

# THE ACADEMIC ECONOMICS JOB MARKET IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT. I describe the academic job market for economists in China. I discuss the broad types of university that hire PhDs in economics. I outline the timing of the market, the application process, and how interviews are conducted. I detail the nature of job offers in the Chinese market. I note several features of the Chinese market that distinguish it from other job markets in economics.

Cunningham’s Law: “The best way to get the right answer on the Internet is not to ask a question, it’s to post the wrong answer.”

## V. 2.1.

### 1. OVERVIEW

I have no particular expertise on the Chinese job market. Rather, I have served on PhD placement at Warwick for a few years now and have found myself at a loss when asked by my students how the Chinese job market works. To my knowledge, there is no equivalent to Abhiroop Mukhopadhyay’s excellent guide to the Indian job market<sup>1</sup> that has yet been written for China. So: I have written a mostly incorrect guide to fill that gap.

This guide presumes you have already read John Cawley’s guide to the US job market<sup>2</sup> and Michela Carlana’s guide to the European job market.<sup>3</sup> It presumes that you are considering how the Chinese job market differs from those in the US and the UK/Europe. This focus on differences may create the impression that the Chinese market is more haphazard or unprofessional than markets in the US and UK/Europe. That is not the case. Rather, this focus on differences should help prepare you for what would otherwise be unexpected.

I have no advice on private sector jobs in China.

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<sup>1</sup><https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-nKjsuAovWz0fCWHO7Z249P-jNbfQSA/view>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.aeaweb.org/content/file?id=869>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.europeanjobmarketofeconomists.org/uploads/Job-Market-Guide-EEA-Website-Michela-Carlana-with-EAYE-Interventions.pdf>

## 2. A SKINNER MAP

There are, more or less, six tiers of universities in China that hire candidates who have completed or are close to completing PhDs in economics in the US or the UK/Europe. While any attempt to rank universities is controversial, and any attempt to rank mainland Chinese universities is very controversial, I can make an attempt based on prestige and research quality:

- *Tier H.* Pretty much anything in Hong Kong: HKUST, CUHK, HKU, CityU, HKBU, Lingnan ...

Among Universities in Hong Kong, HKUST, CUHK, and HKU are often understood to be the first tier, CityU, HKBU, and Lingnan are often taken as the second tier, and schools like HKPolyU and the University of Macau are usually regarded to be in the third tier. The top group of universities in Hong Kong largely competes with universities in Singapore and Australia for candidates. Below the top 3 in Hong Kong, many Chinese candidates do not find Hong Kong schools to be more attractive than comparable mainland institutions. This is in part because Mandarin speakers have faced discrimination in Hong Kong in the past.

- *Tier 1.* The top mainland universities: Peking, Tsinghua SEM, Fudan, Shanghai Jiaotong, Zhejiang ...
- *Tier 2.* Other mainland universities in the QS Top 200 or with otherwise solid research output: Xiamen, Wuhan, Sun Yat-sen University ...
- *Tier 3.* Mainland universities outside the QS Top 200: Nanjing, Tongji, Nankai, Jinan, Beijing Normal, BIT, Xi'an Jiaotong, Shandong, Hunan, East China Normal University ...
- *Tier FE.* Universities that are specialized in finance and economics, but that may perform poorly in the QS rankings because they do not have science departments that publish in journals with high impact factors: SHUFE, CUFU (Central University of Finance and Economics), UIBE, SWUFE, Jinan ISER, Renmin ...
- *Tier N.* New universities in mainland China: CUHK-Shenzhen, HKUST-Guangzhou, ShanghaiTech, Duke Kunshan, NYU-Shanghai, Southern University of Science and Technology, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool, Ningbo Nottingham ...

Within these new universities, CUHK-Shenzhen and NYU-Shanghai are quite similar to Tier 1 schools in their hiring approach. NYU-Shanghai may even be its own tier, having flyouts in New York City, and offering salaries that rival those it pays in New York City. ShanghaiTech is also an outlier, sponsored by the municipal government and by the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

I am making no attempt to rank Tier 1, Tier FE, and Tier N against each other.

While only one of these divisions is clearly defined, these tiers can roughly be distinguished by their recruiting strategies, salaries, teaching requirements, and tenure requirements. A critical point is whether the relevant unit is more internationalized or more traditional: Do the faculty publish in international journals? Do the recruiting strategies, salaries, teaching requirements, and tenure requirements follow international practices?

Another way to think about these differences is to compare Project 985 universities, Project 211 universities, and other universities. These “Projects” are government initiatives that began in the 1990s. Project 985 universities generally get more government funding and have undergraduates who perform better on the Gaokao college entrance exams than do Project 211 universities. And Project 211 universities perform better on these metrics than do other universities.

