

# REPORT

## Harnessing Australian-Chinese Cultural Fluency to Bridge the Export Gap 利用澳大利亚华人的文化熟知度弥合澳大利亚中小企业的对华出口差距



a project funded by:

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### **List of abbreviations**

AUSTRADE Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade)

EMDG Export Market Development Grants

FDI Foreign Direct Investment

MofCom Ministry of Commerce

## Executive summary

This report was conducted between 2016-2017 with the support of the Australia-China Council. The objective was to study how the cultural fluency of Australian-Chinese professionals and business migrants can contribute to export success. The term “cultural fluency” here refers to the ability to act as intermediaries and translators.

In the report, we occasionally use the term “translator-intermediary” to convey the sense implied by our respondents. We refer to registered businesses in this report: the report does not include the category of “daigou”, the individual shopper who sends products back to China, although we do note in passing that the activities of these individuals does make a contribution to the Australia-China trade environment.

Migrants from mainland China comprise the second largest source of business migrants. Added to this is the high intake of tertiary students, many of whom will seek permanent residency or return to China with an intention to pursue further business with Australia.<sup>1</sup> Harnessing their cross-cultural fluency and skills is likely to be an important factor in ongoing trade relations between China and Australia.

A number of key issues surfaced during the course of the study:

### Communication: Ubiquity of WeChat

Social media use was a common factor in all our discussions with exporters, in particular the dominance of WeChat. WeChat is a multi-function social media mobile application developed by the Chinese telecommunications company Tencent that began as an online instant messaging app. WeChat is the most frequently used app among China’s 731 million online population. 79.6% of people in China (581 million) make use of WeChat.<sup>2</sup>

It was evident from several of the interviewees that **WeChat** functions as a means of integrating communication in the production and distribution of products and services.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/International-Student-Data/Documents/MONTHLY%20SUMMARIES/2017/Aug%202017%20MonthlyInfographic.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Statistical Report on Internet Development in China*. (2017). <http://cnnic.com.cn/IDR/ReportDownloads/201706/P020170608523740585924.pdf>

The workflow from the factory floor, inspection, freighting, delivery and retail can be linked through the use of WeChat.

Few Australian exporters are fully aware the flexibility, timeliness and connectivity that WeChat offers them.

The main impediments to the adoption of WeChat by Australian exporters are a lack of **language skills and a lack of familiarity** with the platform.

## **Disparate sources of information and monolingualism**

There is no lack of information available on the export of Australian goods and services to China. However, information is dispersed across associations, state and federal government sources, professional and commercial enterprises ranging from business brokers and law to accountancy firms. While some sources provide bilingual information, most is available only in English.

This creates unnecessary obstacles for Australian-Chinese business owners who are investigating the possibilities of exporting Australian goods and services to China. From our discussions with business owners we believe there is a willingness to share information.

We demonstrate an effective way of conveying and sharing information on our project website (<http://accf.asia/forum/>). The list we provide is far from exhaustive but it is a solid foundation from which to explore the options.

## **Trust**

Trust is crucial to all kinds of business but especially so for transnational businesses. Apart from the need to understand foreign export processes, the lack of familiarity with language, business practices and expectations presents a major challenge.

These issues can be overcome through the employment of people who have the cultural fluency to build trust and understanding between exporters and customers. These are invariably Australian-Chinese. The Chinese form the largest proportion, 29 percent, of those arriving in Australia to pursue higher education<sup>3</sup> and as business migrants.<sup>4</sup> Their

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<sup>3</sup> <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/International-Student-Data/Documents/MONTHLY%20SUMMARIES/2017/Aug%202017%20MonthlyInfographic.pdf>

exposure and experience with Australian culture and business practices is a resource that remains largely untapped.

As cultural translators or intermediaries they not only help Australian exporters to overcome language issues, but by using their cultural knowledge, they can “**read between the lines**” to inform negotiations and decisions. In doing so, they can also pave the way for Australian manufacturers and companies to understand **differences in business practices between the two countries.**

With their bicultural understanding, Australian-Chinese are helping Australian exporters to approach the Chinese market more effectively; for example, beyond appealing to the Chinese through competitive pricing to emphasizing the qualities behind Australian brands such as natural goodness, reliability and expertise.

