

How learning Business Chinese helped my career

In conversation with **Jennifer Bentley**, TV and Media Specialist



PERSONAL AND WORK EXPERIENCE

I am a Chartered Accountant with 25 years project & finance management experience in the Media & Entertainments sector, having worked with WarnerMedia, the Virgin Group, a Sky producer and now at Entertainment One.

I am also a member of the PACT UK TV Trade body Business Affairs committee and Executive Producer on the 2019 Chinese: UK TV co-production with Shaanxi Broadcasting Corp and also a forthcoming Chinese cultural documentary series.

I speak 4 languages, and am a year 2 Confucius Institute Business London Mandarin student who has always worked in international media organisations, over the last 5 years involving mainland China.

WHY DID YOU START LEARNING MANDARIN?

I started learning Mandarin for a number of reasons. Firstly because of the TV **opportunities** for exporting into the Chinese market at my former company a documentary producer for the **international market**. This was following the Oct 2015 visit by President Xi Jinping to the UK, where I was part of the media delegation together with other UK TV representatives. 3 years later I exec-produced with a Chinese production partner the international version of a cultural documentary on the murals in the tombs that depicted the high life in the Tang dynasty.

The other reason was my younger son aged 10 started learning Mandarin at school to 'A' level and soon for undergraduate study and being a linguist like myself (equally 4 languages) this meant for a **common passion and shared trips to China**.

Lastly having gone through the traditional schooling myself in the Romance and Germanic languages, I was determined to – late in life – **expand my language skills** by leaning an Asian language and Mandarin being the source of many Asian languages was my no 1 choice.

HOW DO YOU MOTIVATE YOURSELF TO KEEP LEARNING?

Working in television I enjoy watching the **Mandarin language TV dramas** on Netflix to help with listening, a great audio-visual guide to learning is Catherine Xiang's **字 Expresso YouTube** short learning videos. Also, I am part of a 4-person weekly **self-study group** with my Chinese Language and Culture for Business (CLCB) colleagues.

WHAT IS THE MAIN TAKEAWAY FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE IN CHINA?

I have been to mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan multiple times over the last 20 years, in 2016 I travelled 3 times to China, the most in any one year. The main takeaway is **how hardworking the Chinese are** and the **value of the collective workforce** which is best seen early morning or before dinner time when the office group do their exercises before starting work or the waiters' and waitresses have their daily briefing.

This collective spirit carries on into retirement when the retirees meet in the park and dance and play board games.

HOW DID CHINESE SKILLS HELP YOUR CAREER?

A knowledge of Mandarin and Chinese culture and history has **expanded my network both in my work, also personally** with my fellow CLCB students. The fact that I recently moderated a session for our UK TV trade body within the UK: China TV symposium with a panel of experienced Chinese documentary executives, introducing myself in fluent Mandarin shows how far my study has taken me in my work

TIPS FOR CHINESE LEARNERS

Practice **writing the characters** early as they teach you in schools, that way the vocabulary can be understood much quicker.