Yet another way to think about this division is to ask who the dean is. An energetic dean such as Zhang Junsen, Wang Pengfei, or Fang Hanming can quickly change how a department is run, who it hires, and how it is perceived by candidates.

And yet one more way to think about this division is to take a spatial approach. Universities in the big cities, e.g. Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Hangzhou, have substantial advantages. They are better funded and their events have more international exposure.

These divisions have consequences not only for salaries and teaching loads, but also for grants. Often the top universities in a given province earn more grants than do other universities. “Top” here may mean best, it may mean top three, or it may mean the only Project 985 or Project 211 university in a location.

This division is, unfortunately, a rough one, and I have been told that parts of it are wrong. For example, I have been told more than once that Xiamen and Jinan ISER are actually in Tier 1. Shanghai Jiaotong may be ranked too highly. Tongji and BIT have high QS rankings but have hired few international candidates.

Importantly, this division leaves out differences across units (e.g. departments) within the same university. Traditional and internationalized units can coexist within the same university – consider, for example, the College of Economics (traditional) and IESR (internationalized) at Jinan University. At Peking, the Guanghua School of Management and National School of Development are more internationalized than the School of Economics, though this gap is shrinking.

One university can have many units. In addition to the three above, Peking is home to the HSBC Business School in Shenzhen, the Institute of New Structural Economics, a Finance department in the School of Mathematics, an Urban Economics Department in the School of Government, an Education Economics in the Graduate School of Education, and a Health Economics department in the Medical School. Renmin has at least five units (economics,

applied economics, public finance, business school, and the school of agricultural economics and rural development) that do research and deliver teaching in economics, and that together have recently hired  $\sim 15$  overseas PhDs every year. Fudan has both a School of Economics and a Fanhai International School of Finance, Tsinghua has both SEM and PBCSF, and Shanghai Jiaotong University has both SOEF and SAIF.

In addition to economics departments, business/management/finance schools and public policy departments in some universities also hire economics PhD candidates. Business schools like Guanghua, the Cheung Kong Graduate School of Business, the China Europe International Business School, and Wudaokou/PBCSF can be very attractive to candidates, in part because of their high salaries. Many of the new independent business schools are more internationally oriented than the traditionally elite Chinese universities. A small number of institutions only allow you to apply to one unit within the institution.

### 3. TIMING

Tier H Universities generally follow the timing of the US market. For mainland universities, there are slight differences. The timing of the Chinese market is generally:

- *October 1-December 1(ish)*: Applications are due, depending on the university. Many applications are due in early December. A few are due before November 1. A small number of schools will keep accepting applications through December. The 25th percentile of application deadlines is around November 30, and the 75th percentile is around January 10. But: universities with late deadlines often review materials before the deadline, so you should submit early. Several universities review applications on a rolling basis, including HKU, HKUST, CUHK, HK PolyU, Zhejiang, Tongji, and Universities in Macao.
- *December 15-January 5*: Interviews happen, depending on the university. Before Covid, these were mostly at the AEA meetings. Some were at the equivalent Chinese meetings, i.e. the International Conference in Economics (<http://www.cicecon.org.cn>). During Covid, these became mostly online. In 2023, these meetings became in person once again. You will usually be contacted 3 to 7 days before the interview. According to the Economics Job Market Rumors wiki, the 25th percentile of interview dates in 2022 was around December 7, the median was around December 17, and the 75th percentile was around January 2.
- *December 20-January 31*: Second-round interviews happen, depending on the university. For many of the top institutions there is now a second round that resembles an American flyout, including a full presentation of the job market paper. For other institutions, these second round interviews are more similar to an interview than

to an American flyout, but do involve a presenting your job market paper for 30 minutes. These interviews are generally online.

- *January 1-January 31*: Job offers are made, generally without a campus visit.

The big picture here is that Chinese universities have a different semester system than in the US. Most want to have finished hiring before their winter break begins a couple of weeks before the Chinese New Year.

The movement to online interviews since Covid may shift this schedule earlier. Like some European universities, Chinese universities would prefer to clear the market earlier. Some may indeed organize workshops and conferences in the summer during which they will gauge candidates' willingness to join the university. So: the decision of whether you will go to China may be one you have to make earlier than at the moment you receive offers – Chinese offers arrive early and explode quickly.

Not all universities follow this general timeline. Duke Kunshan, for example, has recently had first-round interviews in the middle of November, second round interviews in early December, and third-round interviews in mid-January.

#### 4. APPLICATIONS

**4.1. Where to apply.** Many Chinese universities list applications on the same portals as universities in the US and UK/Europe. These are JOE (<https://www.aeaweb.org/joe/listings>) and EJM (<https://econjobmarket.org/>). JOE is more popular in China, with something like 75% of Chinese listings being on this platform.

