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Cementing the Anglo-Chinese relationship through education



by Yintong Betser

MOST of us are probably feeling a little negative in the current market place. How to survive, cope or succeed in this harsh economic climate is on every business person's mind. As a result, more people are turning to other emerging markets such as China for alternative solutions. I must admit to having also stepped up a gear with my networking within the Anglo-Chinese business community. On one of these occasions, I bumped into the Dean of the London Metropolitan University Bob Morgan and his colleague Dr. Tony Conibear.

The prominent tie between UK and China in the education sector is very evident. Since the mid 80s, the UK has seen a major influx of Chinese students studying at universities. China Daily reported that about 60,000 Chinese students were studying in the UK in 2007 and more than 100 UK universities had entered partnerships with Chinese counterparts to provide education programmes in China. London Metropolitan University is one of the earliest universities that pioneered its recruitment campaign in China. Bob told me that over the years the number of its recruits from China has steadily increased. With an office based in Beijing, the university's relentless efforts in building relationships and enhancing business strategy have paid off handsomely. It is delighted to see a new surge of Chinese students in the new term. Whilst many businesses are still struggling at the moment, it is refreshing to hear some good news.

Brainpower

However, it is not unexpected that education is doing well. According to a report from the Higher Education International Unit, the UK sells more brainpower per capita than anywhere else in the world. In 2005, knowledge services amounted to £75 billion, about a quarter of all UK exports which is worth some 6.3% GDP. It is also reported that the annual contribution to the UK's national income made by international students alone is estimated at £5.5 billion. Of the 13% of all higher education students in the UK, almost one-quarter of international students are Chinese nationals.

Growing up in China, I know how important education is in Chinese society. But what is causing this high demand for overseas education and what impact is this phenomenon having on the overall Anglo Chinese relationship?

Historically, Confucianism has been a dominant philosophy ingrained in Chinese society. Its basic teaching



emphasises the importance of education and moral development of the individual. Therefore, delivering a good education for their children is the top priority for parents. With the 'one child' policy and the rise of the middle class, children benefit from this attention and financial support, not just from their parents, but also from their two sets of grandparents. Like many of my friends, I have been asked to be a guardian for Chinese overseas students from time to time. Their

parents often tell me that they could buy properties and leave the savings to their children, but there's nothing better than to equip them with the knowledge and skills to enable them to make a good living in the fiercely competitive employment market. Whilst there are many good universities in China, a foreign degree, especially if it is from a university in the UK, still carries tremendous kudos in society and is more desirable among employers.

Chinese Business Association

To reflect the increasing number of Chinese businesses operating in the UK the London Chamber of Commerce is setting up a Chinese Business Association (CBA) to provide them with a support network for doing business in the capital.

The objectives of the CBA are:

- To provide a voice for the Chinese business community and represent their views to the media, and local and central government
- To provide Chinese-origin businesses with introductions to LCCI members and

other companies and give them access to opportunities to enhance their commercial skills and business competitiveness

- To give new Chinese investors in London an understanding of the London business set-up
- Entry to the CBA will be through membership of the Chamber and will give companies a tailored series of networking and other events, as well as access to the full benefits of LCCI membership.

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China's year-on-year double digit GDP growth is instrumental to this demand; it creates huge opportunities for educated and talented graduates in all industries. China's new WTO membership and the success of the 2008 Olympics further asserted China's global profile and even more foreign investments have been secured. Meanwhile, the world is no longer focusing on the West for direction and the East is attracting considerable attention – students from Europe and America are also seeking work experience and knowledge from China. And this creates new business opportunities at the same time.

I recently caught up with a business friend Edward Holroyd Pearce. With his business partner Daniel Nivern, they run CRCC Asia which supplies international interns to Chinese companies. Being fluent in Mandarin and having worked in China, this pair of Oxbridge graduates naturally turned their business focus to China. Their business model has been timed perfectly for the difficult employment market and the new 'Eastward thinking'. It has only been in operation since 2006, yet CRCC is now planning to open an American office later this year to meet the new demand, in addition to its current Beijing and London locations.

From my conversations with the London Metropolitan University and CRCC Asia, I am enthusiastic about the business potential and greatly encouraged by the positive spirit. We are also in agreement that these educational exchanges are not simply money-making schemes for business; they are far more meaningful on a personal level. With these students taking home their experience, knowledge and broader vision, education cultivates deeper understanding and cement closer Anglo Chinese relationships between people, culturally and socially.