

China's Growing In-House Market

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With China thrust front and center in the midst of extensive media coverage, I wondered. What does China's growing in-house market look like? And are there viable job opportunities for U.S.-trained lawyers?

The in-house legal marketplace – just like many other industries in China – has undergone an incredible transformation in the last decade. Where less than ten years ago in-house lawyers in China were almost nonexistent, as most legal work was handled by law firms, today companies are growing their in-house legal ranks at an unprecedented rate.

The leader of the pack is Alibaba – the world's largest online B2B marketplace. With 14 lawyers among its 2,000-plus employees, and plans to add at least another 6 in-house counsels, including a new chief legal officer, the company is at the forefront of this hot in-house hiring trend.

Today, companies in China – both domestic and multinational – are no longer rushing to costly international law firms for help every time a question comes up. Increasingly, they're grooming their own legal team to compete in the heated China market.

Bilingual American lawyers with international law firm experience are the hot tickets for U.S. companies conducting business in China. That said, American corporations are not the only ones that are seeking American talent, especially for top legal jobs.

Certain Chinese companies prefer the rigor and specificity of American legal training, and are increasingly looking to hire U.S. trained attorneys. One of the draw: U.S.-trained lawyers tend to have a greater familiarity with Sarbanes-Oxley corporate governance reforms – that's a skill that Chinese companies – with an eye to an overseas stock market listing need.

With the growing uncertainty of the domestic legal market, a number of U.S. attorneys have made the in-house leap to China. Are you ready to make your move?