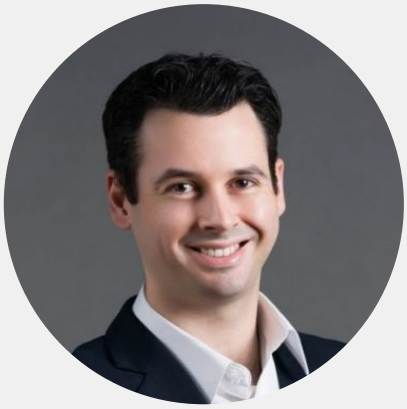
# Stéphane Péden – General Manager, Chamber of Commerce and Industry France Taiwan



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*Stéphane P*

*éden, general manager of the Chamber of Commerce & Industry France Taiwan (CCIFT), describes how the Chamber facilitates business relations between France and Taiwan, the challenges faced by French companies setting up operations in Taiwan, and the numerous opportunities that Taiwan has to offer the French business community.*

**Could you please start by introducing yourself and your role as general manager of the CCIFT?**

I came to Taiwan eight years ago with a French company which was testing running tracks. We were trying to set up a laboratory in Asia but importing our machinery to Taiwan was quite complicated because there is no Taiwan-European ATA Carnet which permits the tax-free and duty-free temporary export and import of nonperishable goods. Finally, the company decided to set up in Guangzhou and I decided to stay in Taiwan to move forward with my entrepreneurship activities.

For a year and a half, I combined setting up a company with a part-time job at CCIFT. I became business development manager, then deputy general manager and finally general manager two and a half years ago. I started to expand the business development department, helping French companies access the Taiwan market and find partners like distributors, importers and suppliers.

We also focused on filling-up our business centre which was a success as we opened a new one two months ago – now we have 850m$^2$ in two locations. We created a new service to help French and international companies set up in Taiwan, through support in company creation, parallel management, VAT refund, and head hunting. The CCIFT has significantly grown over the last decade; our Gala gathers 450 attendees, our Beaujolais Nouveau event 700, and we now have nine employees compared to three eight years ago.

**How would you say the attractiveness of Taiwan from the perspective of French companies has evolved in recent years?**

Taiwan is a bit misunderstood in France, so starting as a business developer at CCIFT I went and visited other regional Chambers to promote Taiwan. With the support of Japan, Hong Kong, and China CCI I explained Taiwan's unexploited market potential. If some French companies could not go to China because the market is too big, or if they were already in Japan or Korea, I invited them to consider coming to Taiwan to test the market. This was one way to eventually find the right partner and enter China market through Taiwan. It is very hard to compete with these Asian countries, but when companies understand Taiwan's potential they start to be interested. Nevertheless, Taiwan still needs promotion among French companies.

Most people who come to Taiwan want to stay, but because of regulations, it is very hard for foreigners to find a job in Taiwan. To hire a foreigner a company must have at least EUR 100,000 (USD 112,450) capital and EUR 200,000 (USD 224,800) turnover. Furthermore, salaries are also quite low in comparison. Therefore, for the past five years, many foreigners tend to set up their own companies. Our members used to be mostly large companies like Carrefour, Decathlon and Air Liquide, but half of them are now entrepreneurs. They first go to the French Tech and register with CCIFT when they are mature enough. Additionally. with around 3,000 students in Taiwan, France has the biggest European student population. In the future, we hope to see Taiwan become even more appealing to French businesspeople.

**Throughout our meetings with general managers and CEOs, a common challenge they face is attracting and hiring international professionals. What is CCIFT's position to help Taiwan-based companies attract foreign professionals and experts?**

First off, we organize several business networking events with our members to help both Taiwanese and French workers find potential job opportunities. CCIFT also hired a HR manager who supports our members in finding the right talent. Rather than go through head-hunters who provide piles of resumes, CCIFT targets relevant profiles to what a company is looking for. This service helps us retain our corporate members because retaining talent in Taiwan is a huge challenge, especially as there is almost no unemployment. To attract French entrepreneurs, we offer a certain continuity in our services and developed a platform to help them find partners in Taiwan, set up any business structure like a limited liability or subsidiary, and recruit. In addition, we can take responsibility for administrative parts such as employees' registrations and payments.

**What are the key challenges French companies must face when doing business in Taiwan?**

Recruitment is absolutely the key challenge along with Taiwan's lack of international recognition. This is sometimes problematic for temporarily importing certain material. Goods for an exhibition, for example, must be recognized by a Taiwan-European ATA Carnet, otherwise, companies have to pay complete import taxes.

Turnover and retaining employees are also a major issue for companies. As unemployment is structurally very low in Taiwan, people can easily switch between companies for any reason. In addition, recent government regulation has reduced flexibility in work conditions similar to France.

**President Tsai's 5+2 policy aims to foster the development of local, innovative industries to build the new economic model of Taiwan. What role do you see for French companies in achieving this goal?**

French companies are traditionally innovative and the French government is actually pushing to increase innovation. The French Tech initiative in Taiwan, supported by the French Embassy, CCIFT, and Business France, creates a collaborative French community, where entrepreneurs can share their innovations along with their R&D and biotechnology expertise with Taiwan. French industry is evolving and moving towards higher added value, so we can combine our new technology with Taiwan's expertise in hardware and semiconductors. For example, French companies can come with new technologies like lasers and machinery and apply them to semiconductors. Furthermore, most of the software developers in Taiwan are either hired by big companies like Asus and HTC or

attracted by China. French developers are quite good so they could come here to sell innovative software for the hardware produced in Taiwan.

**In Taiwan, most companies among the thriving local biotech industry obviously consider Europe to be a key market for expansion. However, most of these companies still are SMEs. To what extent can CCIFT operate as a door opener for these local companies to choose France as their entry point into the EU?**

Our expertise is mostly to accompany French companies in the Taiwan market, but we can put them in touch with regional Chambers of Commerce networks in France to help them access the market. Usually, we advise them to invest in France through the organization Business France. We are all part of the France Export team, so we can direct them towards the correct department.

**What are your strategic priorities to ensure French companies continue to expand their activities in Taiwan and the trade relationship between the two economies continue to flourish in the upcoming years?**

The CCIFT will continue to act as a bridge, improving market access and offering more facilities like our business centre for entrepreneurs to set up their companies. We also want to develop our service range and organize more networking events so that business stakeholders can find the right partners in Taiwan and more easily share their innovations.

To successfully answer the community needs, we must adapt to the trends of the rapidly evolving Taiwan market. We will also keep supporting French initiatives like French Tech, especially considering the emersion of fintech. Furthermore, we are supporting the recent launch of the “French Healthcare” export label; a public-private initiative designed to boost the promotion of French healthcare products.

Of course, we will still need to continue promoting Taiwan for more recognition of the market potential from the French government. Taiwan has become the second market in renewable energy after Europe when no French companies appear in this ranking. Nevertheless, France can help Taiwan in terms of circular economy and environmental values as these are areas which we are both exploring currently.

**What final message would you like to address to our readers?**

Come take a look at Taiwan if you do not know the country. It is an interesting market despite sometimes being forgotten and there is plenty of space here for French industry, products and services. Be prepared before coming to make sure your business can answer the market demand. Doing business in Taiwan is not only about coming and trying to sell, but rather about being a trusted supplier to support the French image. In the future, Taiwan will continue to develop as a strategic business platform in Asia.

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