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Recruiting International Talents for Free Trade Zones in China: Learning Points from Singapore

Terence HO

Xuyao ZHANG

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Terence Ho and Zhang Xuyao

1 China's FTZs and Their International Talent Policies

On September 27, 2013, the State Council of the People's Republic of China set out the Master Plan of China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone (FTZ). The plan assigned four customs special supervision areas within Shanghai as pilot FTZs, launching the establishment of a series of FTZs in China. As of 2020, China has established FTZs in 21 provinces covering 64 districts. Figure 1 exhibits the location of FTZs in China.

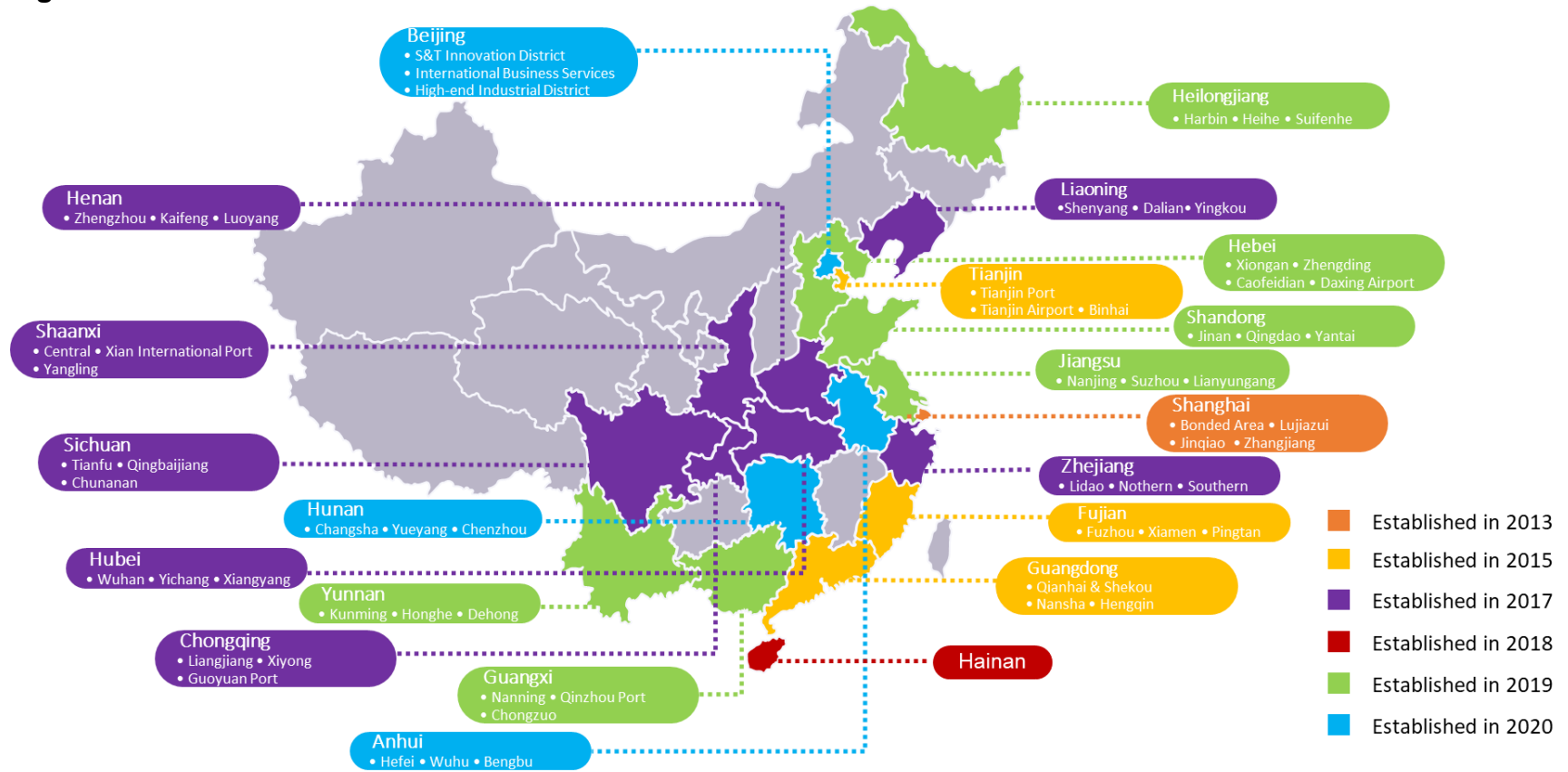
The establishment of FTZs is a major step in China's continuing efforts to deepen economic reform and further open up. These ringfenced, duty-free areas not only offer warehousing, storage, and distribution facilities for trade and transshipment purposes but also host companies from home and abroad in industries such as manufacturing and R&D. By exempting tariffs and simplifying the administrative process for companies, China is opening up more of its key industries to foreign investors. According to data from the Ministry of Commerce, in the first five months of 2020, the FTZs in 18 provinces have utilised 60.25 billion RMB FDI, which accounts for 17% of the national FDI.