Some Chinese universities only list applications and advertisements on their official website or WeChat account. Or they use AcademicJobsOnline and `jobs.ac.uk`. Or they use multiple platforms. Before Covid, some universities listed applications on the China International Conference in Economics website (<http://www.cicecon.org.cn>). From 2023, this site has become active again.

In 2022, roughly a third of Chinese universities required application by email, another third via JOE, and some via both. About a quarter want applications to be submitted by their own websites – especially in Hong Kong.

**4.2. What to include.** Chinese universities generally ask for the same materials as US universities: a cover letter, a job market paper, any other papers, a CV, a teaching statement, a research statement, and three reference letters.

Most schools require a job market paper and “potentially” one other paper. But many (e.g. Zhejiang recently) require three papers from applicants. Interviews received generally correlates positively with number of research papers.

In Europe, research and teaching statements are becoming less common, while increasingly departments ask for a short job market video. This is not yet the case in China.

A typical Tier 1 and FE or Tier 2 school may receive more than 300 applications and schedule approximately 40 first-round interviews that lead to about 16 flyouts. Schools like SUFE, CUEB, Zhejiang and Zhongnan have said recently (2023) that they received fewer applications than in previous years – this may be due in part to political concerns.

Every school decides its interview list differently, but one approach is to have an ad-hoc committee of 10-15 recently tenured faculty and junior faculty who have recently returned from a PhD abroad screen the applications. Many of the things they care about are unsurprising – e.g. what you have published and where you did your PhD. But they will also care about where you did your undergraduate work. And they may need to prioritize certain fields or maintain balance between certain fields. This need to balance broad fields (e.g. theory v. empirical) and more narrow fields may also show up at the flyout stage. All these factors can lead to considerable randomness, so try not to take rejection personally.

Most Chinese universities will ask Chinese scholars based in the US or UK with whom they have a good relationship to provide their own views on the applications they receive. So: make sure to talk to Chinese faculty in your department (or failing that, your network) about your materials and what can be done to improve them.

For schools outside of Beijing and Shanghai, signalling location preference is a good idea. For example, “I am particularly enthusiastic to apply to Xiamen, as I grew up originally in Fujian.” This strategy is, of course, more effective in less desirable locations – “I would totally work at Harvard because I grew up in Boston” won’t get you very far.

## 5. INTERVIEWS

The Chinese job market is changing more rapidly than markets in the US and Europe, especially since Covid. Schools that were not asking for job talks a few years ago now do. With many candidates in China during Covid, these were sometimes in person.

**5.1. How invitations happen.** Like US universities, Chinese universities will generally contact you by email. Phone invitations are now very rare. A member of the HR team may add you to WeChat for informal communication, while having formal communication by email.

**5.2. When and where they occur.** Chinese universities typically do not interview at the EEA meetings. Before Covid, most Chinese universities typically held first round interviews at the AEA meetings. Some universities also held interviews at the job market meetings in China (<http://www.cicecon.org.cn>). A few years ago, there were some universities that only interviewed at these meetings in China, making them mandatory and so forcing candidates to plan their travel carefully. Even before Covid, this was changing and these meetings were no longer clearly mandatory. During Covid, all interviews went online. Generally, these are still online. However, from 2023, the annual conference of the CICE and China job market has become in person once again. Some universities (e.g. HSBC Business School of PKU,

the Business School of the Southern University of Science and Technology) have announced they will hold interviews at these in-person meetings. Others (e.g. Fanhai International School of Finance) have separate application deadlines for the Chinese meetings.

5.3. **What form they take.** Here, it is important to understand that many Chinese universities take approaches different from those of US universities, and that approaches vary across Chinese universities.

- For some universities, there is only one round of interviews followed by offers, with no second round interviews.
- For other universities, there are second round interviews.

For both of these types of universities, the first interview generally follows the AEA format. That is, first-round interviews at the AEA meetings and online have often been similar in format to interviews by US universities, so Cawley's guide to the US market will be useful. In these 20-30 minute sessions, you will often be asked to:

- Present your job market paper, without slides. This is the modal way to open an interview, but you may be asked to do so in 2, 5, 10, or 15 minutes. So be ready for any of these.
- Present your job market paper, but with slides. Wuhan and Renmin have recently expected slides during the first round interview.
- Discuss your other papers, works in progress, and future research agenda
- Answer questions about teaching.
- Other common openers: being asked to briefly introduce yourself; being asked about your motivation for applying.
- A common final question: "Do you have any questions for us?"

In some cases, first-round interviews are an hour long. In this event, you will be likely asked to present your job market paper, with slides, for 40 minutes. The remaining time would then be used for questions and to discuss your broader agenda. Nankai and Jinan have both used this format recently. I have been told of one university that conducted 15 minute online interviews with slides.