Recognising the value of bicultural talent is one thing, connecting such individuals with the Australian export businesses that could use their talent is another. Currently, Australian businesses seem to rely on the ethnic media such as community newspapers and radio, word-of-mouth and traditional job advertisements to find the candidates they want.

While experienced professionals will often respond to these advertisements, the talents of thousands of new Chinese graduates trained by Australian universities are also available. Many of the recent graduates from Australian universities may find it difficult to secure a good position in an Australian company in the current economic climate; however, there are certainly opportunities in Australia-China business.

To overcome this information hurdle, we demonstrate a bilingual forum on <https://accf.asia> where Australian exporters can communicate and connect with young professionals seeking jobs, business migrants, suppliers and even, prospective customers.

Such an initiative is especially important to assist small and medium enterprises, which is typically the nature of businesses owned or started by business migrants



## 2. Introduction

### Objective of the study

An abundance of common wisdom and hearsay surrounds the export of Australian goods and services to China. There is no shortage of data. However, at the moment there is a lack of published research on cultural factors that lead to success. This project therefore seeks to understand the role of Australian-Chinese residents in helping to enable export success.

The trade relationship between China and Australia is an important one for both nations. China is Australia's largest trading partner. A 2016 OECD report shows Australia and China each imported an equivalent of 21 per cent of their GDP, and exported 20 and 24 per cent respectively in 2014 (OECD 2016).

Australia and China have complementary relationships, which indicate that trade is likely to be maintained or increase in the future, notwithstanding future political differences.

Although its population is relatively small compared to geographical size, approximately the same size as Shanghai, Australia has a large natural resource base and specialises in the export of primary goods. China has a large labour supply, which in the past has focused on labour-intensive production. While China is now moving up the value chain, the demand for Australian primary resources is likely to remain strong.

By comparison Australia has a relatively small but highly skilled workforce. Over the past two decades, paralleling increased trade relations with China, the number of persons with Chinese cultural fluency in Australia has increased, primarily through migration and overseas students.

By cultural fluency we mean linguistic competence in Mandarin, or even other dialects used in Mainland China but also an understanding of how Chinese culture operates in various contexts beyond the obvious categories already well-known such as *guanxi* (connections) and *mianzi* (face). To attain a deep understanding of the nuances of business requires a great deal of time for a person not trained in the culture and language.

Because the Chinese written language is ideographic, it requires a great deal of time and effort to build communicative and cultural competence. Much of the communication in Australia-China trade is done through written Mandarin. Furthermore, knowledge of dialects, cultural traditions and regional "characteristics" can play an important role.

Understanding and harnessing cultural fluency is therefore a difficult and important task.

The category of Australian-Chinese resident is quite complex and varies according to educational background, time in Australia, region from which migration occurred, and familiarity with English.

While we acknowledge there to be great heterogeneity within the Australian-Chinese community and varying degrees of identification, belonging and affiliation, for the purposes of this project Chinese-Australian refers to migrants to Australia from mainland China.

To enhance the feasibility of our study, we narrowed our target groups to two: *Australian-Chinese business owners/migrants based in Melbourne* and *Australian-Chinese professionals in Perth*.

One of the central questions pertains to the kind of information available for any individual or business who wants to export goods and services from Australia to China. While there are bilingual hard copy guides available from DFAT, the propensity for Chinese individuals to seek information on the internet and the twin constraints on time and funding made it necessary for us to focus on online sources.

