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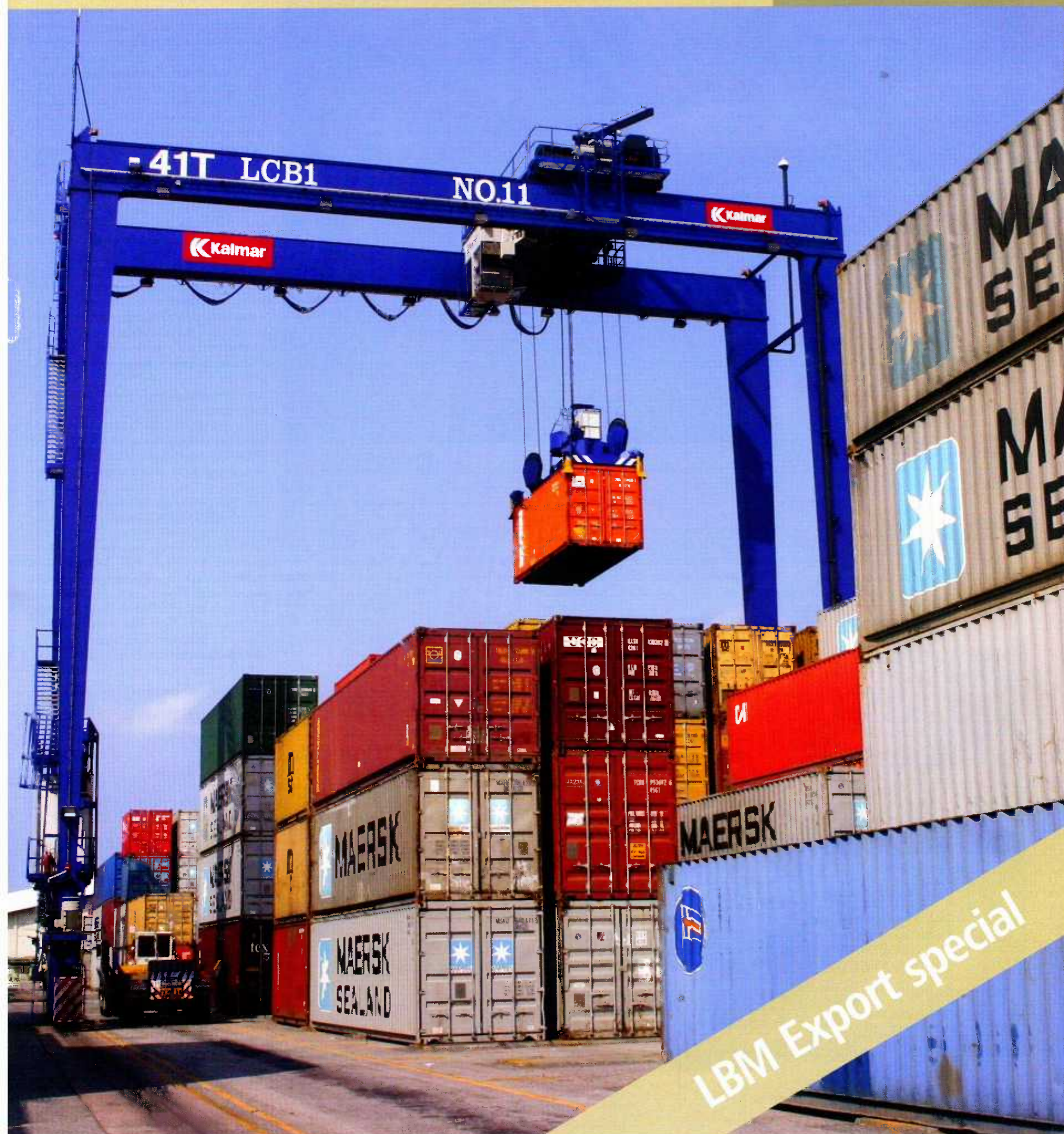


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The first major emigration from China can be traced back to the 14th century

The Chinese community in the UK, then and now

In the first of a two-part feature, Yintong Betser traces the beginnings of one of the UK's oldest immigration societies.