While most universities that adopt the "presentation" format for a first-round interview in English, some will offer you the opportunity to present in Chinese. Both Tsinghua and Renmin have done this recently. You may be asked questions in Chinese during the interview. Some universities may indeed take your English skills for granted and would like to see your ability to present and discuss research in Chinese. Others will have a deliberate policy of using the interview to test your language skills, demanding all students from Chinese universities interview in English, and all students from abroad interview in Chinese. Occasionally, a

department will insist that the interview is in Chinese with no advance warning, even if all prior communication has been in English.

Online interviews, because they may be the only interview prior to a job offer, will often be in this longer, one hour format. It is important to have reliable internet for these meetings – if you keep disconnecting from the Zoom or Tencent meeting, you might be seen as not taking the interview seriously. One solution is to book a room or office in your department that has an ethernet connection, rather than relying on your home wifi. And yes, your online interview may take place at 1AM in your current time zone.

On the hiring side, interviews can be exhausting. So there may be up to 20 faculty members who take part in various interviews. Try to find out who will be present in your interview before it happens, and find out about their research. Often the pool of interviewers is drawn from the recently tenured faculty, as some of the senior faculty in a department may not be up to date with the latest trends in research, or may neither publish in English nor speak English.

Second round interviews differ across universities, both in format and purpose. You may be asked to present your job market paper. You may have a second interview with a second, more senior group of professors who have administrative roles. Sometimes this can be the dean, vice dean, and other senior faculty members who have served as head of department in the past. If you are interviewing with administrators, this interview may be in Chinese, and may involve discussions of whether you would accept an official offer, and under what terms. Second round interviews can take this form because hiring decisions in Chinese universities can be more dictatorial than in the US, i.e. not involving a faculty vote or even a broader meeting of faculty.

At all stages, interviews are likely to be used to gauge your interest and probability of accepting an offer if given. During later interviews, the department might begin promoting itself to you – answering questions about the university, the city, and the curriculum.

I have only been told of one instance of this, but one university has used the strategy of giving a group of candidates a limited amount of time to make a group presentation. This was done to evaluate how well the candidates worked together and how good they would be to have as colleagues.

**5.4. Flyouts.** Most Tier H universities and some Tier 1 and FE universities follow the US model and have on-campus flyouts. Some follow the mainland model. Some mainland universities have a second-round interview where you may be asked to:

- Present your research agenda and teaching plan.
- Ask questions about the university.
- Deliver a teaching lecture on a topic selected by the university, often with less than 72 hours notice.



Because “virtual” flyouts have become possible since Covid, more mainland universities have these flyouts than in the past.

5.5. **Question list.** Below is a list of (some) questions that have been asked in Chinese interviews, though there is little here not already in other lists of interview questions asked in the economics job market:

- Could you briefly introduce yourself?
- Could you talk about your job market paper?
- Questions on the paper (e.g. how did you collect the data; identification strategy; intuition for the method; how do you rule out selection; why you don’t control for XYZ; how can you prove the mechanism is what you claim it is; why did you do X instead of Y; external validity; validity of your variables; definitions of your variables; policy implications...)?
- Could you talk about <name of paper other than your job market paper>?
- How did you come to work with your coauthors?
- What did you contribute, and what did your coauthor contribute?
- Why is XYZ your primary field?
- Are you an XYZ economist (e.g. health economist)?
- What is your research agenda? What are the themes of your research?
- What is your motivation for this paper?
- What is your paper’s contribution?
- How is your paper different from previous work in this field? This question might be asked about a specific other paper in the field.
- Which journals will you submit to/have you submitted to?
- Why did you apply to our institution?
- Did you apply to our competitor institution, XYZ?
- What do you know about our institution?
- How does your research fit with other research at this institution?
- What is your location preference?
- If you could design a new course, what would it be?
- How would you use your research when teaching?
- How would you teach ABC (e.g. instrumental variables) to students in XYZ (e.g. business administration)?
- What did your teaching experience during your PhD involve – lectures? grading? what else?
- Why did your PhD take six years? (They may assume a PhD abroad takes only 3 or 4 years).

- When can you obtain your degree? Or, put differently, could you start teaching on campus by date X?
- What other universities have invited you for an interview? How does our institution rank among these universities?
- Do you have any questions for us?

## 6. OFFERS

If the dean, vice dean, or head of department adds you on WeChat after your interview, this is a good sign. They're probably thinking of making you an offer.

6.1. **Status.** In addition to salary, it is important to consider (and to discuss with the university) whether the job is within the government bureaucracy or not. If so, it may come with more job security. But even then, rules may differ by university, and across departments within a university. So: find out the details when you receive an offer.