### 3. Project data collection

#### 3.1 Online Audit

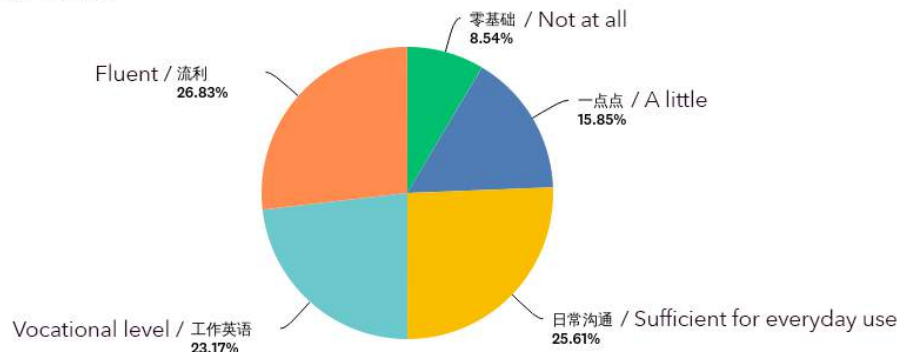
We began with an online audit of the kinds of information and online sources available. The objective was to ascertain the accessibility of information currently available for an individual or business wanting to export goods and services from Australia to China.

While many Australian-Chinese are competent in English, fluency in the language is variable, even within our two specific target groups. We conducted a survey via Wechat that generated 85 responses.

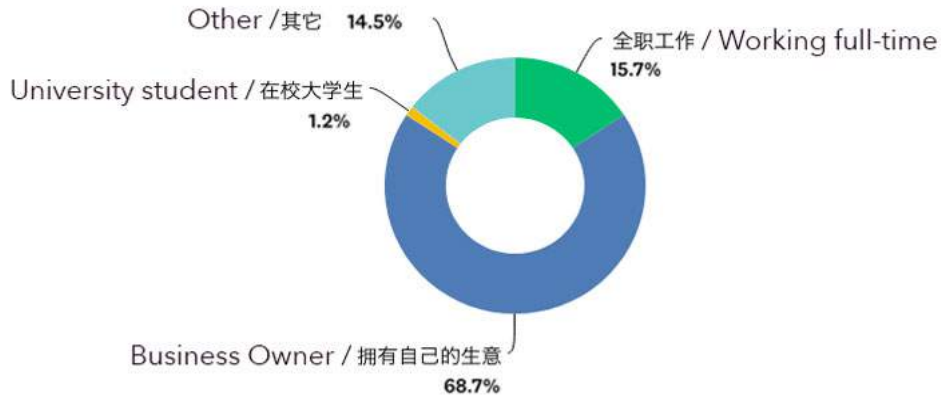
Our survey revealed that close to 24.4 % of our respondents revealed little to no ability to understand English. With the exception of one of these respondent, all the rest own and run their own businesses.

What is your level of fluency in English?

您的英语水平怎样？



What is your current status in Australia?  
请问您目前在澳大利亚的生活学习现状？



We narrowed the scope of information to three major product groups: wine, seafood and dairy to enhance the feasibility of our online audit. During the course of a week, a researcher simulated searches by an Australian exporter in need of a better understanding of how to introduce their goods into China; and as a Chinese importer in search of information on how to bring Australian goods to China.

To broaden the scope of the search, various of the more popular search engines, Google, Baidu and Bing, were used for the audit.

### **3.2 Online audit results**

Many sources of information are available on exporting from Australia and importing into China. This includes technical, legal and business knowledge.

A number of companies and government agencies, such as Austrade China<sup>5</sup> provide bilingual information. However, the majority of Australian-based sites are monolingual, either providing information in English or Mandarin. Additionally, in order to access a site like Austrade China potential exporters must navigate past several layers written only in English.

Conversely, much of the information needed on importing goods and services into China such as the China Law<sup>6</sup> is only available in Mandarin. In cases where English versions of a site, such as China's Ministry of Commerce<sup>7</sup> were available, the sheer volume of information presented makes access a frustrating business. A Publish Message feature of the MoC site seems to provide some relief for those with urgent concerns. A person can leave a query in English.

Optimising direct and timely access to information in the language that importers/exporters need with minimal complication is an issue that needs addressing.

At the same time, as the team discovered on checking the sg560 page in November 2017, online content on sites in China is volatile and ephemeral and can be erased without notice.

