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The Leaders Behind the 21 Made-for-China Success Stories

In what follows, I present the snapshots of my interviewees for this book, China's 21 leading entrepreneurs who have developed their companies into top enterprises in their respective industries. Born during the 1950s to the 1970s, they are China's first-generation entrepreneurs. They have witnessed almost every significant Chinese market development, from the reforms towards openness, to the entry of global companies, and the rise of private enterprises.

These entrepreneurs serve as both insightful observers on the evolving Chinese market as well as the best resource as to how they surf the fast-changing business environment in China. Their companies have been growing following China's consumer megatrends—face, family, food, and fun—and are now pushed to evolve, facing even more sophisticated consumers, hyper-competition, and the increasing need to play in the international arena. The later chapters of the book present personal interviews with each of these business leaders, going deeper into how they evolved their businesses, the challenges they faced, and the future they are preparing for.

I present these portraits following the megatrends they represent and follow.

The Face: Accelerating Customer Individuality

Inspiring Consumers' Dreams and Styles: Modern Media—Thomas Shao

A former Guangzhou city government official, Mr. Thomas Shao founded Modern Media Group in 1993. Mr. Shao is a media mogul and a highly respected art collector in China. With more than ten publications including NUMERO, IDEAT, Bloomberg Businessweek China, Modern Media is one of the largest publishing companies in China and was listed in Hong Kong stock exchange in 2009.

Getting that Dream Job: Tarena—Han Shaoyun

Mr. Han Shaoyun founded Tarena, the largest IT training institution in China, in 2002 and has been its CEO ever since. Before that, Mr. Han was the deputy chief engineer and director of the software division of Asia Info-Linkage, responsible for software research and development and corporate management.

Diversifying the Product: GreenTree Inn—Alex Xu

Mr. Alex Xu serves as Chairman and CEO of both GreenTree Hospitality Group, Inc. (USA) as well as GreenTree Inns Hotel Management Group, Inc. (China). In addition to his leadership roles with GreenTree, Mr. Xu also oversees the APH Family of Companies, a California-based real estate investment group.

Brand to Platform: Daphne—Eddie Chen

Eddie Chen is the Chairman and a non-executive director of Daphne International Holdings. Mr. Chen joined the Group in 1992 and assumed the post of GM of Daphne in 1999 and brought Daphne International Holdings to a new epoch. Today, the company has turned around from being a loss-making company to a profitable one, with a presence throughout Greater China, Asia, Europe, and North America.

Boutique Is Beautiful: Grace Vineyard—Judy Chan

Judy Chan, President of Grace Vineyard, graduated from the University of Michigan with a double degree in Psychology and Women's Studies and Organizational Studies. In 2002, Judy resigned from her work at an investment bank in Hong Kong and took over her family business, embarking on her journey of the family-owned boutique winery in China.

High Above the Rest: Toread—Wang Jing

Ms. Wang Jing is the cofounder of Toread, and it took Ms. Wang and her husband Mr. Sheng Faqiang several years of hard work to establish Toread as China's premier outdoor products brand. Ms. Wang is one of China's selected few women mountaineers. She sets down all her climbing exploits on her blog, which is staple reading among China's outdoor enthusiasts.

The Family: Enhancing Quality of Life

Reaching More Households, Offering More Products: Suning—Zhang Jindong

Mr. Zhang Jindong is the founder, and currently the largest shareholder, of China's leading electrical appliances retailing brand, Suning Commerce Group. Mr. Zhang started with a small shop and developed it into a giant business group within less than 20 years and in 2015 the Forbes's China Rich List ranked him at the 28th place.

Households Upgrading Appliances: Haier—Zhang Ruimin

Mr. Zhang Ruimin serves as CEO and Chairman of Haier Electronics Group Co., Ltd. Mr. Zhang acts as a role model for modern Chinese entrepreneurs. He took the reins of the government-controlled company in 1984, which under his leadership has since grown to become what is now the well-known global household appliance brand.

Home Style Dreams: Kuka—Gu Jiangsheng

Mr. Gu Jiangsheng is the CEO of China's leading furniture brand Kuka, a family business in Zhejiang Province he took charge of when he was 29. It only took Mr. Gu 8 years to grow the small local factory of 30 million yuan in production value to a large company with over 2 billion yuan of sales volume and products sold nationwide and globally.

FMCG Premiumization: Liby—Chen Kaixuan

Mr. Chen Kaixuan, born in 1958 in Guangdong, started his business career at 17 and founded Liby when he was 36. With its iconic products like Liby washing power, Liby detergent, and Liby soap, the company has developed its market across China and became a household retailing brand today.

