

RUSSELL REYNOLDS ASSOCIATES

Leadership, Succession and Search

Russell Reynolds Associates, a global executive search and assessment firm, announced the creation of its China Desk, a new resource dedicated to providing comprehensive guidance on leadership and talent management issues to Chinese firms expanding and acquiring businesses outside of China, and to Western firms operating in a more competitive China market. The China Desk will be headed by [Benjamin Zhai](#) who joined the firm this week to lead this initiative.

Before joining Russell Reynolds Associates, Mr. Zhai was based in Beijing and Shanghai, where he led the Industrial Practice Group of another leading global executive search firm. Prior to that, he led the Beijing office of global consulting firm A.T. Kearney, working extensively in China and Australia. He started his career as director of information management with a Chinese manufacturer, Luo Yang Float Glass Corporation, and later joined Medal Technologies Inc, a Chinese-based technology start-up with U.S. venture backing, where he rose to vice president. Mr. Zhai is an inaugural member of the Aspen Institute's China Fellowship Program.

"For most of the last thirty years, the flow of talent and investment between China and the rest of the world has largely moved from West to East," said Zhai. "But now, Chinese companies are acquiring Western firms and becoming global players in their own right. At the same time, Western multinational corporations doing business in China are facing a more competitive market for top talent and a tougher regulatory environment. The China Desk will help both sets of companies navigate these significant changes."

The China Desk will be headquartered in New York and act as a Western-based point of contact for Chinese state-owned and private enterprises and for Western firms with operations in China. Working in tandem with the firm's offices in Beijing, Hong Kong and Shanghai, the China Desk will provide advice on potentially sensitive issues such as:

- Assisting Chinese companies in conducting due diligence on the management teams of potential acquisition targets
- Helping Western companies compete more successfully for top talent in China, and to develop and retain high-potential Chinese talent
- Working with the leadership of the Chinese acquirers and senior management of the acquired entities, to reach a comfort level with each other more quickly and mitigate potential cultural conflict and other impediments to successful integration
- Advising both Chinese and Western companies on how the political, cultural and economic aspects of each environment impact their leadership assessment, search and retention strategies.

"As the interplay between China and the rest of the world becomes more balanced, it also becomes more complex," said Clarke Murphy, CEO of Russell Reynolds Associates. "Merely explaining emerging China to the developed West is no longer enough. Chinese and Western organizations are now found on both sides of key business transactions, and the China Desk reflects this reality."

"The insight that Ben provides is incredibly valuable to companies working across China/Western borders," notes Christophe Tellier, Global Sector Leader for Russell Reynolds Associates. "Ben is a Chinese national who has worked extensively with Chinese companies with global operations, and with global companies based in the U.S. and Europe that have Chinese market aspirations - because of that, Ben truly understands all sides of these nuanced business relationships, and the ever-evolving leadership and talent implications for these organizations."

The establishment of the China Desk follows the launch of Russell Reynolds Associates' Digital Transformation Practice in January. Both initiatives are in response to an increasing need for resources that transcend traditional categories and that are more closely aligned with the complex challenges and opportunities faced by businesses today.

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