#### **Problems in accessing information**

While there is no lack of information sources, they are scattered across industry associations, state and federal government sites and commercial businesses ranging from law firms and online forums to Chinese language business-to-business platforms such as sg560.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.austrade.gov.au/Local-Sites/China>

<sup>6</sup> <http://fgk.chinalaw.gov.cn/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://english.mofcom.gov.cn/>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.sg560.com/news/qydt/zhengz02\\_30302182.html](http://www.sg560.com/news/qydt/zhengz02_30302182.html)

To take one example, wine is a popular Australian export. Some states have industry associations such as Wines of Western Australia,<sup>9</sup> Wine Victoria<sup>10</sup> and South Australian Wine Industry Association<sup>11</sup>, that provide members with exclusive market and other information on export to specific destinations is in English only. Other associations like the Wine Society<sup>12</sup> dedicated to the sourcing and appreciation of fine wines are only available in English.

To understand how to import Australian wines into China, is an equally daunting task, in part due to the volume of information one needs to wade through and the multiple levels of governance and regulation importers have to deal with.

The complexity, multiple layers and language issues indicate that bilingual (English & Mandarin) Australian-Chinese are uniquely equipped to act as bridges in the export of Australian goods and services to China. Exactly how that occurs is described in the case studies we drew from the interviews conducted.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.winewa.asn.au/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.winevictoria.org.au/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.winesa.asn.au/members/advice-information/export/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.winesociety.com.au/>

## **Interviews**

15 semi-structured, and in-depth interviews were conducted in Melbourne and Perth, as well as in Shanghai and Guangzhou. Interviewees were contacted via their responses to the online survey, through snowballing and personal and business networks. The case studies that follow are based on some of the interviews.

## **Case studies**

We present four case studies that illustrate different facets of cultural fluency. Together they detail many of the advantages that Australian-Chinese bring to their professional positions, the nuances and skills they are able to harness in order to accomplish objectives and the diverse experiential knowledge they add to the task of bridging export gaps.

### Case Study 1

‘WeChatting all the Way’, based on interview with David, sales professional

### Case Study 2

‘Aggregating Nimble Micro-Businesses’, based on interview with Bing, wine exporter

### Case Study 3

‘Australia is my other home’, based on interview with Judy, wine connoisseur

### Case Study 4

‘Cultural Translator’, based on interview with Gina, young professional

## 4.1 Case Study 1: WeChatting all the Way



Image adapted under CC2.0 from © Taylor Johnson/Flickr 2017

**David** is an executive in charge of seafood sales into China for a large Australian producer. Before he arrived at his current place of work, there were no employees of Chinese origin in the sales force. Made responsible for the firm's further inroads into the China market, David instituted the use of **WeChat** to communicate with customers and co-workers.

As mentioned in the executive summary, WeChat is the most frequently used app among China's 731 million online population. Users can send text and voice messages, share photographs and videos, search for, order, and pay for a whole slew of products and services provided by third parties using the e-wallet function.

The potential for reaching prospective customers and communicating with existing customers via WeChat therefore is immense.

Although primarily a Chinese interface, **translation is built into** the WeChat app; so, it is possible for non-Chinese speakers to use it. Admittedly, the translation is machine translation and hardly flawless but it is an option that can overcome the lack of familiarity and language skills.



There are other issues with WeChat as an app. For example, it archives messages locally on the device you use and conversations are only manually transferrable to new devices. Also, because its parent company, Tencent, is based in China, all use and data are subject to Chinese cybersecurity laws. There are also restrictions on the type of companies that are issued WeChat accounts

Before WeChat was introduced into the company, the majority of communication with clients was conducted through email. David's predecessor spent a lot of money marketing and branding the company's products in China.

Drawing on his in-depth understanding of how Chinese consumers and distributors operate, David re-directed attention to the company's main customers, mainly price-sensitive distributors, using WeChat.

An experienced user of the app, David set up and maintains a **dense, personal and on-demand communication network** with customers and provided them with **real-time, responsive pricing**.

