

Damian Maib (BSc 2016)

SHORT & SWEET

WHU degree (program/year): **BSc 2016**

Place of residence & work: **Shanghai, China**

Position: **CEO**

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Dear Damian, great to have an interview with you! We have lot of questions for you ;) Let's start with your career after graduating from WHU in 2016. You went straight to Asia, where you have been living for several years now and where you have founded your family. Where does your fascination for China come from?

My fascination for China started at an early age when I was growing up and attending school in Cologne, Germany, around the age of 13. During this time, I was purchasing mini-helicopters from a Chinese trading company and selling them to classmates and online on eBay. This experience led me to my first trip to China in 2007. I was captivated by the rapid pace of development in China and the striking contrasts between modernity and tradition. Everywhere I looked, there were construction sites, which symbolized progress and dynamic change. You could feel the energy and a sense of things constantly evolving. The potential in the air was incredibly exciting to me. Additionally, I found the Chinese people to be very friendly, welcoming, and positive-minded, which left a lasting impression on me.

You are founder and CEO of the e-commerce enabler GENUINE (and Chinapreneur). With your team(s) in Berlin, Shanghai and Hong Kong you support companies/brands in establishing and growing their business in China. Well-known companies such as cosnova (essence and catrice cosmetics), beiersdorf, dm rely on your expertise. Your analyses on market trends have

appeared in prestigious publications such as CCTV, Forbes, and Handelsblatt. What would you describe as the biggest hurdle to entering the Chinese market?

Entering the Chinese market presents several significant hurdles that companies must navigate. To only name a few:

1. Cultural and Language Differences

The cultural differences between China and Western countries are profound and extend beyond language barriers. Understanding these cultural nuances is crucial to avoid missteps in marketing and communication. For instance, knowing which colors auspicious or what phrases are considered respectful can make a significant difference in brand perception and customer engagement.

2. Market Dynamics

China's market is extremely dynamic and operates at a much faster pace compared to many Western markets. This rapid speed of change requires companies to be highly adaptable and responsive. In essence, entering the Chinese market is similar to a 'corporate fitness center'. Agility and the ability to cope with fast-paced developments are essential.

3. Digital Environment and Platform Economy

The digital environment in China is vastly different. Familiar e-commerce and social media platforms like Amazon and Instagram do not exist. Instead, China has its own local giants such as Alibaba, JD.com, WeChat, Pinduoduo, and many more. Even TikTok, which originates from China, has

a different version for the Chinese market called Douyin. Western companies often face the challenge of starting from scratch, learning to navigate these unfamiliar platforms, and adapting their digital marketing strategies to fit the unique digital landscape. This requires significant effort to understand and leverage these platforms effectively to reach Chinese consumers.

And what would you describe as the biggest hurdle to gaining a private foothold in China?

China is a huge country with significant variations from region to region and city to city. Living in Shanghai, one of the most developed cities in China and even the world, I have found it to be an excellent place to call my second home. In Shanghai, you'll find everything you could want or need, from culture and entertainment to food and lifestyle. So it is rather 'easy' to gain a good private foothold. Tho, regional differences can pose challenges in terms of understanding local customs, lifestyles, and even dialects. Embracing new experiences and being willing to adapt to different cultural norms and practices can make the transition much smoother – Improving your Chinese language skills is extremely beneficial. Graduating from WHU gives you an ideal position to adapt comfortably in any private and business situation worldwide. The international exposure and experience gained during your studies equip you with the skills needed to navigate different cultural environments effectively.

Together with Ekkehard Rathgeber (D 1991) you are the group leader of our In Praxi Regional Chapter Shanghai. How does the In Praxi network work in China? Please give us an overview of your activities!

Yes, that's correct. Together with Ekkehard, I have the honor of leading the alumni network here in Shanghai, China. It is fascinating to see how engaged our community is and how it has grown over time, with everyone showing great enthusiasm and support. We organize various types of get-togethers that combine academic stimulation with casual exchanges between alumni from different years, both young and old. These events have been particularly well-received. For example, we recently had the pleasure of visiting the McKinsey office in Shanghai, where our alumnus, [Daniel Zipser \(D 2001, Ph.D. 2006\)](#), who is a senior partner at McKinsey, gave a speech about the Chinese consumer. This was followed by an interactive discussion among our alumni. After the event, we enjoyed some nice bites and drinks together, and were already looking forward to the next alumni-events. Our activities are designed to create a balance between professional development and social interaction. We have a WeChat group that serves as a hub for communication and updates, and I encourage all our alumni visiting Shanghai to reach out and connect with fellow members of the community.

We recently became aware of your podcast 'Made in China', which you host together with Thomas Derksen, the best-known German influencer in China: extremely informative and entertaining at the same time. How did you two come together? And what is the aim of your podcast?

Yes, that's correct. Together with Thomas, who has over 10 million followers on Chinese social media, I host our podcast 'Made in China.' Thomas and I originally met through marketing collaborations, where he created content for our brands and clients. This professional relationship soon developed into a friendship. During the COVID pandemic, we both felt that the gap between China and Germany was widening due to travel restrictions, making it difficult to stay updated on developments in both countries. This situation highlighted the need to bridge the knowledge gap, especially as things were rapidly evolving in China's consumer market. Initially, our podcast focused on Thomas discussing social media marketing and me covering e-commerce. However, we have since adapted the format to include high-profile guests from different industries with extensive experience in the Chinese market. These guests provide valuable advice and insights, helping to create transparency and demystify China for our audience. Our podcast aims to reach a broad audience, from listeners who have never been to China to those who have lived in the country for many decades. We strive to provide up-to-date information and help our listeners stay informed about the fast-paced changes in China.

Is there in particular an episode that you would like to recommend to us?

I'd say that all of our podcasts are great and each has its unique touch. However, for our WHU Alumni, I highly recommend tuning into the story of Ekkehard from one of our earliest WHU graduating classes. He built up the Bertelsmann business in China and later became a successful real estate investor.

'Made in China' podcast
on [open.spotify.com \(episode/57\)](https://open.spotify.com/episode/57)



Finally, do you have a personal message for the alumni?

Well, I can only warmly recommend everyone – whether you've never been to China, visited a few years ago, or are a frequent traveler – to experience China and Shanghai for yourself. And of course, to reach out to us at the In Praxi Regional Chapter! China has many beautiful places to visit and serves as a great source of inspiration with its technological advancements, which some of us might bring back to Germany in one form or another. Let's see!

Damian, thank you for the interview!