

## Job Market

### Returnee – To Be or Not To Be?

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I often run into Chinese people studying or working in the US, asking me “What do you thinking of the opportunities in China?” Some would also comment “Oh, you returned in 2002! That was early, now maybe it is too late.” I saw frustrated husbands who think about returning to China all the time, but “my wife doesn’t want to go back with me. And I have kids who are going to school now...” I had chat with returnees who moved back to the US, but after a year or two in China, disappointed – “I left my family in the States when I moved back to China, and it is simply not sustainable.” I also got calls from people, inquiring “What about expatriate package, do companies still offer that? What is local plus?” And questions on tax, on school system, so on and so forth...

So, should you return to China? Are you ready to be a Returnee? What are the opportunities in China? What need to be considered before you make the move?

I have to proclaim that I don’t have all the answers, and I don’t try to make the decision for you. What I want to do is to provide you with some information, some perspectives, sharing some personal stories, so that you know some of the pros and cons. At the end of the day, life is all about tradeoffs, isn’t it? And it is good to have options, though sometimes it is not easy to make choices.

To make it simple, I would like to discuss the topic from 3 aspects: career, family life and package.

Career – it is definitely a very exciting time to work in China. I think it is more appropriate to talk about a career, rather than a job here. For potential returnees, it is also about doing something that you truly passionate about back at your homeland. We are witnessing the fast growing healthcare market in China; the emerging emphasis on setting up pharmaceutical R&D centers in China; the increasing strategic importance of China market for multinational pharmaceutical companies, the growing number of local Chinese pharmaceutical getting listed in the overseas stock markets. Many times, the opportunities presented to us are to become the pioneers, to develop something from scratch, to make a significant impact, to leave your marks on a company, an industry sector, or sometimes even on the society as a whole.

You may choose to work for a multinational company, a local player, or to set up a start-up yourself. No matter which path you choose, the first thing I would like to emphasize is that it will not be your normal 9 to 5 job. You need to be an entrepreneur, not only an entrepreneur when you run a start-up yourself, but almost all the companies are looking for entrepreneurs. A CEO of a local pharmaceutical company mentioned to me one day: “I am not looking for professional managers; I am looking for professional entrepreneurs.” So you need to work hard – be prepared to work late in the evening, during weekends, and don’t plan your vacation just yet.

Family life – You’d better bring your whole family back, unless the kids are all grown up. There are a few big advantages of returning to China: 1) Full-time or part-time nannies are so much more affordable (so you don’t have to cook or do laundry if you don’t want to); 2) You would be much closer to your parents and it becomes more important when they become older; 3) You would find

that life is much more than sending your kids to Chinese school during the weekend if you have children or having drink at bars if you are single; 4) Needless to say, if you have a Chinese stomach like me, it will be so much more satisfying. And the list can go on and on. However, I would not pretend that I don't miss the clear sky, as well as clean air and water. Again, that is some tradeoffs you would have to make.

Talking about Children's education, you would find British schools, American schools, Bi-lingual schools, as well as local schools here. Cost is quite high for international schools, and sometimes, the waiting list can also be long. For kids under the age of 8, personally, I prefer top local schools. My rationale is that if my kids can't survive at local school, then it should be no problem for them to later adapt to bi-lingual or International schools, but not vice versa. And most of us did grow up in China and went to local schools, didn't we? Nothing wrong with that! Of course, if your children are older, then they will go through a harder transition period. But one thing is for sure – you don't need to worry about their Chinese any more.

Package – there is a trend of localization. But I also believe that the market is efficient, so talent market is also driven by supply and demand. If your skill set and profile is hard to find locally, you would have a better chance negotiating an expatriate package. Full expatriate package is usually limited to 2-3 years' term. Local plus would also include some allowance for housing, transportation and kids' education. Often times, it offers more flexibilities for both you and the company.

My advice is that do think carefully before you make the move. Talk to other returnees and involve your family in the discussion. Do your homework and negotiate a package, which ensures that you return with a good starting point. Don't assume that life will be easy and simple here. But it will definitely be exciting.



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Prior to joining Korn/Ferry International, Ms. Kang was a Senior Engagement Manager at McKinsey & Company's Shanghai office and a core member of its healthcare practice, assisting leading pharmaceutical, medical devices and other multinational and local companies with their strategic and change management projects for over four years.

Prior to that, Ms. Kang specialized in cancer research in the U.S. for five years, first as a Researcher in the Surgery Department at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in NYC, then as a Research Scientist working on drug discovery at Wyeth, Pearl River, NY.

Born in Nanjing, Ms. Kang obtained a Bachelor's degree in Biological Science and Technology from Zhejiang University in China, and a Master's degree in Biochemistry from Tulane University in the U.S. She also received an M.B.A. with honors from The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, U.S.A.