Clients are able to respond quickly using the voice rather than textual messages, a crucial and early distinction of WeChat from when it was started in 2011.

David explained that superficial understandings of Chinese cultural customs such as noting the popularity of seafood during Lunar New Year/Spring Festival is insufficient when dealing with clients in China. Although seafood is a delicacy especially welcomed during special occasions, consumers remain price-sensitive amid a very competitive market.

At the same time, supplies and quality of seafood can vary throughout course of the year. An understanding of how the various factors – **communication, supply, quality, pricing, cultural customs** and **competition** –interact is key to success in the export of Australian seafood to China.

One factor that has made Australian exports less attractive in China is their comparison to largely similar products from New Zealand. A Free Trade Agreement between China and New Zealand came into effect from 1 October 2008 and has enabled our neighbour to offer many of the same products Australia produces at lower prices.<sup>13</sup> In fact, “[s]ince the China-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement came into force, China’s imports of seafood from New Zealand have grown seven-fold (to \$581 million)”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/trade/free-trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements-in-force/nz-china-free-trade-agreement#time>

<sup>14</sup> <https://dfat.gov.au/trade/agreements/chafta/fact-sheets/Documents/fact-sheet-agriculture-and-processed-food.pdf>

The **China-Australia Free Trade Agreement (ChAFTA)** was entered into on 20 December 2015 and elimination of tariffs is staggered.<sup>15</sup> For example, the 10 to 14 per cent tariff levied on abalone will only be eliminated with effect from 1 January 2019. This time lag will continue to have substantial effect on Australian exporters' ability to compete for market share in China.

Another part of David's strategy has been to ensure clients have **up-to-date information** on incoming stocks. To do this, he has instituted the use of WeChat right from the inspection stage in the company – during inspection the seafood is weighed and categorised with different categories priced differently.

Staff inspectors use WeChat to photograph the lots and David often forwards this information to clients immediately. Part-marketing/enticement, part real-time information and part business process, the flow of information is almost instantaneous, invariably fresh and has, so far, provided David with outstanding results.

**Trust** is key to the relationships between the company and clients but it is equally important that his employer trusts him as they do not currently understand the language, Mandarin (Putonghua), which he uses to communicate with clients. However, as David also points out, the prices he quotes for each shipment are 'on record' and available for anyone in the company 'circle' to view.

Ultimately, according to David, it is the results that he continues to bring in that win trust from both employer and clients. David's success appears to have convinced his employer of the contributions Australian-Chinese individuals can make to the business.

It also paved the way for another employee with Mandarin language skills and a Chinese cultural heritage background to join the company.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.austrade.gov.au/australian/export/free-trade-agreements/chafta>



## 4.2 Case Study 2: Aggregating Nimble Micro-Businesses



A former professional in the property market, Bing arrived in May 2012 as a business migrant on a provisional visa with his entire family. He began exporting Australian wines and wool blankets in September of the same year; in the five years since he has established himself as an exporter of certain well-known wine labels.

The largest proportion<sup>16</sup> (79% between 2012-2014) of Australian business migrants currently come from China on business innovation and investment provisional visas (subclass 163, now 188) that allow them to reside in Australia for a number of years.<sup>17</sup>

Pending the successful meeting of specific business criteria (turnover, employees and capital) within the set number of years, migrants holding this visa are then permitted to apply for permanent residency.

The federal government adjusts the number of visas granted each year but in the 2014-2015 period the planned levels were 7,260. Altogether, business migrants form just **3.8%** of Australia's entire migration programme. The Department of Immigration and

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<sup>16</sup>

[www.aph.gov.au/~media/02%20Parliamentary%20Business/24%20Committees/244%20Joint%20Committees/Migration/BIIP/Report/Final%20Report.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/~media/02%20Parliamentary%20Business/24%20Committees/244%20Joint%20Committees/Migration/BIIP/Report/Final%20Report.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Visa-1/188->

