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PRC Talent Recruitment Goes Virtual During the COVID-19 Pandemic

*China's overseas talent recruitment & intellectual
property acquisition activities go online.*

The Strider Global Intelligence Team has discovered rapid adaptations in PRC overseas talent recruitment and IP acquisition TTPs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditional in-person recruitment and travel to China have been replaced by new online-recruitment tactics.

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PRC Talent Recruitment Goes Virtual

During the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing and international travel restrictions have disrupted PRC government overseas talent recruitment tactics centered on in-person exchanges at conference events or trips to China. Accordingly, the PRC has rapidly shifted overseas talent recruitment tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) online by deploying new, and expanding existing, virtual channels and internet-based platforms. The PRC views the global turmoil caused by the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to accelerate overseas talent recruitment and rapidly improve China's relative position in strategic industries and advanced science and technology.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) government operates hundreds of national and local level talent recruitment programs aimed at upgrading China's position in the global value chain through the mastery of advanced science and technology. These programs target the recruitment of overseas high-level academics, scientists, and subject matter experts working in corporations by offering financial incentives to transfer intellectual property and know-how to China. The Federal Bureau of Investigation is raising awareness of the threat PRC talent recruitment programs, like the "**Thousand Talents Program**", pose to U.S. academia and industry, and is pursuing cases of economic espionage, theft of trade secrets, and grant fraud related to talent program participation.

For corporations, shifting overseas talent recruitment TTPs require a shift in the methods used to detect the unauthorized transfer of intellectual property.

The following **three examples** show how the PRC is shifting overseas talent recruitment TTPs online during COVID-19.

Online Recruitment in Shanghai

Shanghai, a well-resourced talent recruitment hub, is shifting overseas talent recruitment activities online. In March 2020, the Shanghai Talent Work Coordination Group, which is under the purview of the Organization Department of the Shanghai Municipal Chinese Communist Party Committee, launched the **“Gathering Global Talents in Shanghai—Return to Pujiang in Spring”** series of cloud-based talent recruitment events targeting high-level overseas experts, scholars, and university graduates. As part of the launch, the Shanghai Government is offering support to recruiters (e.g., companies and government units) to set up “cloud interviews” on different tech platforms and an online “one-stop service” for connecting recruiters to overseas talents to facilitate the process for recruitment and relocation.

At the opening ceremony in Shanghai, multiple overseas “sub-venues” located in New York, San Francisco, Tokyo, Canberra, and other cities joined via video conferencing.

The online talent recruitment activities featured separate events that covered sectors such as smart manufacturing (April 9), integrated circuits (April 15), pharmaceuticals (April 16), and 5G, big data, and AI (April 23). According to the Shanghai Government, more than 6,000 companies, universities, research institutes, and hospitals registered as talent recruiters for more than 100,000 positions.

Opening ceremony proceedings for “Gathering Global Talents in Shanghai—Return to Pujiang in Spring” in Shanghai.



Hangzhou's Overseas Talent Startup Competition Goes Online

Like Shanghai, Hangzhou has continued to prioritize overseas talent recruitment work during COVID-19 by shifting major recruitment activities online. As part of its **“Fight the Pandemic, Attract Talent”** measures, the Hangzhou municipal government is providing housing purchase subsidies for recruited talent from CNY 1 million (USD 140,000) to CNY 8 million (USD 1.1 million), depending on the qualifications of the recruited talent.

In addition, in March 2020 the Hangzhou Municipal Chinese Communist Party Committee and the Hangzhou Municipal Government launched an online version of the **“2020 Overseas High-level Talent**

Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition,” an annual startup competition historically implemented via a series of offline events that seek to identify and then relocate innovative overseas talent and projects to China. This year’s online competition, like previous year’s offline competitions, will be implemented over the course of eight months. Participants of the competition will present their innovation ideas and projects online, expert judges will assess projects online, and negotiations for investment and relocation to China will also take place online. Winners of the online competition will be eligible for funding subsidies of up to CNY 5 million (USD 700,000). In previous

years, winners of the competition include overseas employees from McKinsey and Co, Aspera, Inc. (part of IBM), and Harvard Medical School.



Launch ceremony of the 2020 Overseas High-level Talent Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition included participants who joined online from overseas locations.

Tongxiang City's Online "Golden Phoenix Cloud Negotiation Fair"

Government entities all across China are similarly implementing online overseas recruitment. Tongxiang, a county-level city in Zhejiang province, hosts the annual World Internet Conference, also known as the "Wuzhen Summit," one of the largest and highest-level international internet conferences in China. Under the guidance of the Tongxiang City Chinese Communist Party Committee, Tongxiang has implemented a multi-tier talent recruitment system including various talent programs to attract overseas talent for science and technology innovation and entrepreneurship.

From February to April 2020, the Tongxiang government hosted the "Golden Phoenix Cloud Negotiation Fair," a series of seven recruitment events online, to recruit experts in biomedicine, digital economy, advanced manufacturing, advanced materials, and other fields.

At a recruitment event in March (shown in above photo), authorities in Tongxiang interviewed 20 high-level overseas talents from eight different countries including the U.S., U.K., Germany and Canada through an online video-conferencing platform. During these sessions, overseas participants presented their innovative projects to, and answered questions from, the Tongxiang government and Party officials. During the online event, three overseas talents finalized negotiations and signed contracts—via the online platform—to join Tongxiang government sponsored talent recruitment programs.

One of the overseas talents who was selected for an entrepreneurship talent program in Tongxiang expressed, "Even if we are thousands of miles apart, it will not slow down our ability to finalize a talent agreement with Tongxiang. This innovative 'cloud platform' allows us to see Tongxiang's enthusiasm in its search for talents. We are full of confidence in Tongxiang's innovative atmosphere and business environment."



Tongxiang's "Golden Phoenix Cloud Negotiation Fair" proceedings on March 7, 2020. This appears to be a signing ceremony with a talent selectee.



Tongxiang's "Golden Phoenix Cloud Negotiation Fair" video-conference proceedings with overseas talents on March 7, 2020.



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