

Made in China Insider's Guide

WOMEN POWER IN CHINA

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Made in China Insider's Guide Women Power in China

CONTENTS



PREFACE	01
LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT	02
LETTER FROM THE EDITOR	03
WOMEN POWER IN CHINA	04
EMERGING FROM THE SHADOWS	06
WOMEN AT WORK	10
BUILDING THEIR BUSINESSES	14
SOFT POWER OF CHINESE WOMEN	22
LITTLE WOMEN	24
THE SOFT POWER OF CHINESE WOMEN	32
LIVING IN CHINA	36
BEING AN AMERICAN-CHINESE LBN IN CHINA	38
GIRL POWER	42
MS. MADE-IN-CHINA.COM	46
MS. MADE-IN-CHINA.COM	48
FOCUS TECHNOLOGY	54

Chief Editor: Mimi Wei
Content contributor: Marco Jaggi
Designer: Zhang Yan
Photo by Jiang Xiao, CFP

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT OF MADE-IN-CHINA.COM



Women living in China are lucky: female students go to school and have access to higher education; career women are given equal opportunities at work; wives stay at home taking care of the family are valued and respected for their devotion. Women in China benefit greatly from the fast economy development.

At Made-in-China.com, the company I have been working for over 14 years, 50% of the employees are women and nearly 40% of the top management are female. Our customers, Chinese factories, have a similar situation. On my factory visits I am very often greeted by the friendly smile of a female boss. These women leaders are often successful both in business and at home. Working women in China value family a lot. They are often the iron lady at work and turn into a sweet house wife and mother at home.

Chinese women are often warm and friendly, sometimes even slightly shy. They are very matter of fact and reliable. You will enjoy working with Chinese women when sourcing in China.

Welcome to China and we are always happy to help you when you need our help.

Sincerely,

Lijie Li, Vice President

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



One beautiful early autumn afternoon, I met an old lady at Nanjing University, where she was sewing pants in her small tailor shop. Her hair was all grey and looking at her hands one could see that they must have been working for a very long time. She told me that she was 94 years old! I was surprised how she could still do sewing work at her age. "I have been working for 80 year," she smiled. "I learned sewing when I was very young and I raised my whole family by the work of my hands. Now we are living a good life but I still want to work and I love talking to young students. They call me grandma."

Just then a young student ran into the tailor shop, a tall and sunny boy. He passed his sports sweater to grandma, "grandma, the zipper needs fixing". Grandma took the sweater close to her eyes for a check, and started to mend the zipper. Within two minutes, the sweater was fixed. As the boy was putting on his sweater, grandma looked at him with a warm smile and said: "Boy it's getting cold outside. Put on more clothes or you'll catch a cold."

Too bad I didn't bring my camera with me that day. I wish I could have taken a photo of that 94 years old grandma. She truly stands for women power in China, small but energetic, soft but strong.

Sincerely,

Mimi Wei

WOMEN POWER IN CHINA



EMERGING FROM THE SHADOWS - THE CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN IN CHINA'S HISTORY

For the main part of China's history, women were dominated by a patriarchic system and forced to a background role. Only in recent history have they reached a more equal position in Chinese society and started to visibly shape the countries destiny. We take a look at how woman have stepped out of the shadows to become one of the pillars of China's current development success.

As in every great culture, women have played an important role in shaping and moving China's history. However, for the greater part of the nearly 5000 years, women had to sit in the back seat and were confined to the shadows of the countries great developments. For thousands of years, women have been part of a feudalist, patriarchic society dominated by a strict hierarchy of men. The female poet Tsai Yen clearly outlines this relationship around 200 A.D.: „In childhood, a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons – a woman must never be independent.“

► Girls in rich families were taught poetry, instruments, singing, calligraphy and maintaining their beauty, not to self-entertainment or pleasure, but to become a desirable bride, capable of entertaining their future husband out



A woman's life was aligned along the rules and needs of men and the extended family. The birth of a boy was generally more valued as that of a girl. Raising a girl meant, that the family would have to find a husband – involving the bride's family offering an expensive dowry to the groom – and then having her leave the family forever. Daughters were therefore considered costly and of little value to increase a family's wealth or influence. Independent of a family's social status, a woman's main purpose was to bare children – preferably sons – and to take care of husband, elders and children. Despite that, the role and duties would vary strongly, depending on how wealthy or cultured the family was. While poorer families were depending on the women as a working force, daughters of wealthy families would have a very different life. While their poorer counterparts at least had the freedom to leave the house for work, these "high daughters" were locked inside the family mansion. It was inappropriate for a woman of notable family to be seen by people – especially men – outside the family circle.

Empresses in China

However restricted women's rights might have been, they did have their strong and influential positions within the family system as leaders of the household, as manipulating concubines or matrons or as the men's background advisors or clever wedding match-makers. Three women even came to lead the Middle Kingdom (China). The first one was Lü Zhi (around 185 B.C.) during Han Dynasty. The second was Wu Zetian (625-705 A.D.). The only real Empress in Chinese history. She managed to come to power through a series of clever intrigues and murder plots and then set out to reform and restructure the then faulty governmental administration system. She was one of the driving forces open the notoriously difficult administrative exams – through which the government recruited its administrators – to any Chinese, regardless of his social status or background. An effort which paid off, since China's government could then recruit the best and brightest of its subjects instead of only such from noble decent. The infamous CiXi was the third woman to rule China on behalf of her son for almost 30 years. Her name is largely connected to the late days of the decay of the Middle Kingdom. Through the pressure from foreign powers and amounting economic and political problems, she was forced to modernize and open China, an attempt which came to late and couldn't prevent the several thousand year old Kingdom to fall apart.



▲ Chinese historical female emperor in Tang Dynasty, Empress Wu Zetian

Early 1900s: Shanghai, the Paris of the East

With the fall of the last Emperor and the new rule of the Republicans under Tschiang Kai-Shek at the beginning of the 20th Century came a wave of modernization and with it some faint reforms, giving women more freedom and rights. In the booming trading city of Shanghai for example – then called "the Paris of the East" – women could be spotted wearing Western clothes and stylish Qi Pau enjoying coffee, wine and dancing in



▲ Song sisters, the most influential women in recent China, at the military airplane donation, 1942

Jazz clubs. The time was also an early bloom for young female writers such as Zhang "Eileen" Ailing (1920-95), who in her stories portrayed very strong, self-confident women who knew what they wanted. Yet in business or politics, women were still a rare attraction.

Mao and Post Mao era: women hold up half of the sky in China

This should change drastically after Mao Zedong and the Communist Party gained power and founded the People's Republic of China in 1949. Of the many political programs Mao implemented during his era, the liberation of women can be seen as one of China's most important changes, which still have a highly positive effect today. "Times have changed, and today men and women are equal. Whatever men comrades can accomplish, women comrades can too." This reform brought women out of their domestic confinements onto the streets, into factories, schools and universities, the army and into political posts. As the communist ideology tried to level social inequality, it also tore down many dividing walls between men and women. Foot binding, restrictive laws on marriage and divorce, and other forms of oppression against women were abolished. The structures of the housewife and mother caring for household, relatives and kids had been in part replaced by government structures such as day-care centers for kids or dining-halls for factory workers. Had the dream woman in Qing dynasty traditionally been a frail object of desire and a "toy" for

men, the communist role model was now a strong woman working side by side with male comrades, erased of all fragility or sex-appeal. Women suddenly appeared in leading political posts or as leaders within a factory or commune structure – unknown before in China. What remained however was the expectation to bare many children, preferably boys.

