

# How learning Business Chinese helped my career - *France*

*In conversation with Matei Negrescu (马泰), Head of Renewables North Sea Area Development at Equinor*



## JOB AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

I'm Romanian and French and have lived, studied and worked in 8 different countries, including China, Brazil, Norway and Algeria. My area of expertise is the energy sector, with a focus on renewable energy and the development of offshore wind. I currently work in London as Head of Renewables North Sea Area Development at Equinor.

## WHAT DO FRANCE AND CHINA HAVE IN COMMON?

France has a strong business connection with China, exporting for example luxury goods and wine, but also high-tech products such as airplanes. Despite the historical background and cultural norms of the two countries being very different, they share a **relationship-oriented business culture**. In fact, in France as much as in China, building a strong network, getting to know your partner and maintaining that business relationship through time is a fundamental aspect in order to succeed. Chinese people are very attached to the concept of “*guanxi*” (关系 - relationship), focusing on building long-term connections, including when doing business. Something similar can be found in French business culture as well. Even though sometimes this similarity is not necessarily widely understood, both parties are aware that you need to make the effort of getting to know the other and adapt in order to succeed.

## WHAT CAN FRANCE LEARN FROM CHINA?

Before first visiting China in 2002, I certainly had the image of a country with a rich history, but I wasn't really thinking of modern-day China as an innovation hub. Through my successive visits to China over the last 20 years I was deeply impressed by how much and how fast the country has been evolving, and in some areas - such as digital technology and services - far beyond what was being done in Europe. One aspect that has left a particularly strong impression on me is that so many of the people I met in China are so full of energy and drive, and have such a great **entrepreneurial spirit**. Each visit to China has left me profoundly energised, and I think that learning from the Chinese people's enthusiastic “**can-do**” **attitude** in business is something we would definitely benefit from in France and other European countries.

## WHY LEARNING CHINESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IS IMPORTANT IN BUSINESS?

In a relationship-based culture, there are often complex norms to follow when engaging with other people. Being unaware of them means you are not going to be as effective in building relationships - either personal or of a business nature. For this reason, I think that **learning the culture should be an inseparable part of learning the language**. Both have helped me greatly when I worked in China. At the time, despite my Chinese language level being advanced, it was not yet fluent. Nevertheless, while we would be using interpreters during business meetings to make sure the message is conveyed accurately, being able to speak Chinese and understanding the cultural codes allowed me to connect more directly with our counterparts before and after the meeting and to build a rapport with them. Getting to know the cultural nuances of the country you are working with will surely help you **avoid misunderstanding** and help you **build a solid working relationship**. For example, working for a Norwegian company, I got used to having a clear and detailed agenda set before each meeting, including specific business objectives to achieve. When working in countries that have a strong relationship-based business culture, such as China and France, that's still important - but certainly not enough to guarantee success. Spending time before, after and in-between each business meeting to get to know each other is fundamental. If you are aware of it and are willing to quickly learn and adapt, it will show your counterpart that you respect their cultural norms and are making a step towards them, which very likely will result in a productive business