

China-World Cultural Exchange Series



# DREAMING BIG IN CHINA



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who have made it



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# DREAMING BIG IN CHINA



绿杨

By Lu Yang



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# Preface

Chinese or foreigner, each one has a dream which he or she strives to realize.

On August 8, 2008, when the Olympic torch was lit in the Bird's Nest (the National Stadium), China's long-cherished Olympic dream finally came true. The Olympic slogan "One World, One dream" had already become familiar in the streets of Beijing, and "Welcome to Beijing" became the most frequently used catch phrase of the city in 2008.

This year, 2008, was also a year for foreigners to build, seek and realize their dreams, and Beijing was the place where their dreams came true, which could be seen from the many world and Olympic records that were broken.

The world will never forget the scene at the Olympic opening ceremony, when 3,000 young Chinese men appeared dressed as Confucius's 3,000 disciples and reading the sage's *Analects*. One of the famous sayings from the *Analects*, "Far and near, we are one family," resounded over the Bird's Nest, showing Chinese hospitality to friends from afar. At the Olympic Games people found that China was an ideal place to realize their dreams.

Hospitality has been a Chinese tradition for thousands of years. The Olympic athletes and tourists in China all felt the sincerity of their hosts. Many athletes held banners reading, "Thank you, China," and many tourists used different ways to express their thanks and favorable impressions to the Chinese people. Despite the disastrous snowstorm and distressing earthquake



in China earlier in the year, and the inhospitality shown during the torch relay outside the Chinese mainland, the Chinese people still welcomed and received friends from all around the world with sincerity. “The world used to wait for China to integrate, but today China is patiently waiting for the world to get to know her,” said Fu Ying, Chinese ambassador to Britain.

Every person who has visited China, either for a quick tour or a long stay, can sense China’s dramatic changes, which have taken place in the past 30 years of reform and opening-up, as long as an objective view is taken. The biggest developing nation in the world, in spite of certain problems and imperfections, is young, vigorous and hopeful. This vast land of 9.60 million square kilometers may be not rich enough, but it is a place suitable for planting dreams. And quite a few wise people have already harvested fruits which have by no means a lower value than Olympic medals.

In the initial stage of the reform and opening-up, the “American dream” and “Japanese dream” tempted many Chinese to go overseas. But now some of them have come back. Many foreigners have also found that in China they could also design their life and realize their dreams. “Chinese dream” is not listed in everyday vocabulary yet, but whether it will become a frequently used word is a matter for conjecture. Many Chinese went abroad, learned advanced technology and ideas there, and returned to build careers in China. These people have formed a distinct social group—the overseas-educated. Likewise, many foreigners have come to China with their dreams and love for Chinese culture. Indeed, some have taken China as their homeland. Isn’t this the charm of the “Chinese dream”?

Western countries are too developed to have enough opportunities for improvement. Compared to them, developing countries offer more opportunities and challenges. Take China, for example. Her unprecedented

changes over the last 30 years have brought to both the nation and individuals a host of possibilities for development. The overseas-educated, foreigners and native Chinese are all citizens of the global village, and are facing unprecedented chances. We hope that all the people tilling this land will reap a good harvest.

This book continues the genre of *Living in China*. The authors interviewed 19 foreign friends who study or work in China, and was touched and edified by their stories about their different Chinese dreams, big and small. Some of those dreams have been realized, while others are still in progress. Their stories show different experiences and life values, and reflect some of the realities of today's China. In fact, people who have lived in China for a while are more authoritative about what kind of a country China is and what kind of a nation the Chinese people are. We, as well as the foreign friends interviewed, cherish the common with that their stories may help friends from all around the world have a better understanding of new China, fill the gaps in the global village and melt the ice between different peoples.

In 2008 the Chinese people came to realize that there was a disturbingly thick wall between China and the rest of the world. However, when they saw the astronauts of the Shenzhou VII spacecraft walking in outer space they were convinced that any barrier could be overcome. Why not go and ask those foreigners living and working in China? They may give you the correct answer, because in China they can feel that a new sun rises every day, and dreams are being realized every day.

Lu Yang

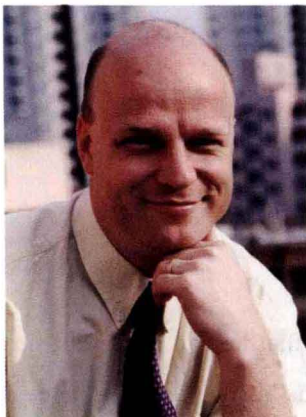
October 5, 2008

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### **Personal File**

**Name:** Johan Björkstén

**Chinese Name:** Dalong (Big Dragon)

**Nationality:** Swedish

**Occupation:** TV Host, entrepreneur

**Time in China:** 17 years

## **Big Dragon's Sky**

Dalong likes a hectic life. The young Swede first came to China because he was fascinated by the country's fabulous dynamism. He was interested in China's language and culture, but mainly wanted to start his own business in an exciting new market. At the time, he probably never imagined that his outgoing, humorous personality would end up making him a local TV and showbiz celebrity. Today, he is famous even in PR business circles for his ability to bring fun and cheerfulness to work. People tend to enjoy themselves when Dalong is around. I personally suspect that he left Sweden because his own country was simply not exciting enough for him. He came to China just to "join the fun".

