



# The Factory Salesgirl

By Ben Chu



It is at 1 pm in a factory located in Taizhou. In a dark and small office of 6, while most of her colleagues are taking their afternoon nap, Jenny is an exception. Already she has had a long morning.

She checked inventory in the warehouse by herself as she could not get a reliable figure from her ERP system. Then she sent an email to her customer to explain all the quality problems of the last batch.

Although she is as tired as everyone, she learned to develop a habit of skipping afternoon nap (which is very common for factory staff). Instead, she spends her precious rest time logging in an online learning platform, where she is taking lessons on the trading business. She continues her study after returning to the dormitory in the evening and at weekends, as she cannot have easy access to entertainment in this remote industrial zone.

This is her first year after graduating from a local college, and life does not turn out the way she expected. Jenny, a nickname for work, was graduated in English major for her bachelor's degree. Born in the late '90s, Jenny sees her career in a way far different from her parent's generation. Instead of being merely money-orientated, she is looking for something more.

"This job allows me to understand the world better," said the 23 years old. "We are the 1% of Chinese who could fluently communicate with the world in English. Opportunity belongs to us".

Icicle, another "salesgirl" who left and rejoined the international trading industry within a year, has a different view of her career. "I love to travel, but not the typical type. This job allows me to explore the world more than any other else." Working in an office in Huaqiangbei, downtown in Shenzhen city, Icicle enjoys the work-life balance that her job could offer. After 6 pm, she could leave office and go to her dancing studio, where she spends a couple of hours with her friends for their favorite activity.

Young people who work as an international trader, usually referred as "Chinese sales girls" by overseas customers, is a community worth more attention. Experienced buyers would agree on the importance of having support from a good "salesgirl", as they are usually the only one you are able to contact directly with your supplier. Nevertheless, it takes some luck to meet a professional one who can really shoulder the responsibility of the linkage.

About education, most of them graduated from either English language or International business. Having said that, the core skills necessary for the real job, like business communication and manufacturing operation, are often missed in college education. "It virtually starts from the very beginning," said Jenny. "Textbook in school tries to give us a bird-eyes view on everything, but it is not practical to our daily work. That's why I need to pay

for my online course." Last year Jenny spent about 10K RMB (≈ 1.5K USD) on learning online, which equals to almost two months of her basic salary.

"Not only the money you spend, but also the quality time you spend on studying online. For me, it is still worthy. I hope to start my own business before my 30s, so I need to push myself to be more competitive than peers".

Being an ordinary junior international trader could be tough. According to our questionnaire in January 2020, of 2000 respondents of all ages and years of trader experience, 40% of them earn less than \$15K per annual (before tax). For those living in major city like Guangzhou and Shenzhen, cost of living is nothing negligible.

Except for salesperson working in factory, most trading companies do not provide their staff with dormitory. They need to look for their own shelter by either living in the most remote possible location and spend more than 1hour commuting, or looking for roommate that is not too disturbing. And in most cases, both. "I share my apartment with 2 other girls, and each of us spends 1300 RMB (\$185) per month for rent. Not too bad". Said Icicle who chooses to work in Shenzhen, one of the most expensive cities in terms of cost of living. "I can still manage to save some money for my future. I think working as SOHO could be a good idea for a longer term."

Despite low salary, poor working condition and high pressure, the international trading industry is still attractive to the young generation. Although the internet and financial sector are getting to be the top layer of young Chinese career choice, reasons like world culture, freedom and travel are still attractions that make international trading a great option.

Today, while entrepreneurship is hot among younger's mind, trading worldwide offers an excellent opportunity to start a business. With 3-8 years of experience, a junior trader could have achieved certain level of success in their career. Some become key managers of a factory, some enjoy being a top sale and refuse to take up management roles, while some decide to start their own trading business, either with a team or as a SOHO, which means working from their home as a one-man-band. This is a colorful career, as it always is.