The post-Mao era and the opening of China towards the West and the many reforms in economy and education triggered an unparalleled development of societal change. Women also strongly benefited in terms of their position in society and their options in work and life. While the saying "women hold up half of the sky in China" might be exaggerated, in the vast majority of Chinese families, both husband and wife are working full time. A large portion of the Chinese work force – from factories to the service industry – are women. Today the majority of students at Chinese universities are female. China's maturing socialist market economy and the government's support have contributed a lot to women's achievements. Statistics show that women run about 20 percent of China's companies and around 46 percent of these female-managed enterprises in China have appeared since 1995.

In only one century China's women have come a long way. A century which through historic turmoil and political reform has shaken up social structures that had prevailed for thousands of years and had kept Chinese women from unfolding their full potential. Today they're on track to get what they deserve and to play an important role in shaping China's future. **EU**

▼ "A strong woman working side by side with male comrades, erased of all fragility or sex-appeal" painting of Mao Era



WOMEN AT WORK – CHINA'S FEMALE ECONOMY MOTOR

By_Marco Jaggi

One of the many things that keep amazing me about China is the number of women in working positions. Coming from Central Europe I thought I was used to women seeking their own income and independence. But if I compare that to China, the portion of working women seems to be a lot bigger than where I am from. Women seem to be everywhere where there's work to be done. Shop ladies, waitresses, nurses, doctors, office ladies, marketing managers, accountants, production supervisors, company managers, factory owners, government officials and even in uncommon jobs such as a street cleaner, construction worker, taxi driver, construction engineer or as an owner of a company who sells large excavating machinery.

When I ride my bike through the milling traffic of metropolitan Shanghai, left and right of me I see women on bicycles and scooters, going to work, going shopping or hauling goods on their vehicles. Behind the steering wheel of many cars – some times even trucks – I can spot women. When I call my suppliers, very often a woman picks up the phone, passes me to another women in the sales department which is very often supervised by a women. I visit factories and see production lines staffed with rows of women, diligently manufacturing products. Often I then meet the company owner, who again is a women or the wife of the founder.

"I don't see much difference between men and women in society or at work"
Sits at the table of a bright meeting room of Superb Tent in Foshan with Ms. Antina Huang. Antina is the company's sales manager and minority owner, producing and selling large event tents to markets in China and abroad. "We only started a year ago, since seven months we're operational. So we're still kind of in the start-up phase, but business is starting to move." Antina has a soft, but energetic way to talk and you can tell she is ambitious. "I used to work in a factory similar as this one, in Zhu-Hai. I liked my job and the products, but my boss preferred guys instead

Men and women are working side by side and are moving China towards the future. From the outside this all looks very equal and harmonious. But do men and women really make no difference between male or female colleagues, employees or superiors? What are the reasons for women to go to work and how do they think about their role in society? We did some research and traveled to different industrial cities in China to talk to ladies in top management of their companies to find out.



Anita Huang and Marco pose for a photo after the interview



▲ Women bosses, sales supervisors, sales and workers hold "half of the sky" of Made in China

of girls. I never experienced that before and I didn't agree with that. Then I suddenly got the opportunity to join and help build up this company. So I took the chance. It's a lot of work and the pressure is different if you're working for your own company. But it's a great feeling." Antina's home and family are over 2 hours away, so she can only go home on the weekend. "I miss my husband and kid and I wish I could go home every day. But I decided to do this and now I just have to adjust." Asked if there is any difference between men and women at work or if she would prefer men over women for sales positions, she said, "I don't see much difference between men and women in society or at work. I don't particularly prefer any gender in a job interview. But there are always more girls with better English than boys interested in the foreign trading business. That's why you see lots of women as sales in this industry."

Today the majority of women in China are working. There are local cultural differences though. "Many women here in Foshan are satisfied with an easy family life. They don't go to work and don't seem to have too many ambitions. That's ok, but it's not an option for me. When this job opportunity came up, my husband and I discussed it together. It was clear for both of us, that I should take this great chance." Today's most common family model consists of both parents working, while the grandparents are taking care of the mostly only child and the household. There are hardly any part-time jobs available and in many cases, parents leave their homes in rural areas to seek work in a far away city, only returning home a few times per year to see their kids and other family members. Women who work have become a part of modern Chinese society and culture. Very often families have no other choice than to generate as much income as possible in order to support daily life, elderly family members and a high mortgage for an acquired apartment. Despite or maybe just because of such circumstances, the traditional Chinese family bonds are very strong and life is arranged around the extended family and work. "Family is very important to Chinese. And for women family is especially important. We couldn't do all this without the help of our own parents," says Antina.

This traditional family model is undoubtedly a key factor for the large number of women participating in China's working life. Grandparents are taking over roles that – at least in many Western countries – are largely on the shoulders of the women and can only in part be substituted by an occasional day with the grandparents or a day-care center. Ironically, the Chinese women's liberation seems to be based on a very old and traditional family model. But how about the ideological side? Is there something like a general discussion or even a conflict in society about women's rights and their equal position with men? In the West, this discussion has been going on for centuries and the balance between men and women seems to be a

constant topic. To my surprise, many of our interview partners didn't even understand the nature of the question clearly. "There is no real conflict or ongoing fight for position between men and women. At least not as far as I can see," says Ms. Ma, the founder of Truemax, a company in the business of giant building machinery. "Chances are more or less equal. Of course men and women are not the same, but somehow everyone accepts these differences." Instead of elaborating on the social differences, discussions usually turned towards the differences between men and women's characteristics.

Unsurprisingly, these turned out little different than those traits Westerners apply to men or women. Many managers we talked to would point out, that they mix their staff to create a balance or to flexibly apply certain skills. "I have men and women in my sales team. I guess men tend to be more aggressive, straight forward and just want to get the job done, while women tend to be a little more careful, subtle and focused on details," says Susan Li, founder of the electric goods producer Power Solutions. "So depending on the customer or the situation, I can let a guy or a girl handle the case." Another factor is the availability of certain skills. The export department of Kate Liang's stainless appliances company almost entirely consists of young girls. "It's not that I favor women over men. I don't care much about gender, but far more about attitude and ability. There are just way more girls graduating from university with majors in English. A must for an export job in a company where the clients are mainly from abroad."

