

CHINA CROSSROADS

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From Dot-Com to Mobile to AI: What's Hype, What's Real, and What Transforms Business?

Barbara Ex

Co-Founder of Kinematic Systems

Founder and Former CEO of WhiteSpace

Former Senior Executive at Lenovo and IBM

Ling Li

Co-Founder of Kinematic Systems

Moderator and Educator

Harvard Business Impact Enterprise

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History doesn't repeat itself — but it rhymes. While AI can feel like the ground is being pulled from underneath us, it is actually following a recognizable pattern of tech transformation. First comes the hype, jargon, and urgency, and everyone piles in. But does AI really make a difference — or does it simply add more noise? And how will all of this help improve the fundamentals of business? Barbara and Ling have been here before. Websites did not transform companies by themselves, mobile did not matter just because smartphones existed, and AI will not deliver value simply because a model can produce an impressive answer. This session explores what makes the current AI wave genuinely different — but also how to connect AI to the real operating system of the business.

[Barbara Ex](#) is a Founder of Kinematic Systems, dedicated to supporting leaders in successfully transforming their business through AI. Many Shanghai residents will recognize her as the former Founder and CEO of WhiteSpace, which offers on-demand team space - professionally operated external space for regular meetings, town halls, presentations, trainings sessions, and seminars. Barbara grew WhiteSpace from initial concept to 13 locations in China before exiting in 2024. Before launching WhiteSpace, she had a long career in operations management and strategic consulting. She served as Executive Director of Business Transformation at Lenovo in Beijing. In the 1990s, she was a Principal Consultant at IBM, where she pioneered B2B e-business models in the manufacturing industries. Barbara holds an MBA from London Business School and Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Chemical Engineering from MIT.

[Ling Li](#) is a Founder of Kinematic Systems, dedicated to helping business leaders understand and apply AI in practical, business-relevant ways. Ling brings a cross-disciplinary background across technology, business transformation, education, and the creative industries. She began her technology career in systems architecture and digital transformation at Accenture, working on enterprise architecture, mobile salesforce tools, and location-based digital solutions. She was also involved in adapting early neural-network-based predictive models for major Chinese enterprises. Ling is a Moderator and Educator for Harvard Business Impact Enterprise, where she facilitates global leadership and management programs offered by Harvard Business School. She previously served as Director of Organization, Strategy & Improvement for Ferrero Greater China, working across business and process improvement, strategic planning, organizational development, and commercial expansion. Ling holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Chemical Engineering from MIT and a Master of Music Degree in Film Scoring from Berklee College of Music.

[China Crossroads](#) hosts talks on all topics related to China, including business, foreign policy, and other areas as they relate to China, the idea being that China is both already a “crossroads” of the world and itself at a “crossroads” in terms of its future global influence. For more information, contact Frank Tsai at editor@shanghai-review.org.