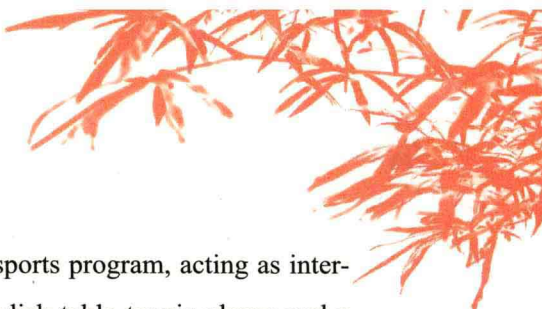


He speaks such excellent Chinese that he can quote classical citations and poetry by heart, and he easily holds his own even in fierce debates with the most glib professional Chinese TV anchors. He has written several textbooks on the language. But his accomplishments in the business field are even more extraordinary: Dalong has founded three companies, was a co-founder of the Swedish Chamber of Commerce in China and has managed to find time to write books on management and communications, in addition to managing his own businesses. He has a dream: “I cannot become Chinese, but I hope one day to be an honorary Beijing citizen.”

### *Grass doesn't grow on a well-traveled road*

Many music lovers still remember Dalong's radio shows featuring Scandinavian music. At a time when China was just opening up to foreign music and culture, listeners broadened their visions to an unfamiliar realm of music. Later, he hosted his own music show on Beijing TV, and taught cooking on the popular program “I Love Western Food.” CCTV and many provincial TV stations have invited him to host their programs.





I saw Dalong for the first time on a TV sports program, acting as interpreter for Jan-Ove Waldner, the leading Swedish table tennis player and a local megastar. China is “the Kingdom of Table Tennis”, and Waldner was here to meet local fans. For almost two decades he had played against seven generations of top Chinese players. He won gold medals in the men’s singles events in all major events, including the Olympics. He was the first “grand slam” winner in the world. No other non-Chinese player has reached the same level, and in China only Liu Guoliang and Kong Linghui have won as many medals as Waldner. His strong spirit, never admitting defeat, together with unexpected tactics and unique skills, earned him a reputation for being a “guerrilla leader”. Later, when he continued to outperform generation after generation of Chinese opponents, he became known by the respectful nicknames of Lao Wa: *Old Waldner and The Evergreen*.

Waldner always creates a great sensation wherever he goes in China. But on the TV show, my attention was captured by his young and lively interpreter. With his accurate and vivid translation, plus an ad-lib remark now and then, Dalong raised the level of the show from a regular sports interview to a lively and cheerful meeting with a beloved sports icon. I especially noticed Dalong’s Chinese idiomatic vocabulary and flawless pronunciation; if you closed your eyes, you would never have been able to tell that this was a fair-haired, blued-eyed foreigner speaking.

Actually, I also noticed that his “golden hair” was not that thick any more, as he was getting a bit bald on top. This was a bit out of keeping with his sunny, young face, and reminded me of an oft-quoted remark by Ge You, the bald Chinese movie star: “Grass doesn’t grow on a well-traveled road.”

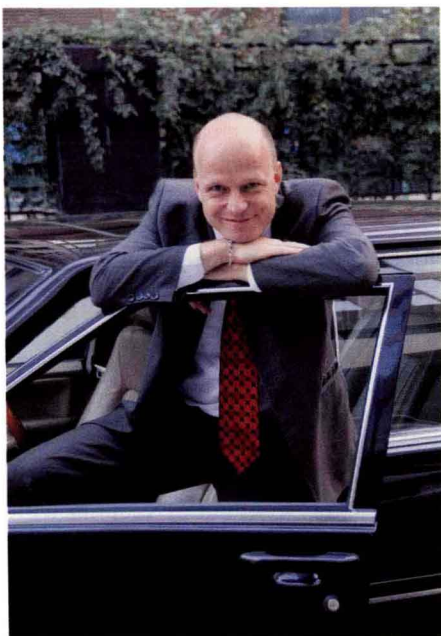
Chinese people like smart guys. That may be one explanation why