Tier 2 and 3 departments are increasingly hiring tenure-track post-docs, rather than tenure-track assistant professors. These are paid less and have short clocks, e.g. 3 years, but have little or no teaching. This format allows departments to hire even if they don't have an official opening, and is used by departments as a faster, cheaper screening mechanism. A post-doc who meets publication requirements can be promoted to assistant professor, or even associate professor. So: if your pipeline will allow you to meet the requirements, this option can be attractive.

Tier N universities stand out because all new hires have started on a tenure system – there aren't multiple tracks. This reduces problems of office and university politics.

6.2. **Salaries.** As a general guide: Hong Kong salaries are similar to American salaries conditional on rank (but not on cost of living) and mainland salaries are slightly better than UK salaries conditional on rank (but not on cost of living).

You should also take taxes into consideration. Hong Kong and mainland China both have progressive tax systems. My rough estimation is that a salary of 500,000 RMB would face an average tax rate of 20% and marginal rate of 30% in mainland China. Its equivalent in HKD would face an approximate 14% average tax rate and marginal rate of 17% in Hong Kong. Its equivalent in USD would face an approximate 17% average rate and 22% marginal rate in the US, plus state taxes that vary widely. Its equivalent in GBP would face an approximate 19% average rate and 40% marginal rate in the UK. And then there are differences in VAT, property taxes, national insurance, etc... that I haven't thought about.

In addition to salary, most universities also provide housing subsidies for Assistant Professors. These range widely, e.g. from £4,100 to £12,000/\$5,500 to \$15,000/RMB 35,000 to

RMB 100,000 per year.<sup>4</sup> In Hong Kong, these can be even greater (e.g. USD \$22,000), and APs may be given a choice between a cash allowance or heavily subsidized (e.g. rent less than 10% of salary) accommodation. The top mainland universities may pay lower salaries than what I list below because they instead provide affordable housing (经济适用房) at a subsidized price. This housing can, sometimes, have a very long waiting list (5-10 years), while sometimes it can be shorter (3-5 years). This ability varies widely across schools, so you will need to talk to those who are informed at a particular school. In addition, some schools will, after tenure, allow you to purchase a house at a steep discount – and you are permitted to sell the house you have bought.

In some cases, you may qualify for a subsidy from the government. The Ministry of Education provides subsidies to exceptional scholars who return to China. You may also qualify for a subsidy from the local government. In Shenzhen, for example, an assistant professor can receive an extra 240,000 RMB per year for 3 years under the Peacock Plan (孔雀计划). After 3 years, this subsidy might be renewed. For a new associate or full professor, the subsidy may be greater. But few cities do this, and policies change – the department will know more than you do.

There is also a major risk that universities might not fulfill the contract – it is not rare that they withhold a portion of the salary, perhaps 30%, for several years. If the financial health of the university is tied to the financial health of the prefectural government, and the prefectural government gets into financial trouble, subsidies and grants that were previously promised might not be delivered. It may become hard to recruit PhD students. Positions can be cancelled. So: do some research into local fiscal conditions.

For a few universities, the salary is inclusive of the pension contributions and insurance paid by the university.

Some top universities in Beijing (e.g. Peking, Renmin) are likely to pay less than the numbers below because they allow children of faculty to attend their affiliated schools, which are among the best in China.

- Tier H schools often pay £100,000/\$130,000/RMB 825,000 for Assistant Professors. But universities in Macao, other than the University of Macau, pay much less.
- Tier 1 and FE schools often pay £53,000-71,000/\$70,000-90,000/RMB 450,000-600,000 for Assistant Professors.
- Tier 2 and 3 schools often pay £47,000-60,000/\$62,000-80,000/RMB 350,000-500,000 for Assistant Professors.

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<sup>4</sup>Early drafts of this document were written in Spring 2022 when 1 GBP was 1.3 USD or 8.25 RMB. But exchange rates fluctuate a lot. Usually the number in RMB is the one that was quoted to me. Hopefully, these numbers will rapidly become out of date.

- Tier N schools often pay £70,000-£83,000/\$94,000-110,000/RMB 600,000-700,000 for Assistant Professors. But some of the universities in this tier (e.g. Ningbo Nottingham, Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool) will have lower salaries of 360,000-400,000 RMB.

Salaries will differ across departments within a university. Salaries are higher in more internationalized departments than in more traditional ones. Business, management, and finance schools often pay 20-50% more than the above. I have been told that the top end of the Tier 1 and FE range “is probably much higher” than what I have listed. One data point from a recent business school hire was RMB 700,000 (~£85,000 or \$110,000). Another data point is a recent offer from one of the new business schools that was “competitive, in all dimensions,” with US offers, including those from business schools.

