

# Experts advise post-MBA career strategies for China

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TONY Liu was a successful senior industrial engineer before joining a top MBA program in the United States. He has just returned to China after graduation and has landed a job interview for the same original job.

But in China, getting back into the workforce for MBAs is not easy. The supply of graduates is significantly higher than demand. For each of the past three years, there were 2-3 million students who could not land a job for six months or longer after graduation.

Is gaining an MBA going to give Tony a good return on his investment?

Many would argue that an MBA is becoming a commodity.

In 1910, eight students at Harvard became the world's first MBA graduates. Today, there are approximately 500,000 MBA degrees awarded every year, with 30,000 from schools based in China.

According to recruitment expert Kelly Qian of The Jace-Kelly ([www.jace-kelly.com](http://www.jace-kelly.com)), there are three main sources of MBA supply in China: overseas graduates, Chinese university MBA graduates and

graduates from Sino-foreign educational institutions.

Qian says: "The salary differences among them are significant. The first category graduates are typically employed by foreign enterprises. Their salaries range from US\$30,000 to US\$70,000. Salaries of the third category are US\$15,000-40,000, while the second category usually earn US\$8,000-20,000."

The American and European business schools not only produce the top-earning MBA graduates for China, but are also very proactive.

Allan Friedman, executive director of communications with the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, says its faculty includes professors from China and there are student exchange programs with Chinese universities.

The Rotterdam School of Management has gone a step further by appointing an international expert on strategies and China as new dean. George Yip previously held senior positions with Capgemini and the London Business School.

Yip says: "There are many opportunities in China. However, few of our new graduates choose to go to China because

they find compensation packages are not competitive with offers from London or other major European locations."

Qian adds: "We have some cases of MBA graduates who returned and earned more than US\$300,000 a year. Typically those high-earners are those already with some pre and post-MBA experience overseas."

"There are some top business schools with proven job-placing power in certain countries, regions, sectors or industries. Pick those schools. Ideally try to stay and work there for three to five years before coming back to China."

Yip recommends that Chinese students RSM "find work in a high-paying job such as finance or consulting in a country with strong currency like the EU or British pound.

"It has become quite common to negotiate a signing bonus or reimbursement of tuition fees in first post-MBA job. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the Netherlands put in place a scheme to attract highly skilled expats to work there several years ago."

If you are not comfortable working abroad, some China units of strategy

consultancies (McKinsey, BCG, Bain) and leading investment banks (UBS, CS, Goldman Sachs) establish pre-determined hiring needs for MBA graduates on a worldwide basis.

"And it is only these jobs that make the US\$100,000 plus offers for fresh and top-performing MBA graduates," says Qian.

However, a US\$100,000 job often means acceptance of a career path that may include 100-hour weeks at dog-eat-dog investment banks and rigid, up-or-out consulting companies.

No matter where you go, always do your homework in finding out about your future employer. Focus on total HR management, not just recruitment. How does the company develop people? What are the measures the company has taken to retain top talent? Generally, less than one-third of multinational companies in China focus on total HR management, according to Qian.

Assess the marriage quotient. "Are you and your prospective employer mutually passionate about the future prospects for the company and yourself? Do you and the company have the common values? Are your professional standards consistent? Is

there a strong cultural fit?"

Qian estimates that around 20 percent of people accept a new job with a significant degree of uncertainty. "Ask questions to determine if the shoes you're about to wear fit, because you'll be running with them a long time," says Qian.

The MBA is more than just a degree. It gives students a global vision and language and communication, networking and presentation skills. These aspects can benefit you throughout your life. The globalization of China needs a global vision of professional managers, who can present and solve difficult problems.

A careful consideration of post-MBA career strategies is important. First, it allows one to choose the appropriate school with proven placing power in certain countries, regions, sectors or industries. Second, it may dispel some MBA myths and lead to a rationalization of many young professionals' desires to attend business school. Third, it helps candidates define their life/career plans and why exactly they are spending US\$120,000 to get an MBA.