Dalong is so popular in China. Da Shan, a well-known comedian from Canada, is usually quoted as the model of foreign students learning Chinese; “Your Chinese is as good as Da Shan’s” is the highest complement on fluency in the language. So I was very surprised when I first heard Dalong on television. My first thought was that “here is a guy who speaks even better than Dashan.” But Dalong’s faultless Mandarin is just one facet of his linguistic talents: In addition to his native Swedish, he is also fluent in English, French, German and Russian. And there is more to his smarts than language: he has a Master of Science in Molecular Dynamics, has dabbled in opera, was the vocalist of his own rock band and has even managed to attain a modest proficiency in Chinese calligraphy. In addition, he has been a successful radio DJ with his own weekly music show, and a skilled amateur

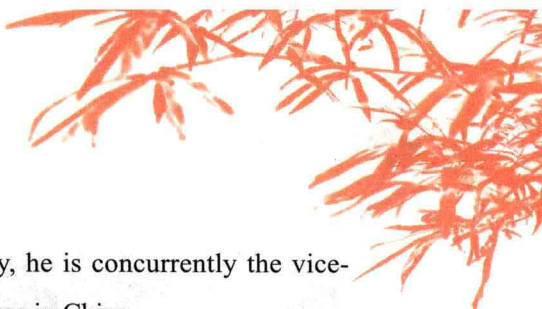


Balding Johan looks cool.

chef, having produced and hosted of weekly cooking classes on TV for more than four years, in addition to hosting his own music video and home furnishing shows. Local producers often invite him to host other local programs, as he is known for contributing to high ratings. He has penned well-received books on how to learn and write Chinese, and even written a book, in Chinese, on public relations in China. As the founder and chairman of his latest







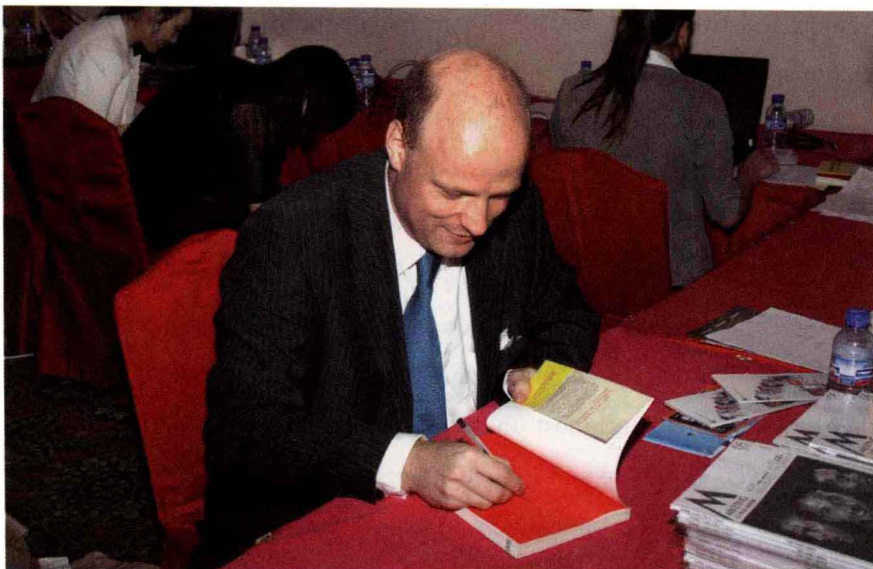
venture, Eastwei Relations, a PR consultancy, he is concurrently the vice-chairman of the Swedish Chamber of Commerce in China.

How does he do it, one wonders? “I always try to find gaps and opportunities, whether doing business, writing books or producing TV shows,” Dalong says. He is also fiercely competitive, and does his best to be at the top of everything he does.

So is he the most famous Swede in China? Probably, but after Waldner of course. After that TV show I started to pay attention to Dalong, and found that he was a frequent guest on TV shows all over the country. Swedish soccer players Mellberg and Ljungberg are well known among local soccer lovers, but it is hard to judge their popularity outside football circles. Most people in China have little idea of who Carl XVI Gustaf, the King of Sweden, is. But the number of Chinese who know Dalong is probably many times the total population of Sweden.