While all this sounds very liberal and highly equal, there are still some boundaries which seem hard for women to cross. Although a much larger part of women in China are working compared with most European countries, there are some similar facts. A topic increasingly discussed in media and society is that of successful women having a hard time to find a husband. According to traditional Chinese belief, a woman should get married and have kids before the age of thirty. Adding to that, many Chinese men still prefer women who are less independent and often several years younger than themselves. This contrasts with the lives and plans of an increasing number of young women, who are well educated and ambitious on their job. Even though China is suffering an overload of boys/men, many women above thirty are facing difficulties in finding partners when they are ready to settle and have a family. This seems to be a field where traditional preferences and beliefs of family, ambition and achievement tend to collide not only with itself, but also with the modern reality of increasingly successful and independent Chinese women. It seems that at least in this respect, Western and Chinese challenges have certain similarities. **EU**



CHINESE WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS BUILDING THEIR BUSINESSES

By *Marco Jaggi*

Women run about 20 percent of China's companies, and 98 percent of their companies are profitable, which is remarkable since 20 percent of China's enterprises are making a loss. Who are these lady entrepreneurs and what drives them to build their businesses? What are the values and virtues that make them successful? We have talked to a few extraordinary women and got interesting insights into the hearts and minds of Chinese business women.

I used to be surprised when I was introduced to the female boss of a company. Not so much was it the fact of her being a woman, but rather her demeanor and appearance. Mostly these women are humble polite and sometimes even shy and unspectacularly dressed. A classic understatement! When they start moving around their company premises and you see them talking to their employees, when they start telling you their story, their background, their vision – then these ladies suddenly become entrepreneurs and leaders. I have had the pleasure to meet numerous female managers and company owners during my time in China. I'm not so much surprised these days, but more so impressed, impressed by these women's stories, their courage and achievements and by their often low-key appearance.

Susan Li, "Your developing ability is gonna be your fortune."

A perfect example might be Susan Li, founder and CEO of Power Solutions, who trades and produces electronic consumer goods in Shenzhen. A small, hardly recognizable sign above a factory loading ramp displays the company name and points us to use a beat up elevator. Susan welcomes us with a very firm hand shake and guides us into her sleek, almost bare office to serve us fresh tea. "Sorry, I'm from the north, I'm not so professional with tea," she apologizes and laughs. Susan might be thirty-something, wears average clothes (soon we knew that she is expecting her baby in December), loosely braided hair and glasses. Her pretty face is sincere but open and her look is stern. You see that she can be tough, but she laughs a lot. "I'm not the

person who is satisfied with the status quo. I always want to move ahead." Susan comes from the far North of China, near Harbin where she grew up on a small farm. Already at a very early age she had to take care of the farm work, herself and her younger brother, while her mother was outside earning money. She didn't have the chance of getting a good education, but she knew she wanted to leave her hometown. "Your developing ability is gonna be your fortune," she told herself and went to Beijing. She worked in a souvenir shop and started learning English by herself. For lack of a high-school degree she couldn't enroll in a real college, but she did the exams and passed. "While real college students failed the test, I got good marks. Back then Shenzhen was said to be an exciting and quickly developing city. So I decided to come here. I remember the long train ride. The farther south we travelled the warmer it got and I was taking off one piece of clothes after another. I didn't have a job or a place to go, I just knew I would make it." She got a job in a trading company, where her oral English ability and her straight and honest attitude soon earned her the trust of the boss. He supported her when she started her own company only a few years later. "It was just a gut feeling to start out on my own. I didn't do any research, I just did it. If I know where I want to go, I'll never stop." After having successfully built up an electronic goods trading business, the industrious lady engaged in a new endeavor. She had joined a friend on a business trip to India and was

▼ *Susan can be tough but she laughs a lot*





▲In the workshop

startled by poverty and the needs of the people which she encountered there. "I decided to do something. But if I invest time and energy, it should also be possible to get some profit from it. I'm a business woman. That's how I got into producing cheap solar powered lamps. Again I didn't even know if there was a market. I just had a gut feeling and started. In the first 3 years our business was not really good and we hardly had any customers. But this year we will make around 10 million USD turnovers." Having built up two successful companies Susan still cannot rest. "My two businesses are running quite stable, so I have resources to do something new. I'm becoming a mother very soon, so now I want to do something for kids. My first item within this brand is a nightlight." Proudly she shows us a few happy colorful snails lamp, which can be stuck to the wall or placed on a table.

When asked about her management style she has a simple answer. "I'm a simple person. So I like to keep things simple – in business and in life." It doesn't just seem to be a phrase but seems to be perfectly in line with her character – the clarity in which she speaks, the way she dresses, the humbleness of her offices and well organized production floor. Everything is matter of fact, to the point, not more than necessary. A style which matches her approach to problems. "I just think of it like rowing a boat across the sea," she describes. "I have to pass each wave and cannot think that this wave is already too big for me. Because what would I do when the next bigger wave comes? That way I never think of a problem as the biggest problem. I

just try to solve it – one by one. Since I have left home as a young girl, I have thought like this. I don't have a religion or a specific belief. I just do my best and treat others with respect."

Susan seems content with herself and her achievements. She never thought being a woman had any disadvantage in business. "I personally don't particularly make a difference between men and women as employees. However, my main staff is female. Maybe it's because some men have a problem with a woman as a boss. As a woman you definitely cannot go out drinking and partying with your staff as men sometimes do. I like having men and women in my team. They are different. Men are usually more aggressive and ambitious, while women are more humble and detail oriented. Both is necessary and depending on the situation, I can use their skills."

Full of entrepreneurial energy Susan Li has big plans for her company. "In five years from now, I want to be on the stock market. This would give us access to government support and government projects and to funding for growing the company. For myself, I have already made enough money to lead a happy and comfortable life. But it's not only about me. I have to think of my staff and their future as well!"

Mrs. Ding, "Some of our customers say I should ask my husband for at least 1 day off per week, as a family day. But I say 1 day off per month would be ok. But my husband says 0 days off per month is enough for me."

Another quite typical Chinese example of a women entrepreneur is Mrs. Ding of a packaging machinery manufacturer in Wenzhou. Her husband, an engineer, founded the company and she is in charge of marketing and sales. The slender Ding wears a bright yellow summer dress and flip-flops. Her attractive features and warm smile can quickly change to a stern, business like face while her voice remains calm but persistent. During the discussion it gets clear, that Mr. Ding is the technical mind and decision maker while communicating is not at all his strength. This is his wife's domain, with good English and a talent for selling. "We are both Bai Shou Qi Jia (coming from families with "white hands", meaning empty hands). We know how it is to have nothing. That's why we are working as hard as we can to build this company." She joined her husband's firm first as an employee. Before that, business had been very tough and because of the lack of English speaking staff, there were hardly any customers from abroad. The English speaking Mrs. Ding joined the company and took care of the export market, soon after sales figures started rising. Today 80% of their 5 million USD business goes abroad. They married, had a baby daughter and became a typical Wenzhounese entrepreneur family – involved and devoted to their company with each and every fiber of their lives. "Some



▲Susan's sales team consists men and women



▲Mrs. Ding's warm smile can quickly change to a stern, business-like face

of our customers say I should ask my husband for at least 1 day off per week, as a family day. But I say 1 day off per month would be ok. But my husband says 0 days off per month is enough for me." We all laugh heartedly but the point is made. I have met many Chinese couples who run a business together. They each take their part and very often the woman oversees marketing and sales.