Border Protection (DIBP) states that the strategic priority of the business migration programme is to “attract high quality investors and entrepreneurs to invest in Australia” but as the 2015 Report of the Inquiry into the Business Innovation and Investment Programme<sup>18</sup> notes, the programme aims to:

- **Generate employment**
- **Increase the export of Australian goods and services**
- **Increase the production of goods and services in Australia**
- Introduce new or improved technology
- **Increase competition and commercial activity**
- **Develop links with international markets**
- Increase the dispersal of business migrants across Australia through State and Territory government nomination

Considering the above-mentioned objectives, it is easy to understand why **business migrants are among those most motivated to harness their Australian-Chinese cultural fluency to bridge the export gap.**

Bing says that as a business migrant he was pressured into rather unfamiliar territory. He started trading as it was the most likely way to gain permanent residence in Australia via the business migration program. But as Bing also reflects, the need to meet the requirements of the visa was beneficial because it pushed him into learning about trading and business in Australia, leading to his current success.

When queried as to the biggest **obstacles** and issues with his journey from provisional business migrant to successful businessman and permanent resident in Australia, Bing pointed to the **initial lack of familiarity with the Australian market, business environment and language.**

The time frame of 4 years granted to provisional business migrants means that sourcing suppliers is difficult. According to Bing, most business migrants are middle-age individuals, so picking up a new language is not easy matter for them. Therefore, timely and accessible information from official government web sites, translated into Mandarin, would be most useful in overcoming this obstacle.

The second obstacle Bing mentions also has to do with the visa conditions.

He explains that in order to develop the market in China for the products he has newly sourced, he ideally would visit China regularly and often, stay for long periods of time. No matter how familiar one is with market conditions for one category of product, **additional market development** needs to be conducted for each product and service to

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[www.apf.gov.au/~media/02%20Parliamentary%20Business/24%20Committees/244%20Joint%20Committees/Migration/BIIP/Report/Final%20Report.pdf](http://www.apf.gov.au/~media/02%20Parliamentary%20Business/24%20Committees/244%20Joint%20Committees/Migration/BIIP/Report/Final%20Report.pdf)

be exported. **Accounting for the extended stays in China** while his family is based in Australia is an issue.

Today, Bing's business sells directly to customers in China using a digital platform he started. He relates the story of how the digital platform began in 2013 as a common objective to share resources between Chinese business migrants.

This coincided with the explosion of export of Australian goods to China via the *daigou* (akin to a personal shopper) model. The idea was eventually aborted, in Bing's opinion, for a lack of investment of time, finance and will as establishing the platform as a sales channel needed to be done primarily in China.

Noting the expansion of digital business models in China, Bing adds that the Australian authorities should encourage business migrants to innovate business models rather than insist on traditional business models. He cites the example of wine sales to illustrate how the objectives of the business migration have been reached. Somewhat agitatedly he asks rhetorically:

how else would the Chinese know about Australian wines? 谁在中国会知道澳大利亚葡萄酒?

Why do retailers not promote New Zealand wines? 为什么没人卖新西兰红酒?

Without the promotion of business migrants, who would know about Australian wines? 没有商业移民谁会知道澳大利亚红酒?

Further, Bing continues, the health supplement brands, Swisse and Blackmores are household names in China, largely due to the efforts of personal shoppers (*dai gou*). Chemist Warehouse and Swisse now have their own 'shops' on Alibaba's online T-mall (天猫).

Business migrants have digital shopfronts for different types of products, investing even more time and capital into export. This is a **new business model** that is an improvement on the traditional business model where exporters needed to transport goods, set up distribution channels and then pursue sales.

Currently, Bing has over **2,000 individual micro-businesses (微商)** who promote, exchange and sell products through his digital platform. These individuals, *daigou* and business migrants are the ones who excel at **spreading product information and bridging (传播以及桥梁) export gaps.**



### 4.3 Case Study 3: “Australia is my other home”



Image adapted under CC2.0 from © Michael Coghlan/Flickr 2015

**Judy** is one of the respondents who exports wine to China. As many of the professionals and business migrants we spoke to revealed, there are many levels to wine export determined largely by price-points i.e. low, mid and high.