Leveraging its own strengths and competitive advantages, each FTZ has focused on different industries to achieve national targets. For example, building on the strengths of Suzhou Industrial Park (SIPAC), Suzhou FTZ focuses on biomedicine, nanotechnology, and artificial intelligence (AI). The FTZ aims to promote innovation development and to collaborate with global economies. Given its unique location and tropical climate, Hainan FTZ primarily focuses on the tourism and services industries. Concurrently, with its marine resources and Wenchang Spacecraft Launch Site, Hainan also develops marine science and aerospace technology. The top five industries that China's FTZs focus on are modern commerce, finance, information technology, medicine and healthcare, and high-end manufacturing.

The recruitment of international talent is crucial for industrial development in the FTZs, due to the inadequate supply of local talent. First, population aging in China has become an increasingly severe problem. According to data from National Bureau of Statistics, the percentage of working age population has dropped from 75% in 2010 to 71% in 2019.¹ Second, high-tech industries in the FTZs require expertise and hence generates demand for top talent. For instance, as forecast by the Guidance of Talent Development in Manufacturing Industries 2016, the talent shortage on new generation information technology industry would be 9.5 million in 2025.

¹ Working age population is defined as people aged 15 to 64.

Figure 1. China Pilot FTZs



Source: ACI

Third, there has been an outflow of talent from China to other countries. Data from the Ministry of Education revealed that from 1978 to 2019, 6.56 million people studied abroad, but only 4.23 million returned to China to pursue their careers. This makes it crucial for China to attract global talent to offset this outflow. Therefore, the central government and the FTZs have announced several policies and measures to attract foreign talent.

Visas form the centrepiece of these talent policies. At the national level, there are two types of visa for foreigners to work in China: the Z visa for general working purposes and the R visa for high-end and urgently needed talent. Both Z and R visa holders have to apply for a work permit and a residence permit upon arriving in China. To be qualified for the R visa, one has to be recognized as a tier A talent as specified in Classification Criteria for Foreigners Working in China (Trial). Examples of tier A talents include recipients of prestigious scientific awards and prizes, academicians, senior executives of Fortune Global 500 companies, entrepreneurs with major technological inventions, as well as top artistes and athletes. Among the incentives, R visa holders enjoy a longer period of stay and are granted multiple entries. Their spouse and children will also be issued visas with the same validity period and multiple entry permits.

At the provincial level, each province has established relevant measures to facilitate the issuance of visas and work permits to foreign talent. In Shanghai, restrictions on age, educational background and work experience in recognizing tier A talent can be relaxed for urgently-needed talent. This flexibility ensures the inflow of high-quality talent. In Jiangsu, there is a policy on mutual recognition of foreign talent across FTZs, which allows free mobility of talent to the province. So far, Suzhou FTZ and Nanjing FTZ in Jiangsu province have committed to recognize any tier A foreign talent previously recognized by other cities in the Yangtze River Delta. For this group, the period of stay could be extended to five years and the work permit application procedure has been simplified.

Besides entry and visa policies, the FTZs are also working on providing better living conditions for foreign talent. For instance, those in Suzhou FTZ will enjoy several housing benefits, such as priority in purchasing their first property and housing subsidies. Children of tier A talent enjoy the same education resources as local students regardless of their nationalities and Hukou status. A subsidy of 20,000 to 40,000 RMB is provided if the children opt for non-public schools (e.g. international schools). The Suzhou FTZ is also dedicated to providing healthcare and easy cross-border finance services for foreign talent. These measures, initially created as incentives for local talent, are now extended to foreigners to attract talent globally. By the end of 2020, the number of foreign talent in Suzhou International Park had reached 3,939, of whom 43% held Tier A work permits.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows: section 2 introduces Singapore's talent strategy from ten aspects and section 3 proposes six learning points for FTZs in China. Section 4 concludes the paper.