Ma, "I've always been fascinated by these huge machines in men's domain."

"Yes, the construction machinery business is a men's world, but I've always been fascinated by these huge machines," says Ms. Ma, founder and CEO of Truemax. She is elegantly dressed and has an earnest, subtle voice. "We as women are different from men. Maybe we're more understanding, more cooperative and better in communicating. Patience and being focused are other women strengths. We can use that to our advantage to be different from our competition. That's why we at Truemax put all our efforts into good service and good quality."

Ms. Ma's assessment is in line with studies carried out by the United Nations Development Fund for Women and China's Association of Female Entrepreneurs. According to these results females are better at communication than men and a lot of women display more rational thinking than their gender counterparts. "Female managers have natural business skills and are as tenacious as men. Once they set a goal, they will march forward with resolution and courage," says Ms. Shi, vice-director of China's Association of Female Entrepreneurs.



Women run about 20 percent of China's companies, and 98 percent of their companies are profitable, which is remarkable since 20 percent of China's enterprises are deficit-ridden, the survey says. "China's maturing socialist market economy and the government's support have contributed a lot to women's achievements," Shi says. According to the survey, female entrepreneurs work over ten hours each day on average, and some for 17 hours. "I cannot distinguish between private life and work. I love my job and my products and I love my family," says Kate Liang. "But today the company and I are already one. There's no me anymore."


In the face of the mentioned survey results it seems a given, that women should be encouraged and receive support to start their own business or to pursue ambitious careers within companies. However, it doesn't look like there are enough organized private or government structures and programs for young women entrepreneurs to get a start-up boost. There



are very few networks that help business women with advice or contacts. None of the female entrepreneurs we talked to said, that they would specifically further or preferably hire women in comparison with men.

It seems that China is still what it has been since its opening in the early eighties – a place full of entrepreneurial opportunities. However, there is no easy road to success and women have to struggle equally hard as men, maybe even harder to succeed. But as statistics and our lively encounters with many fascinating women managers and entrepreneurs show – there are countless ambitious Chinese ladies out there that are willing to work hard and take risks and conquer the business world with their values and very own feminine touch.

Kate Liang, “I came to Guangzhou with nothing but the will to make it.”

Like Susan Li or Ms. Wu, many Chinese female bosses come from humble backgrounds and despite having earned considerable wealth, many of them stay true to their beginnings and rest low-key. This forms a strong contrast to many of their male counterparts, where showing off status symbols and boisterous behavior are not uncommon. Probably because they come from simple backgrounds and had to work very hard to achieve what they have today, these women are determined and have an exceptional ability and bravery to overcome obstacles and endure hardship. “I came to Guangzhou with nothing but the will to make it,” Kate Liang, the resolute owner of ABLinox Sanitaryware proudly says. She wears a simple, traditional black Chinese top and wide black pants. Her energy fills the room and words burst out of her like a waterfall. “For three months I tried to find a job. But because of my disability nobody wanted to hire me. So I started doing business myself.” She rented a small room where she put up a computer and a printer. At first there were no orders. She slept on the floor of her tiny office, ate simple noodles and invested her last money into advertisement. Two weeks later she had her first customer and with that, she started her career. Today her company has 100 employees and a turnover of around 5 million USD. “I want to become an internationally known faucet brand with good quality and environmental friendly production facilities. But I don't only work for myself. I want to give people opportunities and I want to contribute to society. In our business many companies don't care too much about quality and even less about the environment. I want to help change that. Not only in our industry but also in our country. We as business people have a responsibility: towards our customers, our workers, our country.” The idealistic Kate Liang is therefore also member of the local chamber of commerce, representing over 8000 factories. From the ten percent women in the chamber, she is the only one in the leading board. 

SOFT POWER OF CHINESE WOMEN



LITTLE WOMAN

SHORT ENCOUNTERS WITH REMARKABLE CHINESE BUSINESS WOMEN

By_Marco Jaggi

"To me, success means personal fulfillment in the world, that I'm able to carry out my ideas and values into the world – that I am able to change it in positive ways." —Maxine Hong Kingston (Chinese born American writer)

Xiao Nv Zi (Chin. Little Woman) is a humble for women to refer to themselves. China has brought forth many remarkable women and despite of their success many of them remain very low-key and down to earth. We have chosen to tell you the stories of three such ladies who each in their own way have made their footprint in the development of their lives and their countries.

Xiuju, fighting for dreams

Let's call her Liang Xiuju, a 29 year young woman living in Dongguan, Guangdong province, a city in the middle of the world's largest production area and at the heart of "Made in China". She grew up in a tiny village of poor rural Sichuan, where her parents have a small farm. With the small yield their farm produced her parents were always struggling to make ends meet. She spent most of her childhood helping her mother and older brother on the farm, while her father was a construction worker in Shanghai. Her brother soon followed and she was expected to take over work on the farm after finishing middle school. But she had other plans. Feeling confined in the impoverished, traditional hometown she and a classmate decided to leave home and try their luck in the factories of southern China. Her parents and older brother strictly opposed these plans. "A girl is not supposed to leave home alone. You stay here, take care of the farm and find a husband soon. Big cities and factories are nothing for young girls!" By the age of 17 however, the two young women got on a bus with only a small backpack with clothes, a few bulks, full of hope and expectations.

Upon their arrival they found employment in a small shabby toy factory. The production hall was dark and sweltering hot and the fumes of plastic and paint made her nauseous. Each day she was painting toy figures for twelve hours. The light at the working tables was so dim, that her eyes

burned and nasty headaches followed every shift. She shared a dorm with seven other girls, and often lay awake during the hot and muggy summer nights. While rats scurrying over the moldy floor and sweat running down her face, she missed home. After the first month the factory started to find excuses and stopped paying salaries. Both girls quit their work with hardly any money in their pocket. Devastated by the experience Xiuju's friend gave up and returned home. "Was this it? Had all the work been for nothing? Not for me," Xiuju decided and went to work at an electronic manufacturer, which a friend had recommended to her. The working environment was cleaner and salary steady, but the working hours were even longer. She took on every extra shift to try to make up for the salary lost in the toy factory. At night she fell into bed, too tired to even think of her family. After twelve months she returned home for Chinese New Year with a small gift and a hongbao (cash in a red envelope) for each of her family members. However happy about their daughter's success, the parents didn't want to let her leave again. After a big fight, she was again back on the bus to Dongguan. Three years later, she had made it to be a supervisor on the production line, her salary increased, the presents and the hongbao she brought home at Chinese New Year got bigger, and so did the family's pressure to marry. Her mother and grandmother couldn't stop talking about it and introduced several local guys to her – but she had no interest. It was already clear to her that she would never return to be a farmer. She had