The exporters who deal mainly with low to mid-price points tend to focus on volume and are unafraid to import and experiment. Judy, whose business is based in Guangzhou, imports wine from many parts of the world to attract her high price-point consumers of wine, i.e. existing or aspiring wine connoisseurs.

Judy’s story is not unusual, like many of her contemporaries she first started as an employee learning the ropes of the wine export business from a company based in Melbourne. However, her initial role was as an accountant. Still, when her employer wanted to expand into the China market in 2008, Judy was pressed into being the co-ordinator as she was the **only employee able to speak Mandarin and familiar with Chinese business practices.**

This led eventually to her being promoted to General Manager, where she was fortunate enough to receive sponsorship to pick up further wine appreciation courses in Europe



by the same employer. She returned to work with them after graduation but realised that her ambition to start her own wine label could lead to a conflict of interest she eventually left her benefactor in 2013.

Today she imports 90 % of her stocks from Australia (South Australia, Western Australia and Victoria) and supplements the gaps with imports from France. Judy tells us that at one stage she had 30 individuals doing sales for her business, however, as with many Chinese businesses, Judy has turned to the efficient ‘word-of-mouth’ services of WeChat.

Using the **WeChat Circle** feature, Judy has an exclusive group of 90 people or so who help her promote the wines she brings in on commission. Rather than a retail outlet, which is one option other respondents have talked about, Judy has set up her own **e-commerce site** in the last 2 years and with consistent exposure and marketing through attendance at exhibitions and expos, trade has been steady. WeChat is now the main avenue for sales.

When asked what the **biggest obstacles** are that she’s met with, Judy cites two.

First: issues with packaging of wines from the Australian end. This has led many times to goods being held up at customs. To overcome this obstacle Judy’s company has stopped directly importing wines and **use a broker** instead.

For Judy, this means she can focus on her core mission, which she describes as sharing with her elite clients the knowledge, understanding and appreciation of quality wine. In line with that objective, Judy is now well on her way to obtaining her Master of Wine qualification.

The other obstacle, according to Judy, who generally markets mid to high level wines is the **business style** of Australian wine makers. Australian wine makers are usually very direct and instead of spending effort convincing customers of the quality and class of their wines are **too keen to get on with negotiating prices**.

Chinese buyers tend to be less direct and uncomfortable with such forthrightness. They also prefer to try various wines and compare before committing. This was why, Judy reveals, her experience of having lived in Australia and China enabled her initially to **understand both cultures** and successfully **negotiate** sales for her employer.

To illustrate the difference in approaches between Australian and other winemakers, Judy relates that on one occasion where a group of customers from China arrived at a formal wine event in France without the required suits. The French winery representatives promptly brought these Chinese customers to Valentino and purchased a suit for each prospective customer. In doing so, they deeply impressed these customers and earned their devotion.

**Woored** by the French winery these customers went on to place some very large orders. As Judy puts it, Chinese customers remember how they are treated and thus, stay loyal “**很不忘本**”. Judy adds that French labels are also much more adept at using their **cultural capital** to market their wines, impressing Chinese clients a lot more than Australian winemakers. That is the reason, Judy believes, some customers ask for **\$1 wines** from Australia.

Another example of this **difference in business style** comes from when she was still working for someone else. On this occasion, two containers of very expensive wine were stuck at customs in China and Judy and a colleague were tasked with selling them as soon as possible. The prospective buyer was very late for a dinner meeting and her Australian colleague was angered and insisted on leaving.

Judy counselled **patience and flexibility** as she understood the practice of some bosses in China to habitually keep others waiting and knew that the buyer was actually in need of the shipment of wine they were selling. Their patience and the two containers of wine were eventually sold without problem.

There is, according to Judy, a need for suppliers to **improve their knowledge of China**, rather than rely only on their products to do the talking. Again, the French do things very differently, treating major clients to luxury holidays and meeting with them to discuss the wine at least twice a year. In doing so the French demonstrate an understanding of the obligation that their VIP treatment places on Chinese customers. French wineries are also willing to invest and recruit local people.