**6.3. Teaching Loads.** Chinese universities usually have about 32 teaching weeks of lectures per year. In addition, there are four weeks for revision and four weeks for exams.

- Tier H schools often have the equivalent of 2-1 teaching loads, or about 100 hours of lecture over the academic year.
- Tier 1 and FE schools often have the equivalent of 2-1 teaching loads.
- Tier 2 and 3 schools often have the equivalent of 2-2 teaching loads.

You may have a teaching reduction during your first year, though this will depend on whether the department has pressing teaching needs. You may also need to complete a course on how to teach – at one Tier 2 university this course is 30 hours in your first year. This burden is similar to programs like the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic and Professional Practice in the UK.

Unlike UK and US universities, Chinese universities generally do not have large master’s programs, and so you should not expect a heavy load of this sort of thesis supervision. However, there can be a large load of undergraduate thesis supervision, perhaps 10 students per year or more.

As in the UK and US, what you teach will depend not only on your own fields of expertise, but also the needs of the department. So: it is good to find out not only how much you will teach, but also what you will teach, and whether this is negotiable. You will need to find out whether you have the freedom to create your own courses (US jargon) or papers/modules (UK jargon). Even if bureaucracy makes it difficult to create a new course, you may be able to use an existing course code and create your own syllabus.

**6.4. Service Loads.** There can be large service loads unlike what you see in the UK, US, or Europe. Generally, these are heavier than those faced by junior faculty in the US. You might need to interview college applicants. You might need to mentor or supervise undergraduate students as a 班主任. You may need to supervise undergraduates in activities such as

community service, conducting local surveys, and social events. You may need to design ideological or political materials that can be used in teaching economics.

And there are service roles that also exist in the UK, US, and Europe: you may need to help on the admissions of master's students and PhD students. You may need to serve on junior hiring. You may need to help put together materials by which the government will rank your department, much like the UK's Research Excellence Framework. All of this may be irrelevant to your research. All of it can take a lot of time. This work is an investment in firm-specific capital that can create lock-in effects and was, for a long time, why tenure standards were unclear and not well enforced at many schools.

**6.5. Research Support.** Chinese universities do generally provide research support during the first six years of a contract. A typical amount for a mainland university will be RMB 30,000 (£3,600) per year. And of course you can apply for grants + may be able to get funding from a firm for a specific project. At one tier 2 university, new faculty can apply for a start-up grant with RMB 50,000 with the expectation that the funded project is completed within 3 years.

In addition to start-up grants, some departments will provide seed grants. Some will also provide funding for teaching support. Both types of support are often provided on a first-apply-first-serve model and can vary from RMB 30,000 to RMB 80,000 per year.

**6.6. Sabbatical, Maternity Leave, and Travel.** Sabbatical in China is less systematic than in the US or UK/Europe. It is unlikely to be in your contract. But often universities will allow you to spend several months as a visiting scholar at a university abroad, though not in the first couple of years of your contract. Two anecdotes may be useful. The first anecdote is of an AP who, after performing well in service and research, was rewarded with a year of no teaching. While this is not sabbatical in name, it resembles it. The second anecdote is of an AP who visited abroad and, on returning, had to make up the teaching he did not do while he was away. This is less similar to sabbatical, but suggests a willingness of some departments to allow you to visit other universities.

Maternity leave differs by province. It is usually five or six months. Not all universities extend the tenure clock by a year. Some do. For mothers. There is nothing for fathers.

You can travel to present work abroad generally without restriction, though for international conferences you may need to fill out internal paperwork that can take a month to get approved. During term, if you need to teach, you may need to use an official passport to travel. If you simply go to a conference privately, you may not be reimbursed.

**6.7. Tenure Standards.** Tenure standards are usually formulaic (this many papers from these journals) and less subjective than in the US or UK. Chinese universities have lists of journals that count for tenure. These are often graded in tiers, such as A+, A, A-, B, etc...These lists

vary widely across universities, and over time, so you are best off consulting the most recent list. Indeed, you should ask a prospective employer for their explicit requirements before accepting an offer and should ask other people whether the requirements have been reformed recently or applied consistently. SUFE's list is widely available. A typical list might be of the sort:

- “Top 5”: A tier with 5 journals. You know what these are.
- A: A tier with 25 journals, including the AEJs, EJ, JME, IER, JOLE, JDE, ...That is: second tier general interest journals and top journals of big fields.
- B: A tier with 40 journals, including GEB, JUE, JCE, JEBO, the JHE...That is: top journals of small fields and second journals of big fields.
- C: A tier with 50 journals, including CER, EHR, FS, OEP, JAE...

