

## Alumni Profile

# Leading and Learning in Shanghai

By Rosalind Early

When Thomas Cheong, EMBA '13 (Shanghai), entered the Washington University–Fudan University Executive MBA program, he had already been working for 20 years, becoming a CFO at age 32 and a CEO by age 40.

“I wanted to go back to school to recharge and learn new skills to prepare for bigger roles in the second half of my career,” he says. He chose the program because of the reputation of the universities and the opportunity to learn concurrently from a Chinese and American university.

“The professors at both schools were top-notch,” Cheong says. Even today he sits in on lectures when he has time, thanks to the program’s lifelong learning provision.

During the program, Cheong became the class president and won the William Emory Award for Outstanding Leadership.

“I wanted to make the 18-month program as good a learning experience for every participant of the class as it was for myself,” Cheong says about why he took on the leadership role.

His class became the first to have its midterm residency outside of China at the National University of Taiwan in Taipei.

“This has evolved into a midterm residency at the Brookings Institute in the U.S.,” Cheong says. “No other EMBA program

in China offers its participants the opportunity to study and learn at one of the top U.S. think tanks.”

After graduating, Cheong became a CEO at an asset management company in Taiwan. There, he doubled the company’s assets under management in one year by building a strong team, developing a strategic plan for the future and forging productive relationships.

“All the stuff I learned during the EMBA program was put to good use,” he says.

From there, he was headhunted away to be vice president of North Asia for Principal Financial Group, one of the largest pension asset managers in the U.S. and South America. They were looking to grow their operations in Asia. Now, more than 500 individuals report to Cheong.

“I am thankful that the EMBA program — particularly its courses on leadership, strategic thinking, innovation and marketing — has prepared me well for my current role,” Cheong says. “And the friendships and support of fellow participants and the mentorships of professors have also helped me a lot.”

Cheong also gives some of the credit for his path in life to high school teacher Jagit Than, who encouraged him to apply



Thomas Cheong, EMBA '13 (Shanghai), with his son.

for the prestigious Public Service Commission Scholarship from the government of Singapore (his home country), which he won. That enabled Cheong to attend the London School of Economics as an undergraduate.

“Because of her belief in me, my life took a different path,” he says. He’d one day like to have the same impact. “I love teaching and sharing my experiences with others,” he says. “If the opportunity arises, I would like to teach at one of my alma maters to share my experiences of running businesses in Asia.”

## WashU Spotlight

### Bill Xu, Head of the China Office in Shanghai

By Rosalind Early

In May 2015, Chancellor Mark S. Wrighton opened Washington University’s China Office in Shanghai near Fudan University. Since then, the China Office has hosted workshops, provided support and local media coverage for Wrighton and others visiting Beijing and Shanghai, and established a social media presence. Now, more than 1,300 alumni and friends are connected on China’s popular WeChat, an instant messaging platform.

Behind every success is Bill Xu, the head of the China Office.

From 2007 to 2012, Xu worked for the university’s joint EMBA program with Fudan University. He left to head up another China office for a Singaporean

university, but was recruited back by James V. Wertsch, PhD, vice chancellor for international relations and director of the McDonnell International Scholars Academy.

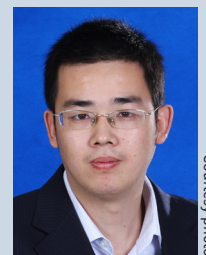
“We were fortunate to recruit Bill. He makes a big difference for us in Shanghai, and China more generally, as we strive to give Washington University the visibility it needs in this part of the world,” says Wertsch, who is also the David R. Francis Distinguished Professor in the Department of Anthropology.

“The main goal of our office is to increase the university’s visibility in China,” Xu says. And it’s working. “When talking with people in China, quite a lot are impressed that we are such a great

university. Previously, they didn’t hear too much about us.”

Xu also organizes alumni events, holds information sessions for WashU’s joint programs with Fudan, helps the admissions office and aids the career development office in locating opportunities for graduates.

“WashU has established official partnerships with some top universities in China, and it’s the biggest market outside of the U.S. for the university,” Xu says. “As the China market becomes more important, the China office will help the university become more firmly established.”



Courtesy photo