payment easier and more convenient for individuals, transactions amongst businesses are more complicated.

“The business needs for e-banking are all there – it is all about what we can do,” David says.

In addition, David foresees a promising future for digital currencies in business.

“We can see it over the last century – the US dollar became dominant, but as [...] more companies do business with China, the RMB will



catch up and be as popular in the future [...]. In old days, we used cash and traditional tools such as bank cards and cheques for payments, but in the future, the digital RMB will be even more popular.”

Going for CEIBS Global EMBA – A pursuit of diversity and global connection

Looking to map the next move in his professional career path, David sought out a platform which would allow him to connect with other like-minded people. In the end, he joined the CEIBS Global EMBA programme to expand his network and get global exposure.

“As the top business school in Asia, there was no reason for me not to join. The programme has provided me an opportunity to share ideas and experience with people from different industries,” he says.

“The experience so far has been amazing. Prior to enrolling at CEIBS, most people I dealt with were my clients or people from the same industry. But now I’m working with classmates from all walks of life with different understandings of the same topics,” David explains, adding that diversity not only helps people understand each other, but also helps companies understand their clients.

Thirty years of venture capital adventures in Shenzhen

■ By Esther Tian

From national ministries and commissions to SOEs and foreign companies, Shenzhen Share Capital Co-founder Huang Fanzhi (CEIBS MBA 2003) has experienced many career ups and downs – or what he calls “walking down the ‘pyramid’ step by step” – during the past 30 years. Since launching Shenzhen Share Capital in 2011, Huang has witnessed the rise and fall of the venture capital industry in China, while steering a local firm on the way to success.

From accounting to business

Fund raising and startups and venture capital management – those are the key words he uses to sum up his working day. “It’s my best state and what I’ve been looking for over the years, I’m very happy with it”, Huang says.

In 1989, Huang graduated in accounting and was assigned to China’s Ministry of Machinery and

Electronics. However, the prudence and persistence required to be an accountant proved far from Huang’s character. “I’m a risk taker. I don’t want to stick to the rules nor be bound by rules,” he says.

In 1992, Huang left the ministry and subsequently took up senior finance positions at an SOE, Philips and Walmart China. Despite excelling in his various roles, he eventually sought out a new path. After a stint managing investments for Mindray Medicine Founder Xu Hang (EMBA 2022), Huang co-founded Shenzhen Share Capital together with other two CEIBS alumni.

Diving deep into venture capital

When Share Capital was founded, China’s venture capital industry was in full swing. During its first six years, the firm focused on emerging industries, but lost ground in capital scale and size compared with other competitors. As the competition be-



came more homogeneous, Huang's team realised that it was impossible to excel in all areas, and shifted investment strategy from industry breadth to professional depth. In 2013, Share Capital identified healthcare as a core field of investment.

Adapting to future trends in healthcare

Despite an abundance of healthcare investment opportunities, Huang says he believes it is necessary to look to the future, have an overall grasp of the industry and focus on more niche investments. While many investors have adopted an "import substitution" strategy, Share Capital has opted to focus on new frontiers, innovation and the future.

In 2014, Share Medicine reoriented its investment strategy with a focus on precision medicine – an area Huang says he believes will make diseases predictable and preventable, and

make medicine participatory and individualized in the future.

Seeking a win-win path

In 2016, Share Capital supported CEIBS in establishing the CEIBS Alumni Smart Healthcare Startup Club.

"We come from CEIBS, and have benefited from CEIBS. We are a CEIBS alumni enterprise," Huang says, adding that the CEIBS experience has enabled him to obtain cutting-edge knowledge and develop his career.

In return, Share Capital has donated more than 15 million RMB to CEIBS to support the school's teaching, research and program development.

Loneliness and optimism

Capital investment focuses on early stages of development. At this point, it is hard to make decisions based purely on reason, as the investment layout is not very clear. As such, Huang says, excessively rational people are not suitable for early-stage investment. At the same time, he adds, it is necessary to have clear investment logic and a strategy based on insights into the future, a holistic view and an in-depth understanding of segmented areas.

Finally, Huang says he believes that an outstanding investor must have acumen and insight into the development of their focus industry. He/she must be equipped with strong communication skills and sound logical judgement, be able to cope with loneliness and not rush to success. Ultimately, he/she has to make the value stand the test of time and keep digging while others are harvesting.



Delivering success as a global freight giant

■ By Fanghong He

For Gotofreight Founder Wang Chaojun (EMBA 2017), life is all about making choices –and choices are what have made him who he is today.

Wang believes that companies should not only make rules, but also stimulate human nature. Since launching his logistics company (later rebranded as Gotofreight) in 2002, he has invested in the development of his workers, even as it has grown from a few dozen to a few thousand employees.

After going strong as a secondary freight forwarder in its first five years, however, Gotofreight experienced a major downturn and found itself facing financial trouble, as well as a dilemma about whether to transform its business.

Wang subsequently led the company's turnaround from a secondary freight forwarder to a primary one, while many of its competitors failed to make the leap. His perseverance has helped Gotofreight develop in spite of hard times and embrace exponential growth.

From resistance to falling in love

According to Wang, for an enterprise to maintain its competitive edge, its helmsman must never lose his/her way. Moreover, he says, continuous learning is key to finding one's direction.

“The knowledge of the past is not enough; if we want to go further in the future, we must not have a short board,” he says.



Prior to joining CEIBS, Wang resisted the idea of spending two years at business school. However, at the urging of his brother (who is also an EMBA alum), he finally decided to enrol at the school's Shenzhen campus.

“Studying at CEIBS is not about how much knowledge I’ve gained, but about mastering logic,” Wang reflects, adding that his initial resistance to school almost cost him a big opportunity to grow his business systematically.

He also says that studying alongside his peers at CEIBS has made him realise that there is always someone who is better than him. As a result, he tried to stay humble and cast aside his former “boss mentality.”

Helping others to benefit oneself

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has hurt many industries in China, and the logistics industry is no exception.

“Instead of being consumed by the pandemic, we should use our available resources to do something meaningful; even if our enterprise fails, we would still go out with a bang,” Wang once told his brother.

During the pandemic, Gotofreight helped those in need seek pandemic prevention supplies from

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abroad, while covering customs clearance and airport transportation costs on their behalf. In 2022, Wang also donated 15 million RMB to CEIBS to support the Gotofreight.com chaired professorship.

“This limited amount of money is still within reach of our business, and we donated to CEIBS to provide more research funding for professors so that they can disseminate knowledge to students, who in turn can create greater value for society,” Wang says.

From outperforming competitors to leading industry development

Wang says he believes that enterprises should take social responsibilities in four ways: first, by creating value for shareholders; second, by creating tax revenue and employment; third, by creating a platform for employees to develop their careers; and finally, by innovating to promote sustainable development and striving to be an industry leader.

Though the future is unclear, Wang has sketched out a vision for Gotofreight, with an aim to improve the efficiency of the logistics industry, reduce circulation costs and create greater value for customers and society through innovation.

“I opened up my horizons during my studies at CEIBS and developed the idea of turning our business into a public company,” he says.

“There is no template for the future. As global e-commerce and logistics develops, the market will call for companies that can better meet customers' needs. Filling the market gap is what sets Gotofreight apart from other companies,” he concludes.