Tier H schools often have 6-year tenure clocks and require at least 3 A or better publications. An older draft of this document said 4, but I was told that was too high a bar. A top 5 may or may not be needed at the top Hong Kong schools. The top Hong Kong schools also have begun recently to pay close attention to research independence. Solo-authored papers are better. Papers co-authored with different collaborators are OK. A bunch of papers coauthored with your supervisor or with someone more established than you can be a major problem.

Mainland tenure clocks and tenure requirements have changed over time and differ across universities. Standards have generally risen in recent years. Some departments in universities such as Peking, Tsinghua, and Shanghai Jiaotong have 8-12 year tenure clocks and require at least 4 A publications.

Most Tier 1 and FE schools have 6-year tenure clocks and require at least 2 A or 1 A + 2 B or better publications – I have been told this about PKU's NSD and SOE, for example. But this can vary widely. One breakdown I have been told is that Zhejiang usually requires two As or equivalent publications, that Guanghua requires 4 or 5 As in 12 years, that Tsinghua SEM and Shanghai Jiaotong require 3 As in eight years, and that SUFE and Jinan IESR require 2 As. Tier 2 and 3 schools often have 6-year tenure clocks and require at least 2 A or 1 A + 2B or 1 A + 1B or better publications. At departments like these, quantity may come to matter more than quality. Tenure standards will differ across departments within a university. Tenure standards are higher in more internationalized departments than in more traditional ones.

Whether a publication “counts” depends on rules that vary across universities and departments. This can be affected by the number of authors (e.g. a paper with more than three authors may be discounted), whether you are first author, whether you are the corresponding author, and what your primary affiliation is if you have more than one. This too is good to clarify during the negotiation phase.

The lists of journals given above are very international in their focus. In more traditional departments, Chinese journals such as *Management World* and *Economic Research Journal* will be given higher weight. Publishing in these journals may even come with a financial bonus. Personal connections may help at some Chinese journals (which does not imply they do not also matter at non-Chinese journals). At Tier 1/FE schools there can be pressure to publish in these journals as well, in part because the government uses them in funding decisions and rankings.

For most mainland universities, obtaining a national grant or other major source of funding (e.g. Chinese National Social Science Foundation, Ministry of Education, National Natural Science Foundation of China) is also required for tenure. In the more international departments, a national grant can be replaced with a Tier B (e.g. GEB) publication. An NSFC grant may count as an A publication, particularly if you in a department with a greater share of domestic or traditional faculty. There are also substantial reputational benefits from these grants.

These grants are not easy to get. Once you get the hang of it, you may expect to spend a bit more than two weeks every year applying for them. The first application will take more than a month, because you will not be familiar with the way proposals are written in China – you will need to learn this from your more experienced colleagues.

6.8. **Postdocs.** There are no general rules on whether Chinese universities will permit you to do a postdoc before joining, and thereby delay the tenure clock. Some universities allow this, some do not, and it will depend on what you negotiate. Some universities have rigid dates by which you must join.

6.9. **Visits.** If you can, visit the campus before you accept an offer. This will help you gauge both the intellectual environment and the level of internationalization. On the intellectual environment, you can assess whether faculty and students frequently meet to discuss ideas and data, and whether people are often discussing research. On internationalization, you can check whether seminars and the questions asked during them are both in English. At the most international departments, you will barely notice that the department is in China.

## 7. A JOB MARKET WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

Several variables make the Chinese market different from the US or UK/European markets.

7.1. **老外.** It can be very hard to work in China if you are not fluent in Chinese. Even in a department full of internationally trained faculty who all speak English, the administrative staff and much of the paperwork will likely be in Chinese. Even in a department that does all the paperwork in English (e.g. Duke Kunshan) you still have to actually live in a city where you will likely need Chinese to get by. Though in Hong Kong English can be enough.

Even if you are not Chinese, you may be considered by Chinese schools. Foreign scholars may not require *bianzhi* after tenure; that is, they may not count against the quota of employed persons allowed by the government. Foreign scholars can count positively in internationalization indices that are part of the Times Higher Education and QS rankings. But Chinese schools may also consider you for reasons specific to you. Is your partner Chinese? Does your partner work in China? Are you Chinese but with a foreign passport? If you are from Korea or Japan, you may be able to make a more credible case than the average Swedish candidate that you would be willing to move to China.

Signalling willingness to move to China is essential – if they don't believe you'd accept an offer, you won't even get an interview. This can make it wise to reveal personal information on your credible reasons for moving in the cover letter or during the interview. And they will test your willingness with questions like where else you have interviews, how the department ranks relative to your other interviews, why you are interested in the specific city, and... simply asking “if we give you an offer, will you take it?”