THE recent state visit to the UK by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao was followed by the arrival in London of a 150-strong Chinese business group. A key focus of the subsequent UK-China Summit was the Anglo Chinese trade and investment relationship. China's £400bn fiscal stimulus package, its commitment to move up the value chain and its policies aimed at stimulating greater domestic demand, offer new opportunities for UK companies to sell in China. An industry insider commented that this was perhaps the first time the Chinese government truly recognised its global role and was determined to ensure China was closely involved in the international marketplace.

"When I first came to Britain, Chinese people were a rarity."

How China has grown in the last 30 years! From a country to which everyone was rushing to purchase low quality, cheap goods, to a nation that is now actively taking part in rescuing the global economy.

When I first came to Britain, Chinese people were a rarity. I hardly saw any of them and when I did, it was typical that we would stop for a chat and soon arrange to meet again over a meal. Nowadays in the little residential area in which I live I can sometimes hear Mandarin spoken. However, outside the Anglo-Chinese community, understanding in the UK of mod-

ern China is still split. People are aware of the country's astonishing GDP growth and its widespread "made in China" legacy. But they still retain the stereotype that Chinese people are born entrepreneurs – a nation of laundry and restaurant owners – and are keen gamblers with superstitious minds.

Like all stereotypes there is some truth but where do these perceptions come from? Who were the first Chinese immigrants to the UK and why did they come here? Moreover as China is being transformed beyond recognition, will we witness changes in its culture, life style and mentality among the size, make-up and status of the Chinese people and business communities living in the UK? To find answers to these questions, it is necessary to go back to China's association with the UK.

Humble beginnings

The Chinese community is one of

the UK's oldest immigrant societies. Some say the first major emigration from China can be traced back as early as the 14th century. However, major growth started in the 18th and 19th centuries when British trade with China was strong and Chinese, employed as seamen on British merchant ships, started to settle in ports such as London, Liverpool, Cardiff and Bristol. In the mid 18th century Chinese goods, porcelain in particular, became very fashionable but it was tea that dominated Anglo – Chinese trade, and drinking tea quickly became an English way of life.

Apart from working as seafarers, the Chinese immigrants initially ran laundries and lodging houses to serve the

Chinese sailors moving between the British ports. According to a BBC report, up to 1911 there was still only a very small Chinese population of about 500 Chinese in Liverpool and around 670 in London.

The second influx of immigration took place during 1948 – 1950 after the British Nationality Act gave new Commonwealth citizens the right to live and work in the UK. The land reforms together with the collapse of the agricultural industry in the New Territories of Hong Kong, resulted in between

30,000 – 50,000 (mostly Hong Kong) Chinese people flocking to Britain. In addition, as the English taste for international food developed in the late 1960s, the Chinese catering industry expanded and more workers arrived.

More recently, from the mid 1980s onwards, Britain has seen the most significant immigration from mainland China owing to relaxed government policies on both sides. Whilst the United States, Canada and Australia have been more popular recipients of this new wave of migrants, the UK has also become a well-favoured English-speaking destination for the new generations of Chinese.

Yintong Betser is a China business specialist and the author of Active Business Travel – China (www.activeukchina.com). She can be contacted at Yintong@activeukchina.com

In part two of *The Chinese Community in the UK, Then and Now* in next month's London Business Matters Yintong will look at the Chinese business community in Britain and their increasingly important role.



Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao



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The Chinese community in the UK: part two



In last month's London Business Matters Yintong Betser traced the beginnings of one of the UK's oldest immigration societies. In this concluding part she looks at the increasingly important role the Chinese business community in Britain now plays.