▼ Like Xiuju, Susan left her hometown in a small village in her 17 and fought her way up to the founder of an electronic company in Shenzhen



become comfortable with having a cellphone, a few nice dresses to wear and being outside the direct control of her family. And she had started to learn English. Two years later she had become the family's biggest income contributor. While her brother had returned home, married and worked as a truck driver, she had made it into the sales department of a household electronics producer, leaving the sweaty production halls for a seat in the office and making four times the salary of her first job. Her family kept pushing on marriage. That year, she brought home her boyfriend, a production manager at a mould making firm in Dongguan. Her mother was outraged that her daughter had picked a man from Jiangxi Province instead of someone from Sichuan, and that cultural difference was sure to fail a marriage and prevent a happy family life. Again, she left home in a fight. Today Liang Xiuju is manager of the sales department in the same household electronics manufacturer. Back home she has built a house for her parents and her brother's family, where she and her boyfriend from Jiangxi had a big wedding dinner last summer. The family had accepted that it was pointless to go against Xiuju's will. Especially since she had helped her brother open a shop for household electronics, which she buys in Guangdong and sells in her hometown. That way she had become the head of the family and everyone was listening to her. In another three years, Xiuju and her husband hope to buy an apartment in Dongguan and then have a baby. There are no fights anymore when she leaves her parents home after Chinese New Year. And sitting on the bus she sometimes feels like the seventeen years old girl again, who despite the uncertainty had believed in her chance and had worked very hard to make her dreams come true.

Wu Yi – China's Iron Lady

Wu Yi was born in 1938 and became one of four Vice Premiers of the Chinese State Council. She oversaw the country's economy until 2008 and internationally earned herself the nickname "Iron Lady" for her strong will and tough negotiation skills.

She joined the Communist Party in 1962 and earned herself a degree in petroleum engineering. After many years she became deputy manager of a large oil refinery and party secretary at Beijing Yanshan Petrochemical Corporation. This launched a remarkable political career first as deputy mayor in China's capitol Beijing (1988 – 1989) and then as Deputy Minister of Foreign Economic Relations and Trade, Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Co-operation and was Member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party China – the most influential power circle in the country. No women before had made it up the ranks so far since Mao's wife Jiang Qing. A major career milestone certainly was the negotiations for the Chinese membership in the World Trade Organization.

Besides her excellent skills as a negotiator she proved to be a successful



crisis manager during the SARS epidemic crisis as well. After health minister Zhang Wenkang had been sacked for covering up and downplaying the devastating progress of the disease, Wu Yi took over and was soon labeled "Goddess of Transparency" after taking an open and solution based approach to resolve the crisis. This also applied to another difficult situation in 2008 during the final months before retiring from her political career. In negotiations with U.S. toy giant Mattel Wu managed to calm international outrage after several lead scandals that strongly damaged the reputation of Chinese toy manufacturers and had massively affected sales and the health of children worldwide.

Wu Yi's short stature and the grey hair markedly set her apart from her colleagues within the party leadership – who besides all being men also mostly dyed their hair black. She dedicated her whole life to her work and never got married. "I am not a celibate. So far I am just not lucky enough to find my lover. I have never fallen in love with any body. I might have over-idealized life and have been waiting for the Mr. Right, which in truth never exists in the real world." Though having reached the pinnacle within Chinese governmental structures and decision making and having dealt with the most powerful people in the world – presidents, ministers, high level diplomats – and having been ranked by Forbes as the world's second most influential woman 2004, 2005 and 2007, she rests humble and refers to herself as a "Xiao Nv Zi" (Chin. little woman). She often says, "Little woman (I) is ready to risk everything. Little woman doesn't care. Little woman (I) is appointed in difficult situations. Little woman (I) doesn't easily shed tears. I am a little woman fighting my way out through men."



◀ Zhang Xin, CEO of SOHO China

Zhang Xin – building China's present and future

Born 1965 in Beijing Zhang Xin grew up under very simple working class circumstances. Nothing indicated at that time, that she should become one of China's richest and most influential women who, together with her husband Pan Shiyi founded SOHO China, the largest property developer in Beijing who is famous for innovative extravagant architecture projects and landmarks.

Together with her mother Xin emigrated to Hong Kong as a teenager, where she became a factory worker in the sweat-shops, scraping together every single dollar and saving it for a foreign education. "It was terrible, every day you were looking for a way out," she said. By the age of twenty she managed to take a flight to the UK and – through scholarships and grants – was able to enroll at Sussex, then Cambridge University, where she made her masters in economics. From there she started a career in the finance industry, among others at Goldman Sachs on Wallstreet in New York. In the mid-nineties she finally returned to Beijing and upon a suggestion of a friend, got involved in the real estate industry. There she met Pan Shiyi, who proposed to her after knowing her only four days. The two got married and founded SOHO China what today is one of China's most famous property developing firms. "It was a gradual build-up for so long. I remember the days we were struggling to pay salaries and bills and taking the cheapest flights available."

Zhang Xin made her fortune in property, paper, tobacco and Tibetan medicine and today is estimated to have around two billion USD, which makes her five times richer than the Queen of England. Yet she prefers to keep a low profile. The mother of two sons is fashionably dressed but without extravaganza. She is said to drive a Lexus and only flying business class. "It's about conscience. When I see how much my Ayi (Chin. maid) makes, and then I think of the price of a first class ticket, I think business class is comfortable enough."

Xin was listed among the "World's Most Powerful Women" 2009 and she has received a series of Chinese and international honors such as the Special Prize at the Biennale of Venice, for a private collection featuring Asian architects. She is a member and Young Global Leader of World Economic Forum Davos and a board member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

But despite all these achievements, her good looks and charisma, she doesn't chase the spotlight and seems to carefully foster her role as a supporting wife, who stands by her husband and never seems to over-power or outshine him, a very distinctive Chinese way of creating and living a harmonious relationship. She is also choosy with her business engagements when it comes to her role as a mother. "I don't do evening business dinners and I don't do weekends. That's when I do the usual parent things like going to the boys' football tournaments or getting a hike along the Great Wall."

A traditional virtue of a Chinese woman is to be humble, subservient and low-key, a trait that is still being lived by many women today. Many Chinese women who have brought it to success – especially in business and politics – choose to play a Xiao Nv Zi, a little women. They seem sovereign in using the feminine weakness and subtlety to become a strength and successfully reaching their goals. As we have seen in the stories of the three remarkable women – persistence, courage and a dream can never be too big. Yet cherishing a humble and low-key conscience can not only gain respect and success, but also personal satisfaction and tranquility. [TU](#)

▼ Zhang Xin stands with her husband side by side



Susan emphasizes the balance between work and family



THE SOFT POWER OF CHINESE WORKING WOMEN – BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY LIFE THE CHINESE WAY

Chinese women have a very special position within their work and family life. They play and balance very different roles and expectations and manage all this by keeping their feminine vibe. We take a look at how they do this and at some major differences between working women in West and East.

The Chinese models of working and family are completely intertwined and differ strongly from the concepts in most of Western societies. While Westerners strive for individual independence and equality between people and genders, Chinese are seeking a harmonious collective and an individual role within this structure. As a Westerner it took me quite a while to see these differences and several more years to at least partly understand them.

