

How learning Business Chinese helped my career - *in Belgium*

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HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE THE EU-CHINA BUSINESS RELATION IN YOUR FIELD?

Nowadays everyone is speaking to China. Knowing your interlocutor is beneficial for the success of any relationship in order to have a conscious approach.

Confronting yourself with a different culture can open up invaluable opportunities to look at our own world from a fresh perspective, and thus driving innovation and creativity. In fact, having an informed and more critical view of EU-China relations can help make decisions based on rationality rather than misconceptions. If we then consider the public affairs sector, there are major differences as the political system is different. In general terms, the line between public and private is more blurred in China, which means that businesses and organizations are subject to a higher degree of scrutiny from the institutions. In practice, this means having a good understanding of Chinese culture, history and language, therefore, becomes a matter of survival for a professional in the field.

JOB AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

I am a Brussels-based public affairs professional working on the interface between international relations and sustainable development issues with a passion for Asian history. Having a multidisciplinary background, I always see the value of learning more about what is out of my main area of expertise. Such a curiosity encouraged me to gain a deeper understanding of Chinese history and culture. My interest grew stronger when I saw that understanding China was a clear advantage for my job, since the country's rise has tangible consequences on decision-making around the world, impacting businesses, people and the environment alike.

WHY LEARNING CHINESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IS IMPORTANT IN BUSINESS?

With an increasing number of Chinese nationals taking leadership positions in international institutions, knowing Mandarin can be of advantage in approaching relevant civil servants by demonstrating to be willing to facilitate interaction with them.

Most importantly, I have found myself in situations where learning Chinese was a tangible professional limit.

For example, I needed to compare policy responses to a certain issue in different countries.

China is definitely a country that you want to consider; however, most documents are not available in English and this means that without Mandarin skills, you have an understanding that will miss a (rather big) piece of the puzzle. For all these reasons, learning Mandarin and its culture can be crucial to expand the scope of your network and make sure your knowledge is not fragmented.

WHAT CAN YOUR COUNTRY LEARN FROM CHINA?

Europe and Belgium have a lot to learn from China, especially considering that most Europeans know very little about Chinese culture. The list is probably never-ending, but if there is something that Europe can really learn from China it's the concept of balance. I am always amazed by how equilibrium seems to come back over and over in Chinese culture. I am thinking, for example, about Chinese characters: perfection is reached when the character equally covers the whole surface of a square. This is just one example, but given the vastness of Chinese culture and history, I am sure every person can find a specific fact or approach to learn from. Overall, I have come to realize that learning Mandarin and Chinese culture is always a process that gives a lot back to you in both professional and personal terms.



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