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Alumni Profile: Hanie Yee's career embraces a global perspective

By Bridget O'Connor '06



Yee (above) majored in sociology — not business — at IWU, but believes that choice was beneficial in preparing her for the career she eventually chose. (Photo provided by Hanie Yee)

As a global product execution and sourcing manager for Jockey International, Hanie Yee '73 has experienced places most people only read about: the Great Wall, the Petronnis Towers in Kuala Lumpur, the Taj Mahal in India, the Eiffel Tower, the Vatican, and the Wailing Wall in Israel. She has also embarked on an African safari, and she has “stepped foot in the Red Sea, the Yellow Sea, the Dead Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, the Bay of Bengal — and parasailed off the shores of Bali in the Indian Ocean.”

Although her job has given her a chance to experience these breathtaking sights, not all of her exotic adventures leave her breathless over the joys of tourism. Yee recalls a business trip to Hong Kong that coincided with a level-8 typhoon (10 being the most severe level). As a guest on the 35th floor of a high-rise hotel with floor to ceiling windows and nowhere else to go, she proclaims that the experience was “utterly nerve-wracking!”

The challenges of business travel, however, are not usually life-threatening. Yee notes that the

most common obstacle to overcome during her trips abroad is finding meals that are safe to eat in unfamiliar places, where hygiene standards may be suspect. (“In the Far East, a bowl of cooked white rice is always safe,” she advises). But despite the risks, large and small, Yee has an unabashed love of her career. “Sourcing is my passion as well as my livelihood,” she says.

Since Yee joined Jockey International 10 years ago, traveling has been a major part of her job — she takes two to three trips per year and is gone up to three weeks for each trip. Although she misses her Lincolnshire, Ill., home and family — including husband Donald and their teenaged daughter Jenna — improvements in communications worldwide have made those partings relatively painless. “Staying in touch is never a problem with world cell phones and e-mails,” Yee says, although cost can be an issue. Her visit to Madagascar included a one-hour phone call to the Jockey home office in the U.S. and a connection to download and synchronize e-mail. Yee was shocked when presented the \$1,200 tab for those communications. “Needless to say, I was much more careful in my future visits,” she says.

Jockey International is a privately held company with a history that dates back generations, when

retired Reverend Samuel Cooper, who started Jockey 129 years ago, recognized the basic need for comfortable wool socks for frontier lumberjacks “who were suffering from blisters and freezing their feet off out in the wilderness,” says Yee. She shares this story, she says, “because it is not just a part of Jockey’s history, it is an embodiment of Jockey’s core beliefs. It represents the integrity and quality of our products and the people behind them.”

Today the company employs over 4,000 people worldwide. Yee is responsible for managing the product development process for all outsourced Jockey products. A major aspect of her job is to ensure that “business is done with suppliers who share a commitment to quality, legal compliance, and Jockey’s high standards,” she says.

Yee majored in sociology — not business — at IWU, but believes that choice was beneficial in preparing her for the career she eventually chose. Her sociology courses trained her to “deal with people in all different socio-economic backgrounds,” she says. “My enjoyment of working with people carried me from social work to retail sales.” After cultivating a successful career in retail, she shifted to manufacturing in 1985 when she joined Uniforms To You, (a division of Cintas), where she held several positions and left as procurement manager of raw materials and finished goods. A former boss from the company lured Yee over to a newly created department called “Sourcing” at Jockey International in 1995.

Although the outsourcing of jobs to non-American workers is controversial, Yee believes the practice can be of benefit to both American and global societies and noted that Jockey is committed to manufacturing a major share of Jockey products in the company’s owned and operated facilities. Yee adds that she continually balances relatively lower offshore production costs with the benefits of on-shore production. “Jockey, unlike many companies in the apparel industry, continues to manufacture in plants that it owns and operates, including plants in the Caribbean basin,” she explains.

“Outsourcing and globalization are about creating jobs in both the U.S. and around the world,” Yee continues. “People are in jobs in third-world nations that just a few years ago we would not have even imagined, while jobs in America have become more technical and are more service-oriented, providing an elevated source of technology. ... What great company isn’t here to improve costs and productivity? Outsourcing definitely has a place in our society.”

When asked if she would recommend a career in international business to new or recent Illinois Wesleyan graduates, Yee advises, “I would tell them to be open-minded and to be willing to venture outside their comfort zone in whatever career path they choose — for perhaps it is these types of experiences that really create the person and build character.”



On a trip to Beijing for Jockey, Yee (above) had a chance to visit the Great Wall. (Photo provided by Hanie Yee)

The most important advice that Yee says she can give to anyone is “to listen to your heart and follow your dreams.” Following that advice herself has meant that, 30 years into her career, “I still have the burning passion and the fire in my gut to keep my career path moving forward — but now my perspective is of a global nature.” And from that perspective, Yee says, her life couldn’t be any better.