When it comes to women in the working world, the differences between Western and Chinese concepts come into play and have very specific effects. While working on this handbook we noticed for example, that many Chinese were not aware of a conflict between genders or felt engaged in striving for equality. Many didn't really understand why we were asking such questions. The majority of the people we talked to judged the job chances of men and women as being quite equal. This seems surprising for a society that is seen from the outside as traditional and rather patriarchic.

So how can it be that more women are working in China than in the West, but there is still no major discussion on gender topic. Circumstances are complex and it's hard to pin point just a handful of factors. I believe that one reason is that when it comes to business, Chinese are very matter of fact and result oriented. They like to get things done, mostly as quickly and easily as possible. Remarks from the managers we talked to such as "I don't care much about gender, but much more about attitude and ability" or frequent emphasis on using men and women employees different abilities to solve specific challenges seem support this idea. In China working hard has a very high esteem and very often pays off. Chinese women – and men – can work very hard. With my suppliers I regularly communicate way outside business hours or on weekends. I enjoy working with Chinese women, because there rarely seems to be an underlying feminine struggle for equality. Chinese women know that they are women and are not easily offended by a man's attitude and they usually do not try to level with a guy's behavior. They don't need to. I admire their often warm and friendly, sometimes slightly shy mannerism. They are often very matter of fact and reliable. They don't seem to be in constant competition with their male counterparts or even trying to imitate certain working behavior. Something that can be frequently observed in Western business environments, especially in higher management levels. In China I have rarely met a female senior manager or an owner of a company, who in her mannerism more resembled a man than a woman. Such female leaders often have a soft, elegant but strict female authority, which sets them apart from many women counterparts in the West. This has to do with the Chinese society's tradition of finding a place

Most Chinese women have a natural humbleness which should not be mistaken for weakness or servility. These women have a strong determination, focus and feminine toughness.

within a social structure and being aware of that role. Hierarchies are more obvious and less flat in China than in the West and can less easily be contested. A boss is a boss by position and has to be respected. This makes it easier for women superiors to lead people – especially in a male dominated environment – since she does not have to engage in power struggles so frequently. Even though some of our interviewees have mentioned that men sometimes have a problem with a female superior, many company owners said they like having women managers because of their loyalty and diligence.

Soft and humble girl at home

So will all these successful women go home with the same attitude as they have at work? Is the woman CEO of a large company also the uncontested leader within the family walls? “When I’m at home I’m completely different – another person,” laughs the CEO of an electronics company. “I turn into a soft and humble girl who seeks a strong shoulder and a man that makes decisions. My husband makes all the important decisions concerning our daily life: where and what house to buy, which car we drive, what we eat for dinner. At home I really like to be taken care of.” “Work and home are totally different,” agrees Ms. Ma, boss of Truemax. While her work is set in the man’s world of construction and heavy machinery, she can ease and relax in her role as mother and wife. “I am taken good care of by my husband and my son. I reply much on them. I don’t work on weekends to have more time with my kids, my husband and the grandparents.” Asked about the role between her and her husband she replies: “In business we take important decisions together and we take care of our own responsibilities. But at home he probably decides more. I’m ok with that. It’s important for a wom-

► Ms. Ma, boss of Truemax



en to give her husband space and support him – to give him the opportunity to show who he is.” The topic of giving face to one another is a central element in close Chinese relations. “I’m very tough and direct,” admits Kate Liang, who owns a sanitaryware manufacturing company. “But when I’m together with my husband and his friends I’m just there, enjoying, listening, not saying much, backing him up.”

“For a woman, family is very important, maybe even more important than for men.” A quote often heard from the women we talked to. Women are in a special position in China, since they have multiple roles to play and many different tasks to align. For one part there is the working life, with which they are expected to contribute to the family income and often want to excel for themselves. There is the relationship to their husband, the role as a mother and the often very special and delicate relationship to the grandparents. These are mostly the parents in law who live under the same roof, in often tight circumstances. But Chinese women usually master this with ease and enjoyment. For them, this is family life and they are part of this microcosm in which they have their specific part. “Of course I can’t go home and be the same as I’m in the office. It’s another place. I’m still the same person, but I have another role,” smiles Antina, a sales manager. “That’s good like that.”

While from the perspective of many Western women, the tight Chinese family bonds might seem confining and limiting their independence, many Chinese women see it as an opportunity to generate an income, follow their career and to fulfill an important and meaningful role. While many Western couples might have a different concept of equality in their relationship where individuals might be more the same, Chinese couples cherish the differences. ■



▲ Kate Liang, CEO of ABLinox Sanitaryware, who set up the company from nothing to everything



◀ Antina, sales manager and a minor owner of Superb Tent, enjoys her soft family role

LIVING IN CHINA



BEING AN AMERICAN-CHINESE LBN IN CHINA

By *Elisa Lui*

Never in a million years would I have expected to be living the life that I live now. I grew up as a Chinese American in the suburbs of the United States of America, studied Accounting at the University of Washington in Seattle, and started a wonderful career in the Silicon with PricewaterhouseCoopers, a Big 4 public accounting firm. I went from that life to being part of the executive management team at KNE Solar, a solar panel BOS and accessory manufacturer in a second tier city in Guangdong, China. And this unexpected professional journey of mine all began because of love.

My husband is a very ambitious entrepreneur and struck out on his own, opening businesses left and right. Since most of his ventures had significant operations in China, I made the tough decision after having our second child to permanently move to China for him. Next thing you know, I am helping my husband get his business up and running in China.

THE LAO BAN NIANG (LBN)

I am what people around here would call a “lao ban niang” (LBN) which translates to a female boss and usually refers to the wife of the boss. These female bosses can be characterized along a continuum where at one end of the continuum is the “involved LBN” and at the other end is the “stay-at-home LBN.” The involved LBN is like a business partner alongside her husband and knows the company’s activities intimately from vendors to customers, financial statements to factory operations. She has authority and access to most areas of the organization and has significant influence over the decision making process at the top level. The challenge here is balancing between being a wife and a business partner. And don’t forget – finding time and energy to be with the kids. The stay-at-home LBN is quite removed from the activities at the company and doesn’t involve herself very much at all, except for significant company anniversaries, Spring Festival celebrations, and significant customer or vendor social activities that include other women and family. However, the influence and power of the stay-at-home LBN should not

be underestimated. She may not be heard from often, but when she does speak up, people listen. She can have influence over a wide range of issues from restructuring decisions, hiring, vendors, etc. On this continuum, I fall somewhere close to the “involved LBN” end, except during summer vacations and Spring Festivals where I stay at home more to spend time with my children because, on a more personal note, I am a mother first and a LBN second.

“LBN, wife of the boss, may not be heard from often, but when she does speak up, people listen.”