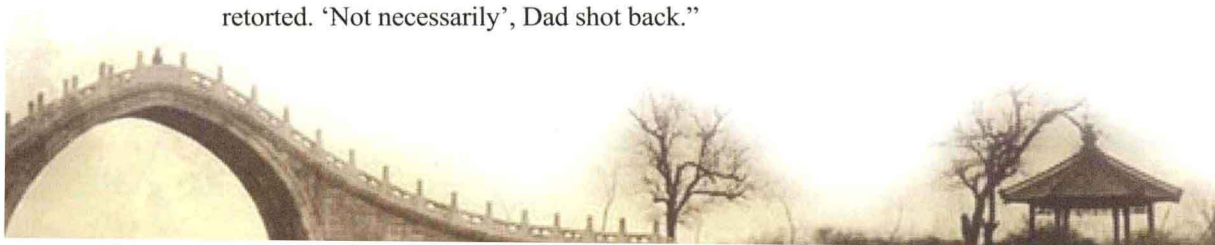
Behind the celebrity surface is a successful business story. Dalong’s entrepreneurial career in China has been mostly smooth, particularly since his Eastwei company was set up. This company is now seen as something of a benchmark for the local PR industry. His book, *PR, Chinese Style*, written in Chinese for local PR practitioners, is seen as the standard textbook by Chinese colleagues, and as a guide to the Chinese market by foreign colleagues. It has been reprinted time and again. Some media reports even claim that Dalong has “reinvented China’s PR industry”, though he himself has repeatedly stated that there was no “reinvention” to speak of and that he just wanted to put forth some ideas “for people to think about”. He is highly regarded for his accomplishments and for his generosity in sharing his experience with others.





Autographing his new book *PR, Chinese Style*.

Not long ago, I met Dalong in his Eastwei office. He hadn't changed much since I first saw him on TV, still wearing the same kind of friendly smile. But I did notice that there had been a tendency for the bald spot to expand. His close-cropped hair added an element of coolness to his scholarly demeanor. The shining forehead seemed more eye-catching than on TV, but he didn't seem self-conscious about this. Asked if early baldness had something to do with family genes, he said it was not related to heredity. "My grandfather was thick-haired and my father's hair is pretty bushy," he said. "My baldness started when I was only a teenager. Grandpa was more than six feet two, and father is a little bit shorter than grandpa but still taller than I. The height and hair thickness of our three generations tend to decrease. "'Stature gets smaller. Hair gets thinner,' Dad used to sigh when I was in my twenties. 'But head gets smarter,' I retorted. 'Not necessarily', Dad shot back."





## *The smart guy has great originality*

In fact, Dalong's father never made light of his son's intelligence. But he may not have foreseen his son's colorful experience which would lead to such a great reputation in China.

Dalong was born in Lund, a university city in Sweden, in 1964, a Year of the Dragon, according to the Chinese calendar. Father, of Finnish origin, and mother, a Swede, are both graduates of the city's university. Dalong has two younger sisters and an adopted younger brother from Korea. A couple of years ago, his recently retired father was working in Estonia. As a well-known professor of pediatrics, his father also travels widely around the world giving lectures. The family hobby of traveling around the world "internationalized" him, Dalong said.

Perhaps his future fame TV host and Radio DJ could also have been foretold from an early age. He manifested this potential even when he was in elementary school. The first graders organized an auction of coffee, bread and biscuits to earn pocket money for extracurricular activities. Little Johan acted as an earnest auctioneer. Gavel in hand, possibly the youngest auctioneer in history, he displayed his ability to take charge of future gatherings and created a long-lasting, untiring conversation topic for his grandmother, which she would recall again and again over the coming years.

Sweden is a beautiful country. As a kid, Dalong would go biking with his father to explore the deep, dense forests. He would also often watch ice hockey, his little hand in Dad's, heartily cheering for his local team while







enjoying a hot dog. All these are wonderful childhood memories. But it was also Dad who gave him his first contact with Chinese culture by taking him to a Chinese restaurant at age seven. “As soon as I stepped inside, I was instantly immersed in a rich foreign culture—beautiful calligraphy and paintings, and splendid carved roof beams,” he said. “It was so different, so exciting. From that first moment I was immediately interested in the 5,000-year-old culture of this great country.” The delicious Chinese food was probably the strongest temptation. After a bit of fiddling around, and some help from the service staff, young Johan learned to wield chopsticks, a skill he later liked to show off to his schoolmates and friends.

But Johan also had early cultural interests. Although his passion for Chinese cuisine has remained to this day, he would also go to museums to see Chinese cultural relics, learning to appreciate Chinese calligraphy and painting. Although he didn’t have the chance to study Chinese culture systematically, these early activities laid the preliminary foundation for him to be a future China expert.

Chinese usually call boys of about 14 years old “cubs”, conveying a mixed feeling of love and annoyance. We say teenagers can “make devils cry”. There are some well-behaved kids, but they are few and far between. I believe teenagers from other countries are probably no better behaved than Chinese kids. In his famous opera “Le Nozze di Figaro”, Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais describes a young Cherubino as “a kid whom all mothers under heaven would dream of and all mothers under heaven would have a headache with.” It shows that “bad people are bad all over the world” and all imps are “mischievous” everywhere.

But at 14, Johan was instead busy setting up his first organization. At