Medical Care Going Private: BYBO—Li Changren

Mr. Li Changren is the founder and president of BYBO Group. In 1993, Mr. Li quit from serving at a public hospital and started his dental medical business in Shenzhen. Mr. Li has been making strenuous efforts in the field of dental healthcare for more than 20 years and is honored as the leader of private dental institutions of China.

Protecting Lifestyle and Loved Ones: NCI—Kang Dian

Mr. Kang Dian served as Chairman and CEO of New China Life Insurance (NCI) from Feb 2009 to Jan 2016. During his tenure, Mr. Kang (in his 60s) directed NCI's transformation and succeeded in bringing the company to be listed in both A-share and H-share market. Before joining NCI, Mr. Kang worked across all verticals of the financial sector in China and is considered one of the most respected leaders in China's financial community.

The Food: Aspiring to a Healthy and Fashionable Diet

Brand Trust: Yili—Pan Gang

Mr. Pan Gang has been Chairman of Inner Mongolia Yili Industrial Group Co., Ltd since June 2005 and served as its President since. Following the leadership of Mr. Pan, Yili reported sales of more than 60 billion yuan in 2016, ranking at the top 8 of world's largest dairy companies.

Supermarket Sophistication: Yonghui—Zhang Xuanning

Mr. Zhang Xuanning is the cofounder and vice chairman of Fujian Yonghui Commercial Co. Ltd, China's leading supermarket brand featuring fresh food with affordable prices. Mr. Zhang started from a small shop in 2001 and took Yonghui to the Shanghai Stock market in 2010.

Urban Fast Food Formats: Gil Wonton—Zhang Biao

Mr. Zhang Biao is the cofounder of China's most popular wonton brand, Gil Wonton. Mr. Zhang started from a humble beginning in a small street shop in Shanghai and turned it into a business of 1.5 billion yuan after 15 years of hard work. Today, Gil Wonton runs over 1000 chain shops across China.

Better Booze: Jing Brand—Wu Shaoxun

Mr. Wu Shaoxun is the founder and Chairman of Jing Brand, the most popular health liquor brand in China. Mr. Wu became the chief of Jing Brand after 7 years of work at a state-owned spinning mill from 1980. In the beginning, Mr. Wu had a modest knowledge of liquor manufacturing, but he has turned the small liquor company into China's largest health liquor brand today.

Turning TCM Classics into FMCGs: GZ Pharma—Li Chuyuan

Mr. Li Chuyuan is the Chairman of the Board in Guangzhou Baiyunshan Pharmaceutical Holdings Co. Ltd, and the Vice President of Guangzhou

Pharma Group. Under Mr. Li's leadership, GZ Pharma has succeeded in recapitalization by listing in Hong Kong and Shanghai stock markets and is today ranked as China's largest pharmaceutical group.

Fun, Entertainment, and Leisure

Curious About the World: Ctrip—Fan Min

Fan Min is one of the cofounders of Ctrip, China's largest online travel booking platform and its President since 2009. He also served as the CEO of Ctrip from 2006 to 2013. During his tenure as Ctrip's CEO, Mr. Fan was the recipient of the Top 10 Great Leaders Award of the Year on the 2010 APEC China SME Value List.

Eater-tainment: Hai Di Lao—Zhang Yong

Mr. Zhang Yong is the founder and president of Sichuan Haidilao Catering Co., the most popular Chinese spicy hotpot chain brand worldwide. The Haidilao chain started from a small singe shop in 1994 and has ever since developed across China and overseas with presence in Japan, Korea, Singapore, Canada, and the USA.

Chinese Hollywood: Wanda—Wang Jianlin

Mr. Wang Jianlin is the founder and chairman of Dalian Wanda Group, China's largest real estate developer, as well as the world's largest movie theater operator. The Economist once called him "*a man of Napoleonic ambition*."¹ According to Bloomberg, in 2015, Mr. Wang was the richest person in Asia with US\$9.9 billion.

Home Entertainment: TCL—Li Dongsheng

Mr. Li Dongsheng became one of the most recognized business leaders in China by founding one of the largest home electronics appliance brands, TCL. Following Mr. Li's leadership, TCL accomplished two landmark acquisitions: Thomson's worldwide television business and Alcatel's worldwide mobile phone business both in 2004.

Note

1. Dalian Wanda—It's a Wanda-ful life, The Economist Print Edition, Feb 12th 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/business/21643123-chinas-biggest-property-tycoon-wants-become-entertainment-colossus-its-wanda-ful-life>

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