But I am not your typical Chinese LBN. I am the American-born Chinese LBN. You can say that I come with a little kick. In typical Chinese executive management meetings and general company meetings where the boss is never questioned, I usually have a few questions for him. I carry a notebook with me and take notes and when I am explaining something, I draw diagrams and charts. I make lists and have agendas and objectives for meetings. When leading teams on projects, I make sure my employees know what they are doing and that they are being productive. I

▼ *Elisa and her team pose for a photo in the office*



have seen on several occasions employees stressed and terrified about a project they were tasked with and I suggested them to go directly to the boss and ask questions so they could save time and have the information they needed to do their work. But they were usually too afraid. One team of secretaries responded, "We don't ask questions. We just need to get it done." So I had to prod the other end and ask my husband to provide a bit more direction to the team because they were lost in his sea of ideas. My communication approach is relatively direct when compared to the locals, especially when giving feedback. You can say that my approach to work is quite westernized. And my handshakes have a firm confident grip to them.

"Although I find that my working style is effective in some areas, the traditional Chinese working style is more effective in others."

Although I find that my working style is effective in some areas, the traditional Chinese working style is more effective in others. When it comes to strategy and functions involving parties outside our organization, I play by the Chinese business style protocols. That often times involves endless hours drinking tea in various laoban (boss) offices, often times watching them smoke way too many cigarettes in one sitting, eating dinners and lunches with heavy amounts of alcohol, and watching my counterparts work their magic with something we call "guanxi." From my observation, our employees do the daily work of the nuts and bolts of our business, while management spends a considerable amount of time working on maintaining relationships with all relevant parties for various aspects of our business – to grease the nuts and bolts so that everything, from transportation of goods to banking arrangements, can all go smoothly.

A BANANA WITHIN THE SEA OF YELLOW

It is very commonly heard that many women in Southern China seek to emigrate out of China by marrying a foreigner. The running joke amongst the circle that knows me is that I am the anomaly – I, being the foreigner, married back to China. But as China continues to grow, more and more Chinese that have grown up abroad are flocking back to their motherland seeking out new opportunities at all levels of the workforce and in all different fields and industries.

I am one such example. I am a Chinese American that has returned to my ancestral roots here in China. You can call me a banana within a sea of yellow. Literally, a banana is yellow on the outside and white on the inside. Metaphorically, it is a common term to describe someone that looks of Asian descent but is very westernized in their values, thought process, and experiences. After living in China these past few years, I have started to realize just how "white" I am. I look Chinese, but the cultural differences that I experience are quite significant. The comforting thing to know is that I am not alone.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

There are a lot of women in the workforce in China. However, the majority of top executive positions are still comprised mostly of men. This is not any different from the West. Even so, women in China have increasingly over time been gaining influence and power, whether directly or indirectly.

In relationships, the balance has shifted considerably between a woman and a man. I went traveling around China recently during the National Holiday and I was utterly shocked at how every young Chinese couple around me had the male hold the female's purse. This purse holding phenomenon did not exist in the prior generations where a man's pride was king. Holding a woman's purse would have definitely "lost face." Just a generation ago – the generation of our parents, when you see a couple walking down the street in China it would typically look like this – the man is walking with nothing but a cigarette in his hand and his wife is walking almost two meters behind him, holding all the groceries, her purse, with a kid strapped to her back, and all the while balancing an umbrella over her to shade from the sun. Fast forward to present day – today's generation, when you see a couple walking down the street in China – the husband is holding the woman's purse and all the groceries, while balancing an umbrella over her to shade the sun as she pushes their baby along in a shiny new stroller.

Even the traditional Chinese home is changing. Traditionally, a woman married "into" the family of the man she married. This means that she leaves her home and moves into the home of her husband's, which at the time would include living with the father-in-law and the mother-in-law. In the traditional Chinese home, the mother-in-law is the boss and the new bride is expected to listen to everything this wise elder said and obey all her commands and "suggestions." But again, a new phenomenon has been occurring. Most of my husband's well-to-do male friends no longer live with their parents, all most likely due to the request and bidding of their wives. In fact, I, the American-born Chinese female, am one of the few still living the traditional Chinese life – with my father-in-law and mother-in-law.

I can't help but wonder if these phenomena have something to do with the media that Chinese women have access to and are exposed to, and as a result, are having influence on their expectations, values, and choices. Ideas such as true love, individual success and achievement, search for one's own happiness, and the power of a sexy woman are more prevalent in today's Chinese media than before.

Chinese women are changing. They are becoming more assertive, confident in their own skin, and believe in the idea of true love and pursuit of happiness. That, to me, is power. **BU**



"A couple walking down the street in China – the husband is holding the woman's purse and all the groceries, while balancing an umbrella over her."



GIRL POWER – THE 1990S GENERATION ENTREPRENEURS

By_MimiWei

Young women born in the 1990s are sometimes referred to as “material girls”, “unprofessional”, “do not want to work” or they get other unflattering labels. But if you meet Aihua and Cici none such things will come to your mind. The two girls in their early 20s are founders and partners of a fine Flower & Cafe shop called Suburb Flower. I was impressed by how such young ladies managed to open a shop in only 2 weeks. Two days later, I sat down with Aihua in her café to listen to her stories while sipping a cup of delicious Suburb Flower coffee.

FV: None of you are local and both of you had been working in Beijing before. How did you manage to open the shop in 2 weeks with no background and a limited budget?

Aihua: Yes Cici and I, we are not local Nanjingnese. My hometown is two hours drive away from Nanjing. When I was in college, I had a part-time job selling cosmetics. After graduation, I set up my own company, a studio. After 5 years of operation, I started thinking of going back to Nanjing where my parents and brother live. One day, I was walking around, I saw a coffee shop and after talking to the shop owner, I decided to join as a partner and open a new shop. It took me one night to work out the proposal and in 2 weeks, Suburb Flower was open in a fancy shopping mall. The preparation was exhausting but exciting.

FV: Did you make your own decisions when you were a small girl?

Aihua: Yes, my parents always asked me to do things which I was capable to do, like making pony tails, washing my own clothes, sharing some house work and some DIYs.



FV: Do most girls of your age know exactly what they want and know how to get things done?

Aihua: Yes. My friends who are of similar age are quite clear of what they want, and they are fighting in their own ways to make their dreams come true. They have a clear picture of "who I am" and make their own decisions.

FV: What did you do before you are here running Suburb Flower?

Aihua: I set up a small company after graduation from college, without serious market research. You could say it was quite rushy. It took me three months to find out being an agent is a better business practice for me at that time.

FV: How would you characterize girls born in the late 1980s and 1990s?

Aihua: I feel that girls of such age seem to be born entrepreneurs. There are many 1980s women who set up their businesses and are quite successful. Some run big businesses others small ones. For me, setting up my own business is more about doing things I like and live the life I like.

FV: From your own experiences, do you agree that Chinese society today is enough tolerant and open to women, in terms of working chances, social status, life style?

Aihua: Yes, I think our society provides equal opportunities to men and women.

FV: Would you describe yourself as being more emotional or more rational?



▲ Aihua enjoys taking care of every detail of the shop

▶ Aihua makes sure her employee (Pengfei Guo) hair is as perfect as the rest of the shop



Aihua: (Smiles) I am quite emotional.

FV: Are you the person who sets up a goal, breaks down into every step and never "fights unprepared"?

