



Wang & Li Asia Resources

Pursuing China Job Opportunities From Abroad

March 2009

Pursuing your career in China is a huge move at many levels. Beyond career considerations, there are also personal, lifestyle, and just physical location ones. This document will help you in your approach to attaining your job search objectives in the mainland, from identifying job leads from the U.S. to landing here and meeting potential employers.

1) Two Key Concepts For Pursuing Job Opportunities In China From Abroad

- **Nothing Beats Being Here** – Pursuing someone thousands of miles away is not an attractive scenario for China-based employers, no matter how good you are. Even if you have a good phone interview with them, it's doubtful that they'll send you a plane ticket based on just a call. And they're not going to hire you until they meet you face-to-face.

Therefore, if you're serious about finding a job in China, then you need to make the investment to come out and make yourself accessible to employers here (even if it's just a weeklong trip over your Spring Break). *The ability to meet with you face-to-face increases your chances of attracting the attention of employers by many times.* Otherwise, it's out of sight, out of mind.

- **The Kindness Of Strangers** - China is full of outgoing, young professionals with similar bilingual/ bicultural backgrounds as your own. At one point, we've all slept on someone's sofa or gotten job leads or introductions from friends of friends and complete strangers. As a result, *people here tend to be very generous and supportive of others who are going through a job search situation that they understand very well.* Many will offer you whatever help they can. To access these resources though, you need to be proactive and clear about what you they can help you with.

2) Key Things To Ask Before Your China Job Search Trip

- **What is my fundamental commitment to pursuing my career success in China?**
- **What are global companies and executives in China looking for most when evaluating new talent?**
- **In what ways does my overseas background clearly respond to what global companies and executives are looking for in China?**
- **What are the things that I want to both highlight and avoid when speaking with a potential employer?**

In addition, three things will greatly impact your ability to both identify and impress prospective employers who can offer you an attractive opportunity in this market. These are related to your:

- **Commitment** – Your career and financial success in China in the first couple of years over what you can achieve in the U.S. over the same period of time is not necessarily clear cut. Whether a business or individual, you first need to get up the learning curve to develop your capabilities and achievements for this market. More likely, the greater career opportunities and success that you hope to see may not come until later.

In addition, *employers will assess how strong your commitment to pursuing your career in China is, or if you're only here because of the poor U.S. economic and employment situation.*

- **Value** – Your international education and/or work experience clearly bring advantages to this market. But *the key question for China employers is, “How does your overseas background apply to the business challenges and needs being faced in China?”* As such, you need to talk about the specific skills and value that you bring to companies operating here.
- **Flexibility** – Many people in China are able to transition their career and attain opportunities that are much more difficult to get into in more mature markets like the U.S. In this tough economic period, however, you have to be realistic about the market situation and opportunities available to you right now. Therefore, *be flexible and open with the type of opportunities that you initially target.* Your first objective should be to get into a good opportunity that will help you build your capabilities and achievements in this market.

Also be flexible on the timeframe needed for you to attain your career objectives. Although there are many opportunities in China's less mature, fast developing market, they require some time and patience to obtain.

3) Preparing For Your China Job Search Trip From The U.S.

- **Tap Into Every Resource Available To You** – In today's Internet Era, there is no excuse for not being able to pursue job leads and contact potential employers in China from the U.S., especially given the pool of contacts and resources available to you that can provide you with information and put you in touch with people and companies in China. *These include alumni, your network of friends, and even friends of friends.*
- **Your E-mail Cover Letter** – You need a well thought out, cover letter that highlights your value and objectives to others, whether you are asking for assistance or approaching them for a job. Beyond expressing your career objectives for this market, emphasize what you can offer an employer that is competing in this dynamic and highly competitive market.
- **When To Start Contacting People Out Here** – *Start contacting people about 3-6 weeks before you arrive to China on your job search trip.* If you contact others too far in advance, your email will likely be pushed to the bottom of their priority list. China is a here and now place where people focus on what will affect them right now.
- **Check Out Helpful Websites:** Check out professional organization websites that target foreigners working in China, such as: Shanghai Expat (www.shanghaiexpat.com), Amcham (www.amchamchina.org), AsiaXpat (www.asiaxpat.com), Zhaopin (www.zhaopin.com), Britcham (www.britcham.org), etc. These websites not only provide useful information, they also hold events that can help you get connected with many other professionals in this market.

Job Search Tip: *Of course, Wang & Li Asia Resources is a great source of information and guidance for your China job search efforts. As such, we encourage you to visit our website (www.wang-li.com), as well as contact us just before you make your trip out to China and we'll do what we can to help you make your job search trip a successful one.*

4) What To Know About China's Hiring Market

The “Ideal” Candidate - From our experiences in placing top quality candidates with leading multinationals in China, we have come to determine an ideal candidate profile based on what is consistently sought by our clients. No matter the industry or function or position level, we always identify six factors in potential candidates that are common to any hiring situation for an international company. They are:

- **High-caliber** (able to handle management-level roles and responsibilities in a world-class company)
- **Bi-lingual**
- **International-oriented/trained**

For more information on Wang & Li, please contact in Shanghai at 86-021-6288-5426/shanghai@wang-li.com or in Beijing at 86-010-5960-4861/beijing@wang-li.com, or visit our website www.wang-li.com.

