

FIRST PERSON | CUI QI

# Getting a competitive advantage

*Cui Qi, 24, from Nanjing, graduated from Singapore Management University in December 2011. He now works as a reinsurance broker in Singapore.*

I came to Singapore in 2008 after taking my university entrance examination and SMU's qualifying exam. I did a double major at SMU: finance and marketing.

Luckily, I planned my university life well and managed to graduate in three-and-a-half years.

With the rapid growth in China's economy, many companies are now expanding into the Chinese market. If a

company's operation involves business on the mainland, our (Chinese SMU graduates) competitive edge lies in being able to communicate well with clients, business partners and manufacturers.

That's exactly what happened in my case. My company doesn't have a presence in the Chinese mainland, but it does have major clients there and in Taiwan, and someone like me is very helpful in daily operations, as well as future planning.

I helped a lot in translating Chinese documents into English, and I easily established a good relationship with Chinese clients and

business partners. In addition, I can always provide advice to my bosses, who are from England, to help them understand Chinese culture and facilitate negotiations.

It didn't always go well, however. It took a few months to get myself in a favorable place after graduation. Singapore is positioned as the financial center in Asia and the bridge between Asia and the West, so being able to speak Chinese is an advantage when it comes to job seeking. Indeed, I have seen a number of job advertisements with "fluency in spoken and written Chinese" as a requirement. But Singapore is

a bilingual country, and most Singaporeans speak Chinese.

Apart from that, the Singaporean government's tightening of immigration policies has made it more challenging for foreigners to find jobs here. Some companies only consider hiring Singaporeans and foreigners with permanent residence status. Some others are still open about it.

I was lucky. I also believe that I graduated from a super-popular university here in Singapore, especially in the finance industry. Although some employers prefer not to hire foreigners, if you are a SMU graduate, you can surely get around it.