

# Asia in focus as jobless bankers switch careers

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**Enoch Yiu**

Bankers laid-off during the global financial crisis are turning to alternative careers in private fund management, private banking, or assisting companies planning to go public, according to headhunters.

The spate of lay-offs has also prompted United States and European investment bankers to look for work in Asia, which was less affected by the financial crisis.

"It has been difficult for these ex-bankers to stay in the investment banking sector as it was hard hit by the financial crisis and many banks were laying-off people rather than hiring," said May Wong Tung, the managing director of financial services for headhunter DHR International.

"Many bankers have had to change their careers," she said.

One popular career choice is joining mainland companies that plan to go public. "These companies like to hire former investment bankers to join their senior management teams," Tung said.

"They want the bankers to help them to restructure to meet with listing requirements."

Former bankers also were choosing to join private equity funds, which can use their skills to help identify investment targets.

Jerry Chang, a director of head-hunting firm Barons, said investment bankers who had a client base were also turning to private banking.

"We have received hundreds of CVs from former investment bankers who now need to find jobs," Chang said.

"Those who have a good social network and can bring new clients to the private banks will easily find a new career as many private banks are in expansion mode in Asia."

But those with less extensive client bases and only deal-making experience were less likely to find a position in a private bank, Chang said.

"They may end up accepting lower pay and working at a smaller investment bank."

Tung said the career changes

extended into the commercial banking sector as well.

"Some insurance and asset management companies are hiring people who have experience in serving retail banking customers," she said.

And many former investment bankers from the US and Europe were now searching for opportunities in Asia and especially China, where economic growth was stronger since it had been less affected by the sub-prime mortgage crisis that hit financial markets in the middle of 2008.

"But we have to warn Western bankers seeking jobs here about the difficulties of working in Asia. It is not only an issue about their experience and qualification. They will need to



**May Wong Tung**

have good network in Asia to be able to get a job here," Tung said.

"Without friends and contacts and no knowledge about Asia, it will be very difficult to convince Asian firms to hire them."

Regarding pay, Tung said salaries in the financial sector in 2008 dropped about 50 per cent from 2007 levels as a result of the financial crisis.

After economic growth and stock market performances picked up in the second half of last year, pay packages were about 30 per cent better than at the worst point of the crisis, she said.

Chang said the job market for ex-bankers had improved since the recovery of stock markets in the fourth quarter of last year.

"However, we still have far more former investment bankers seeking jobs than the number of positions on offer and things will continue to be tough for job seekers for some time," he said.

*(another photo on following page)*

