

China Tries To Halt Exports Of Brightest Minds

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TOKYO (AP) — Having worked for two years at a tech company in Japan and picking up the language, Qiu Zhaohua has decided to return to China, lured by a job in the eastern tech hub of Dalian that pays as much 200,000 yuan a year, or about \$29,000 — a handsome starting salary by China's standards.

Chinese media have dubbed returnees like Qiu as "sea turtles" — Chinese-born graduates of top global universities and veterans of major companies that Beijing is eager to lure back as it tries to move its huge but poor economy beyond low-skill manufacturing.

Hoping to reverse a "brain drain," the government and companies are scouring the globe for talent. Job fairs like the one Qiu attended — at the posh Prince Hotel in central Tokyo — are one of their tools, with dozens being organized around the world.

"My Japanese ability and the work experience qualify me for the position of manager," said Qiu, 27.

Thousands of Chinese go abroad every year to study science, engineering and other fields and many never return home — not because they want to emigrate but because their still-developing economy lacks jobs to match their advanced skills. Of the 1.4 million Chinese students who received student visas to go abroad since 1979, only 390,000 have returned — just over a quarter, according to China's statistics bureau.

Beijing is keen to build up industries like telecommunications, computers, clean energy, automobile manufacturing, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals. It needs researchers and managers with experience and foreign-learned know-how.

One of the most famous "sea turtles" is Shi Zhengrong, the Chinese-born Australian founder of Suntech Power Holdings Ltd., which has grown into one of the world's biggest producers of solar cells. Shi emigrated to Australia and had no plans to return to China until city leaders in Wuxi, west of Shanghai, invited him to start a company there in 2001, along with financial backing of \$6 million.

"Companies are unavoidably getting drawn into the flow of globalization," said Wang Huiyao, director of the Center for China and Globalization, based in Beijing. "Hiring internationalized personnel at high cost is the fastest way they can catch up."

In late 2008, the Chinese government launched what it called the "thousand talents program" to bring 2,000 such top-notch hires home in the next five to 10 years.

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To compete with high-paying jobs in the U.S., Japan and elsewhere, Chinese companies and universities know they have to offer appealing packages.

"We have enough money and plenty of programs. The only thing we don't have is the talent," said Lu lin, director of the tax free area of Dalian.

Previous generations of Chinese who left for the United States, Europe or Australia were driven by war or poverty and stayed, creating large ethnic Chinese communities.

More recent "sea turtles" are members of China's intellectual and professional elite and planned only a temporary stay abroad. They left for better job prospects but are ready to return now that China can make them a better offer.

Huang Guan, who has nearly finished a PhD in political science from Japan's prestigious Waseda University, agreed to a \$52,000 a year teaching position at Shanghai Finance University — far higher than the average university professor salary.

He's also getting allowances for housing, research and moving back to China.

"I was persuaded by the offer," Guan said. "I've decided go to back home."

At another recent Tokyo job fair organized by the eastern province of Zhejiang which bristles with industry, several hundred young job seekers visited stalls for more than 30 companies and universities, some brandishing banners declaring "Welcome Home Package."

One of them, Alibaba Corp., which operates China's biggest shopping Web site, Taobao.com, was offering \$100,000 a year for a job in electronic information — an eye-poppingly large sum in a society where the average income per person was \$3,600 last year. The company said that was more than it offers graduates of Chinese universities.

Still, China faces tough competition from foreign employers who offer better pay and chances for advancement.

Zhan Shuwen, who also attended Waseda University, accepted a job with Japanese cosmetics maker Shiseido Co.

"I admit the invitation from China is alluring, but I want to do my best in Japan for my future happiness, although it may take dozens of years," she said. "Also, my experience in Japan will be valued."

Sunyard Corp., a software company, that had set up a booth at the job fair, was looking to make just one key hire: a marketing manager.

"The students are all excellent, but what we need is the all-rounder," said Ge Xingru, a company official. "I am not saying they are not perfect, but the right

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person is hard to find."

While job fairs have brought some success, Wang says Chinese companies need to use headhunters more to target the best employees amid increasing competition for talent.

"The effectiveness of these overseas recruiting fairs has its limits. Involving headhunters is a must," he said. "There are piles of students seeking job opportunities overseas."

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AP Business Writer Joe McDonald in Beijing contributed to this article.

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