- **Affordable**
- **Track record that shows the ability to perform and get results *in China***
- **Realistic expectations**

For more detail about these characteristics that make up the “ideal” candidate for global companies in China, please see our Wang & Li article on *High, Value-Added Skills And Job Functions That Are In Demand In China Today*. This article also contains information that will give you a good sense of the high value-added, job functions and skills that many international-trained professionals offer and that are still in short supply/high demand in China. From what we can see, the hiring needs in these areas will exist in this market for the next several years, and are good areas to highlight when describing the value that you can bring potential employers in the mainland.

5) Things To Do When Looking For A Job In China Today

- **Stay close to your core, competitive strengths and what you have a track record of performance in** – China has long been a very “opportunistic” place to be for many businesses and individuals. Like everywhere else in the world, however, the hiring market here has tightened as well late last year. As a result, it is difficult to make a jump in market and job function or industry at same time.

Right now, you want to highlight to potential employers the things that you have a strong track record in. As you develop your achievements here and as the overall economic situation improves, you will be in a better position to pursue opportunities outside your current area.

- **Be Flexible in the Type of Employers/Opportunities You Seek Out** – Mainly, *look into the many good, small and medium companies in the market, and not just the well-known multinationals*. China is the “mother of all entrepreneurial markets,” where many top executives leave their successful corporate career tracks to start or join more entrepreneurial businesses. As a result, many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in China offer a growing platform that possess high-potential products and services, solid management, professional working processes, and a unique business approach.

Although smaller/start-up companies tend to be more conservative on base salaries, they are more generous on variable, performance-based incentives. The situation is higher risk, but can offer higher growth and upside potential. Joining an SME can bring you excellent chances to be more involved, to stand out, and to make a large impact on a growing business.

- **Place Your Initial Emphasis On Experience Over Compensation** – Until recently, it has always been a sellers’ market in China, where the demand for international-caliber, management talent was far greater than the supply for many industries. As companies hired aggressively to keep pace with their business growth, candidates could demand large salary increases to move jobs.

The global financial crisis, however, has shifted things to a first-time ever, buyers’ buyers’ market, where companies can now be more selective and patient in their hiring approach, where they can look at more candidates and are not under the same pressure as before to “bid” for top talent. Therefore, be flexible in your compensation considerations when considering opportunities here. Particularly, if you’re somewhat new to this market, focus on opportunities that can build your capabilities and achievements in this market. If you’re confident in your capabilities and the platform you choose to join, then you’ll do well here.

- **Keep Your Long-Term Career Objectives in Mind** – Where the opportunistic nature of China’s economic environment allowed many to make leaps in their career development in the past, this situation no longer exists to the same degree in today’s global economic downturn. Still, China and many industries here offer a strong, growth story that is better than any other major market, where the career opportunities for strong performers are much more and much greater over the mid- to long-term.

6) Things To Avoid When Looking For A Job In China Today

- **Don't mention or refer to the word "expat"** – With international companies in China localizing their compensation structures for the past decade, the global economic crisis is only accelerating that process. The "expat" concept does not apply to all but the most senior positions for most companies in China today. Therefore, you don't want to give employers the idea that you have such expectations.
- **Don't overemphasize the point that you can "be a bridge" between China and the U.S** – Saying this only let's others know that you are new to this market. Of course, anyone who is bilingual/bicultural has this ability, but instead, those who work here talk in more depth and detail about their actual achievements in this market, rather than making such a general claim.
- **Don't ask too many questions about compensation and benefits that create exceptional or complex considerations for employers to think about** – Although compensation and benefits are fundamentally important to everyone, try to avoid questions early on in the interview process that highlight ways how your situation is different from the local workforce here. If you're a non-mainlander, remember that you're competing against a rising talent pool of mainland professionals that is not raising the same questions about compensation and benefits. For them, China is their backyard, where these things are straightforward and familiar to them.

Overall, most international companies employ some non-mainlanders and know how to look after them, so there's no need to be overly concerned. If you have questions about how they do that, then ask after an offer is made, or ask others who are not involved in the hiring and decision-making process.

7) About Compensation And Career Upside In China

- **Chance to pursue and do things you wouldn't be able to do elsewhere** – The aggressive growth of many businesses and industries in China allow many people to get into roles and opportunities that they would not likely, or would take much longer to break into in more mature markets like the U.S. You can find many people here who are handling roles and responsibilities that they have little previous training or background in. Although China's opportunistic environment has slowed from the global recession and as it becomes more developed, there are still many areas and roles that are not that mature yet.
- **Faster career growth and promotions tracks** – The faster growth rates of companies in China means that promotion tracks occur quicker, as is seen from the many people here in their mid-30s to mid-40s who are holding top management roles in global companies. . In China, there are not the bottlenecks at the middle to senior management levels that are found in places like the U.S. For strong performers in this market, the cream rises to the top.
- **Evaluate your net income, after taxes, living expenses, and housing expense** – When comparing financial compensation between what you may earn in the U.S. versus China, look at the net income you're able to put in your pocket. For instance, USD60K/year in China is comparable to USD100K in the U.S. after factoring in taxes, rental costs, and living expenses, which are all less in China (please see the net income comparison in our Wang & Li article, *Making A Move To China From The U.S.*).

From what we're seeing, *it's still a great time and great place to be in China.* Although the global recession is definitely being felt in the mainland as well at the industry, company, and individual levels, excellent career opportunities are still available, especially for those who are committed, patient, and persistent about pursuing their career success here. Capturing them just requires you to be smart and proactive about identifying and building your value to compete in this market.

Best of luck with your China job search trip and we hope to have the chance to work with you as you pursue your ongoing career objectives in the mainland.