Aihua: I will set up a goal of each stage and move forward step by step. It took me and Cici fifteen days to set up "Suburb". We spent three days, days and nights. The shop is our dream and our life, so we work so hard to make our dream come true. This is serious business and at the same time, we are running Suburb the way we like. We believe that we could bring a better life to our customers, and people walk by Suburb can enjoy a moment of pleasure. (smiles happily) We are also learning from other countries to make Suburb better.


FV: When you are working with male co-workers, do you feel the differences between men and women?

Aihua: Men and women are different in thinking patterns. Conflicts sometimes are good for us to work out better works.

FV: How do you balance work and life?

Aihua: You should lay a solid foundation for life, which is your career. A person who has passion towards life is able to balance work and life. For me, I work hard and play hard.

FV: Can you describe your most favorite/ comfortable life style?

Aihua: My ideal life is to achieve financial independence and to have enough time to experience more of the world. 



◀ Liao Wei (right), Aihua's partner, says that young girls in China are quite ambitious and quite feet-on-the-ground

40% of the managers at Made-in-China.com are women



COVER STORY:

LIJIE, MS. MADE-IN-CHINA.COM

By_Mimi Wei



Lijie Li, Vice President of Made-in-China.com, a lady at her 30s, climbing her position from an ordinary editor to one of the top managers of Focus Technology, a public company in China operating Made-in-China.com, together with well-balancing the family relationship. Focus Vision sat down for a talk with Lijie.

Below "FV" for Focus Vision, "LJ" for Lijie.

FV: Would you describe yourself more emotional or rational?

LJ: I would say that I am rational at work and emotional in my daily life.

FV: You have been working in this company for 14 years and you are one of the very early employees of Made-in-China.com, your career starts in this company. We know that you have a medical background. Could you please tell us why did you choose to join Made-in-China.com instead of becoming a doctor?

LJ: I was quite interested in global business when I was in college. Made-in-China.com's mission is "connecting buyers with Chinese suppliers" which is exactly what I was looking for. Graduated in 2000, I joined Made-in-China.com as an editor responsible for information entry. My daily work was to enter and verify website information, which didn't sound interesting. I never stop thinking about how to make thing more efficient and systemized. My supervisor Joseph gave me a lot of chances to see more and access many fields, from which I benefit a lot. I helped to build up systems and rules. From 2003 to 2005, I worked as a tele-sales for two years, selling on-line advertising services to Chinese suppliers and at the same time because of my good English, I was assigned to take care of global buyer service, which helped me to have deep understanding of the two end customers Made-in-China.com is serving: Chinese suppliers and global buyers.

In the coming 5 years, there was a boom in global business, "Made in China" became a sparking label. Made-in-China.com grew fast and I was given op-

opportunities to be involved in global business, helping the company setting up oversea warehouse. Because of my understanding of global buyers and China suppliers, I am now in charge of product development. I never stop thinking, learning, practicing and growing.

FV: You grew up from an ordinary employee to one of the top managers of a public company in China. 40% of the managers in Made-in-China.com are women and 70% of them were your subordinates. Do you agree that at work place, women have to work much harder than their male colleagues to get promoted?

LJ: Women are as smart as men in Intelligence. There are differences in character, physical, family role and society responsibilities. A self-esteemed, capable, intelligent woman with positive attitude has the same promotion chances as men. Chances are for every well-prepared person, regardless of the gender.

Today women take more responsibilities in family and society than before. That's why there are some women choose to draw back a little from work to pay more attention to the family.



▲ 40% of the managers at Made-in-China.com are women

FV: At Made-in-China.com, 50% are female employees and 40% managers are women. What are the strength of these women managers and do they have something in common? What is the main difference to the male managers?

LJ: What the women managers have in common are: they are positive; they have their own opinions; they take responsibilities and have good execution ability; they are good team leaders and very self-motivated.

The main difference between female and male managers in my opinion is that women are more considerate and approachable, approachable. They are better communicators and listeners.

FV: There are inevitable disarguments or agreements at work. What would you do when there are disagreements?

LJ: I will try to find out "what it is" and "why you/I want that". Based on the objective situation, I will either try to persuade him/her, or adjust myself to accept his/her opinion.

FV: Is there any lady you admire?

LJ: I appreciate Hillary Clinton, Angela Dorothea Merkel, Marissa Mayer, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Yinmeng Hu. The first three ladies are westerners and the last two are Asians, Yinmeng Hu is an actress. What I admire most of them are their generous love.

FV: You helped Made-in-China.com to set up its American

warehouse in LA and you had been living in the United States for a while. What are the differences between women in the U.S and in China?

LJ: The main differences I observed are: 1. Some well-educated women in the U.S choose to become full-time mothers to better take care of the kids and the family. It is not easy for Chinese career women; 2. Working spam and engery. In the United States, I've seen many aged career women who are excellent stay passionate and professional towards their work. But in China, aged women are losing their passion and energy toward their job fading. That might be one of the reasons for the "Square Dance" becoming so popular. We need more options when we are getting old.

FV: The mission of Made-in-China.com is to "connect global buyers with Chinese suppliers". What are the strength and weakness of the women employees in Made-in-China.com?

LJ: They are young and well-educated women, among them some have been studied or lived abroad. They have their strong will to build their career, be international, and the company offers an open environment to them.


They are young and still lack in-depth understanding of trading business; they need to know more about the diverse culture differences and have better communication skills. Besides, they still need to be better in English (some of them are really good).

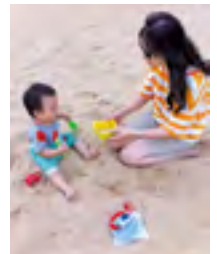
FV: You have a lovely one-year-old daughter and you enjoy taking care of her and spending time with her. How do you balance your work and family?

LJ: One thing I deeply believe is that a person comes to the earth with a mission. A person needs to fulfill himself/herself, as well as having kids. To me, the fulfillment of life consists family and career, I would never give up one for another. They should be balanced and influence each other. I try to do the most important thing at different stages and try to find the balance, yes, I am still trying and exploring.

FV: Can you describe your most favorite/ comfortable life style?

LJ: A warm family of supporting family members, lover, adorable kid, a job which I like in my favorite industry with nice boss and partners. I enjoy staying self-motivated, creative and progressive.

I have been traveling around the world. Now I am living in Nanjing, an ancient city with green trees and nice people. I am expecting a greener environment in China, a harmonious society. I hope I can spend more time to be with my little girl to witness her growth and take more responsibility for my family. My perfect life would be 50% work, 50% life. I can travel more and maybe be part of some charity or NGO. 



▲ Lijie wishes she could spend more time with her daughter



▲ Lijie enjoys her rare leisure time after work



▲ Olive Guo, in her early 30s, is the general manager of an e-insurance company



▲ Sherry Gong, born in 1980s, is in charge of overseas buyer service and supplier management



▲ Ms. Made-in-China.com discusses overseas distribution set up with her Australian partner



▲ Many women managers at Made-in-China.com were Lijie's subordinates

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2014, Focus Vision went to GeSaLa, a remote village in Sichuan, to help children there

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