Although she intends to extend the range of French wines she represents, Judy insists she “**won’t let go of Australian wines [because] Australia is my other home**”.

**To compete**, Judy suggests the smaller wineries in Australia to **collaborate on a platform** to hold wine-shows and use WeChat. It is important, she stresses, if winemakers don’t have the cultural knowledge to hire Chinese-literate employees to use **WeChat**. However, she cautions that it is not sufficient to have Chinese employees. They must have the requisite knowledge and ability to translate/mediate inter-cultural knowledge capably.



#### 4.4 Case Study 4: Cultural Translator



Image adapted under CC2.0 from © Fruitnet.com/Flickr 2008

**Gina** is in her early 30s and is originally from Guilin, China. She has been working with a major international firm based in Perth for a number of years. She first came to Australia to pursue her studies in accountancy and moved to Perth in 2012 when her then partner found work there. Gina is very active in Australian-China related activities and events and heads one of those initiatives. Initially she started getting involved initially to widen her social circle and networks in Perth.

Recruited by one of the big 4 accountancy firms, Gina, became part of the Chinese Business Practice Group and was **“always the first one to be called upon”** when any of the work involved China. The array of activities she undertook included the translation of documents, research of trends and business development. Gina makes clear that the role she played was one that she **proactively pursued**, spotting a gap in consultation and speaking to the partners to ask for the responsibility.

The training she received allowed her to move into her current role in an Australian-owned international corporation. Looking back, Gina admits **“my knowledge of Chinese business practices and language helped me a lot in my career”** and has been the **“major advantage and value proposition in my career”**. Today, Gina is in charge of strategy and product development, with specific focus on the Chinese market.

Asked how, if any, difference exists between how Chinese and Australians conduct business, Gina observed that Australians are generally more transparent and straightforward when conducting business in a regulated market. Dealing with the far less direct Chinese, however, one needs to **“read between the lines”**.



## **About the researchers**

**Dr Susan Leong (Project Lead)**, DipProdEng, BA(Hons), PhD, GradCert

Susan is a Research Fellow with Curtin University. She is the author of *New Media and the Nation in Malaysia: Malaysianet* (2014). Her current project, *Belonging at the Borders: Diaspora Business in the Age of the Internet*, focuses on provisional business migrants from Mainland China. Susan's research interests are transdisciplinary and especially concerned with the questions of transnational connectivity, migration and belonging.

Susan is a Chief Investigator on the Australia Research Council (ARC) project, *Digital China: from Cultural Presence to Innovation Nation* (2017-2019). She is also the editor of the book series, *Media, Culture and Communication in Asia-Pacific societies* with Rowman and Littlefield International and associate editor of the journal, *Transitions: Journal of Transient Migration*.

### **Professor Michael Keane**

Michael is Professor of Chinese Media and program leader of the Digital China Lab at Curtin University. The Digital China Lab is an important initiative, acknowledging the central role that China plays in Australia's future with both nations looking to secure new sustainable economic models and to break away from reliance on manufacturing and extractive industries respectively. He is the Lead Chief Investigator on the Australia Research Council (ARC) project, *Digital China: from Cultural Presence to Innovation Nation* (2017-2019).

Michael's key research interests are digital transformation in China; East Asian cultural and media policy; and creative industries and cultural export strategies in China and East Asia. His current funded research project with the Australian Research Council (ARC) concerns audio-visual media collaboration (film, TV, animation, documentary and online platforms) in East Asia with a focus on Mainland China.

### **Dr Ling Deng, School of Management, RMIT**

Dr Ling Irene Deng, lecturer and PhD supervisor at School of Management, RMIT University. Dr Deng teaches business management courses across undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and her research focuses on cross-cultural management between China and Australia. In last seven years, Dr Deng has dedicated to research on business migration in Australia. Dr Deng intends to draw particular attention from all stakeholders to Chinese business migrant groups through her research in order to better help business migrants to live and invest in Australia.

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