If this is you, you might have a lower, but very different service load. You may be the one who teaches classes in English. You might be the one who organizes international conferences and other events. You might be the one who interviews candidates. And this can vary quite a lot from case to case. Foreign passport holders may also have different contract lengths, tenure standards, and salaries.

There is a general presumption that you are interested in the Chinese economy. If your research is not on China, it may be difficult to find others to talk to.

**7.2. Publications.** Publications are a benefit on the job market, but “revise and resubmit” invitations are much more valuable. Chinese universities can usually only “count” your paper if it is published while you work there, with their name on it. So: a publication is a signal of future potential, while a “revise and resubmit” invitation is something that a Chinese university may tangibly gain. This creates perverse incentives for you to drag your heels on resubmissions. Your non-Chinese coauthors are unlikely to understand this if you do not explain it to them.

**7.3. Economics Job Market Rumors.** The benefit of anonymity is freedom to tell the truth. The cost of anonymity is freedom to lie. This makes the “economics job market rumors” website a more valuable source of information in the context of China than in other job markets, though the signal-to-noise ratio remains low.

**7.4. Flyouts.** Many mainland universities, including those in Tier 1 and FE, make offers based on the AEA interviews alone, without having flyouts or second-round interviews. Tier H schools typically have flyouts on the US model.



7.5. **Timing.** The Chinese market mostly follows the timing of the US market, with the exception that schools that do not interview at the AEAs will generally hold online interviews in the second half of December (including on Christmas). As a result, they make offers almost immediately after the AEAs, and these are generally exploding.

The administrative process after you have accepted an offer can sometimes be quite long. It may take a few months to finish the paperwork needed for you to become a proper employee of the university.

7.6. **After Tenure.** There is no direct equivalent of the US tenure system in mainland China. In Tier 1 and FE universities, if you make tenure, you often sign a second contract of 5-6 years that has low or no publication requirements. This may come with a pay increase, though the increase may be offset by the loss of housing subsidies. After that contract is complete, you will sign another contract of 5-6 years. You will repeat this process until you are promoted to full professor. At that point, you're nearly impossible to fire. Some Tier 2 and 3 universities follow this model.

Another model takes a similar approach but continues to have publication requirements during the second contract.

Yet another model is that after you make tenure, you become a government bureaucrat. Although you are again hard to fire (鐵飯碗!), this puts you on the pay scale of the bureaucracy. Still, your net income will be similar or slightly higher to your pre-tenure net income once you account for other subsidies and welfare. This is popular among Tier 2 and 3 schools.

7.7. **Interdisciplinarity.** Some departments, as a legacy of past organization, will be interdisciplinary. Or they will teach an economics you do not recognize. You may, for example, be asked with 48 hours notice to prepare a 20 minute lecture contrasting the ideas of 司馬遷 and Adam Smith for your second round interview. You may be asked to demonstrate knowledge of Marxian economics (which, to be fair, came up when I was interviewed by a US HBC).

I have been told that these examples are an exaggeration – though they do come from experiences of actual candidates. Questions like these are increasingly uncommon, but can still happen. These sorts of matching frictions may simply reduce the proportion of interviews that are successful. But you can improve your chances in any one interview by doing research in advance into the institutions you are applying to and knowing the material they teach that may not be offered in US and UK/European universities. A rather quick and easy check is to look at the fraction of faculty with overseas degrees – the higher the proportion, the more similar the interview questions will be to those at an AEA interview.

7.8. **Exploding, Inflexible Offers.** All mainland offers are exploding offers. Expect to have about a week to decide. Maybe even less. You can ask for an extension. You might not get it, but if you do, expect a second week as the maximum. Some universities even offer temporary teaching reductions if you quickly accept an offer.

Unless you have a comparable or better offer, it is very hard to negotiate an offer in China. These are often set by the university, not the department.

The dean or head of department is likely to have an informal conversation with you before making a formal offer. They are gauging your interest – they try to avoid situations in which candidates decline offers.

7.9. **Politics.** Political pressure on faculty has been increasing in recent years, including in Hong Kong. This can make work in sensitive fields such as political economy more difficult, or even impossible. Even less politically sensitive fields may face some political risk.

7.10. **Insider Information.** Candidates and recruiters on the Chinese market are unusually well networked and have surprisingly up-to-date information on who is being flown out, who has an offer, when it expires, who the second choice is, etc...It is to your advantage to know this information as well (for example, if you have an exploding offer but are unsure if a more-preferred option has a high probability of making you an offer). So, network with other Chinese students on the job market, as well as with advisors and other contacts from your previous degrees, and keep up to date with discussions on platforms such as WeChat.

In addition, your networks will be far more important than this guide in helping you navigate the academic economics job market in China. Seek advice from classmates who have graduated recently. From professors who taught you as an undergraduate. From friends at other universities.