THE 2005 figure of 347,000 shows that 33 per cent of the Chinese in Britain live in London, 13.6 per cent in the South East and 11.1 per cent in the North West. Birmingham, Brighton, Cambridge, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Milton Keynes, and Swansea are the most popular cities. In London most are based in Barnet, Southwark, Westminster, Ealing and Tower Hamlets. Of all the

MBA or both, and PhDs are not a rarity either. However, these Chinese professionals are not just bookworms. They are well integrated into British society, dress smartly, speak perfect corporate English, and voice their interesting insights, often from their unique Anglo-Chinese perspective.

Dr. Frank Pieke, a specialist on Chinese migration at Oxford University, observed that the Chinese people are increasingly adopting a mobile, transnational lifestyle, moving from one job and one country to another as new opportunities present themselves.

At a recent event, I met Dr. Wang Shengming, an old business friend, who told me that whilst his training business based in Cambridge was still running well he had left the London business scene for a while to set up an A-Level school in China. He couldn't help but beam with excitement. All of the school's first 58

intrinsic part of the Chinese identity. It is true that as China has become more internationalised, the Chinese restaurant - one of the oldest types of business in the UK - has also changed its persona and has developed dramatically. Chinatown is no longer the only venue for the best Chinese cuisine as new waves of modern and trendy Chinese restaurants have appeared. Now you can find not only the hot and spicy Sichuan style from mainland China, but also the Michelin-starred fusion restaurants with an emphasis on modern, design-oriented ambience.

The Chinese people are a particularly sociable race. A highly developed social infrastructure is evident in shops, travel agencies and logistic companies. Meanwhile, the numerous China-centric associations, whether social, professional or business, are endemic. One of the distinctive features of many such groups is



Chicken Congee

Direct Investment (FDI) in Europe and it has grown by 13 per cent during the past financial year. China's active role as an investor has also changed from natural resources in the 1980s and 90s to high-tech industries such as automotive, telecommunications, media and pharmaceutical industries in which we have seen considerable investment over the last few years. Of all the Chinese companies that have established in the UK, there are approximately 400 nationwide - 250 in London alone - that have been assisted at government level.

China's Shanghai Automotive Industry Corporation (SAIC) set up its European Design and Engineering Centre in Leamington Spa, which now owns the MG marque. The leading broadcaster CCTV opened its European headquarters in London staking its importance in the creative and media sectors. As a result of the burgeoning Chinese herbal practices throughout the country, it is not difficult to see why the success of this alternative medicine and Chinese medical practice has led to organisations such as the International Guangzhou Xiangxue Pharmaceutical Factory Ltd establishing a traditional Chinese medicine research centre in Cambridge. Other major corporations based in the UK include Huawei Technologies Co. Ltd, ZTE and China Mobile.

From humble beginnings as restaurant and laundry owners, the Chinese population is now integrated into every level of British society, and I am glad to see that the Chinese community is enjoying its best time in history so far.

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ethnic groups, the Chinese people have the highest proportion of students (a third) and the lowest in routine or manual occupations. Some 50,000 of Britain's Chinese people, about 20 per cent of the total, hold jobs in law, medicine and other professions, and are amongst the highest-earning groups in Britain.

This is particularly evident in the Anglo-Chinese business community in which I am involved. During the eight years of my business career as a Chinese specialist, I have noticed a significant growth in the number of Chinese professionals who actively take part in promoting British companies and organisations. Most hold a Masters degree,

"...the Chinese people are increasingly adopting a mobile, transnational lifestyle"

students had gained excellent grades, five had gone on to Oxbridge and 15 had won places at the top five universities in the UK - a record result even among the sixth form colleges in the UK.

A popular saying among Chinese people in the UK is: "Chinese heart, Chinese stomach". Even though younger generations of Chinese people can be very adaptable and enjoy their Western style of living, Chinese food remains an

their inclusiveness; they are not just for the Chinese people, but for everyone who is interested in China.

As the Chinese economy and management mature in the international market, firms have realised the importance of internationalising their business operations to become global players. According to Ernst & Young's European Investment Monitor, the UK is by far the largest recipient of Chinese Foreign

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