



## Yintong talks with...

### Lady Xuelin Bates



Lady Xuelin Bates is one of the best-known figures in the Chinese community in the UK and is so grounded we all simply address her as Xuelin. She holds many positions including secretary general of UK Chinese Business Association and chairwoman of the Zhejiang UK Business Association though she is a philanthropist at heart. Her unassuming approach is admired by many and, unsurprisingly perhaps, leads people to assume that her main role is to support her politician husband Lord Bates. I am therefore delighted to reveal the true Lady Bates in her own right as a successful Chinese immigrant entrepreneur.

Arriving in the UK in 1989 with a Masters in architecture from Zhejiang University and £50 in her pocket, Xuelin was part of the first wave of modern day Chinese students.

#### Craftmanship

She was initially studying English when, three months in, she was lined up by the job centre for an interview with the John R Harris Partnership. With her limited language skills her hopes weren't high but at least it would be a chance to practice her interviewing technique. Her high standard of craftmanship, the result of eight years training, clearly impressed the firm and she

was hired on the spot as an assistant architect with a decent salary.

After a three-month probationary period she was appointed a permanent member of staff and able to secure a working visa. The UK economy though was at a low ebb in 1993. The company suffered and nearly three quarters of the work force were made redundant. Xuelin survived but went down to four days a week, giving her some welcome time to think.

#### Entrepreneurial

Seeing how busy her old classmates were, many conducting major projects in China, she asked herself, "Would I be happy to settle as a draftsman, leaving my future at the whim of others?" It was at this time Xuelin read *A Chinese Woman in Manhattan* and was inspired by the heroine's entrepreneurial spirit. This chimed with her own philosophy of: if you believe in something, try it, even though you know it may fail.

With the comfort of knowing that she was welcome to return to her old firm, Xuelin threw herself into the unknown. She went to the Guangdong trade fair and acquired a range of samples from gifts, bags and clothing to homeware and stationery. Desk, research involving ploughing through pages of directo-

ries followed by knocking on company doors and doing the rounds of wholesale and trade fairs finally bore fruit. Her personally-designed iron candle stands were picked up by one of the big gift companies and, despite some teething problems, set her on the road to success.

By 1997 Xuelin had moved out to the country with her family. With the business profitable she was able to indulge her hobby of visiting houses for sale and property auctions. She picked up some rundown properties and renovated and refurbished often with bits and pieces she sourced through the newspaper *Loot*. She was having a blast with her



projects as they combined her passion and knowledge – and they generated lucrative results with less effort than her original enterprise. So, in 2007, when companies were fiercely competing on price in the giftware market, Xuelin decided to wrap up her trading business and concentrate on property development. "It was a golden period for the property business. At times, I would have three or four projects on the go. And I was also more in control of my time and the business."

#### Responsibility

Bringing up her son in the country, Xuelin made many good friends, got involved in many charitable activities, and integrated with British society. This opened her eyes to a new world of social responsibility and led her to another interesting chapter.

"This country has given me so much. From the first £50 in my pocket I have achieved such a lot in under 30 years. I wanted to give back to the society that adopted me and I felt this was my destiny," Xuelin told me. In 2005 Xuelin moved back to London and focused her charity interests on the UK-China



**"As the Chinese saying goes, one blossom does not make Spring; only when the garden is full of flowers will Spring be truly here."**

communities. She helped set up Zhejiang UK Association in 2009 and later the Zhejiang UK Business Association. "As the Chinese saying goes, one blossom does not make Spring; only when the garden is full of flowers will Spring be truly here." Under her guidance the association has grown to over 1,000 members.

#### On the map

"The Zhejiang UK Association is non-religious and apolitical and we collaborate with both British and Chinese governments to promote trade and bi-lateral communication. We were involved in the Lord Mayor's parade last year to put the Chinese community on the map which was widely reported including on the BBC and Chinese Central Television. We also participated in the Yiwu [a city in Zhejiang Province] to London train journey to draw attention to the modern Silk Road and highlight the Chinese Belt and Road initiative."



Under Xuelin's leadership the UK Chinese Business Association has won the bid to host the 15th World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention

in October in 2019. An estimated 5,000 business leaders of Chinese origin, now based all over the world, are due to gather in London for the event.

The UK offers tremendous business and investment opportunities while the Chinese entrepreneurs are thirsty for projects and partnerships with specialist and innovative opportunities. "This international convention will provide an ideal platform for all businesses with a dynamic reach internationally. It is an achievement to secure the right to host this forum and we look forward to seeing the benefits it can bring to British businesses."

### Content

As a businesswoman, Xuelin is obviously a high achiever but, I asked, does she have any regrets on a personal level along the way? "Yes, I sometimes wished that I had spent more time to encourage my son with his Chinese studies during his upbringing. However, looking at him

developing so well at university right now, I feel somewhat relieved and content. As a positive person, I look forward very much to the future."

Asked about her husband Lord Michael Bates, Xuelin smiled, "We are very lucky to have found each other, albeit late in life; we share similar values and he is the love of my life." Lord Bates is passionate about China, and they have been supporting each other through thick and thin, either on their charitable *Walk for Peace* or her China projects. They have committed themselves to good causes, and devote much of their time, energy and finances to their beliefs. Their combined force plays a vital role in the Anglo Chinese community which I believe is of undoubted benefit to both countries.

Yintong Betser is the author of a series of books on doing business in China and the UK and managing director of ACTIVE Anglo Chinese Communications.

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## Help needed in Kerala



Last month saw the worst floods in the southern Indian state of Kerala for a century. Hundreds have died and thousands made homeless. Relief camps have been set up across the state and the need for aid is pressing.

Contributions to help alleviate the situation can be made at [www.donation.cmdrf.kerala.gov.in](http://www.donation.cmdrf.kerala.gov.in)

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Dr Juliana Goga-Cooke

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