2 The Evolution of Singapore's Global Talent Approach

Since Singapore's independence in 1965, it has been recognised that people are the city state's most important resource. Every effort was made to develop the potential of Singaporeans, through considerable public investment in education, to improve skills and capabilities. Many new primary and secondary schools were opened, and educational standards were raised across the board. The 1970s and early 1980s also saw the setting up of training institutes, in partnership with foreign governments, to equip the workforce to support Singapore's industrialisation.

Singapore's fertility rate had fallen below the replacement rate by the mid-1970s. After a brief resurgence in the late 1980s, the fertility rate resumed its inexorable downward slide. To sustain workforce growth and hence economic growth, Singapore turned increasingly to immigration and foreign manpower.

In his 1997 National Day Rally Speech, then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong alluded to another challenge as well – that of talented Singaporeans being recruited by multinationals to work overseas, with some deciding to permanently settle abroad. The way forward, he said, would be to “gather talent and make Singapore a cosmopolitan city.” He pointed to the success of global cities such as London, New York and Hong Kong, which had prospered by attracting and retaining talent. Concurrently, a National Education effort was launched to instill greater loyalty and attachment to Singapore.

PM Goh explained that Singapore's “foreign talent strategy”, as it came to be known, was in the interest of Singaporeans: “We can build the best home for Singaporeans only by tapping the best talent from around the world. To have world-class universities for our children, we must attract the best students and professors here. To have good jobs for our workers, we must attract the best employers – which means the most talented professionals and entrepreneurs, and the strongest companies in the world, like Shell, Compaq, or Sony. Attracting global talent is essential for creating the best for Singaporeans.”

It was a difficult message to sell to Singaporeans, but the Government was certain that this was the only way to ensure Singapore's place in a hyper-competitive world – to augment Singapore's indigenous talent base with the best talent available globally.

The 1990s and 2000s also saw considerable international discourse on the global “war for talent”. Urban Studies academic Richard Florida's 2002 book, “The Rise of the Creative Class” captured the imagination of urban policymakers, its thesis being that cities' ability to attract creative types was the key to success in the new knowledge economy. Singapore had every intent to be at the vanguard of this global war for talent.

Contact Singapore was set up in 1998 to attract people from around to world to work, invest and live in Singapore. Besides organising career fairs and networking sessions in major global cities, it also facilitated business development and relocation to Singapore.

Another move concerned the corporate leadership of Government-linked companies (GLCs). The Government signaled that the appointment of CEOs for GLCs would not be limited to locals; it would seek the best person for the job, regardless of nationality. Danish national Flemming Jacobs was appointed CEO of shipping firm Neptune Orient Lines in 1999; American John Olds took the helm of Singapore's largest bank, DBS Bank, in 1998, and was succeeded by fellow American Jackson Tai in 2002.

Singapore also had to be attractive to global talent, who would factor in not just financial incentives but also lifestyle and liveability in choosing where to live. There was a concerted push to expand lifestyle and entertainment options, not just with tourism in mind, but also to establish Singapore as an exciting place to live. These included the Crazy Horse Parisian cabaret, which opened in 2005, the Singapore Grand Prix in 2008, and the Integrated Resorts (Resorts World Sentosa and Marina Bay Sands) in 2010.

After a period of slow economic growth in the first half of the 2000s, the Government was eager to help the economy pick up in tandem with improving external demand. While firms had access to professional and managerial foreign talent through the Employment Pass scheme, as well as lower-skilled foreigners through the Work Permit scheme, it was felt that a new scheme was needed to allow firms to recruit mid-skilled foreign workers in roles such as technicians. The S Pass scheme was launched in 2004, with mid-skilled workers also offered a path to permanent residency.

From 2005 to 2009, Singapore's foreign population expanded by more than half, from under 800,000 to over 1.25 million. To calibrate the inflow of foreign workers, the Government introduced a suite of tightening measures beginning in 2010 – including raising levies and tightening quotas (called “Dependency Ratio Ceilings”) for lower and mid-skilled workers. For higher-skilled workers, there was concern among some Singaporeans that they were not given fair opportunities for employment and advancement, especially by foreign employers who were perceived to favour their own compatriots.

In 2014, therefore, the Government introduced the Fair Consideration Framework. Firms were required to advertise on a national jobs portal for 14 days before being able to apply for an Employment Pass. The Government made clear that this was not a “Singaporeans only” or “Singaporeans first” policy, but was intended to ensure that Singaporeans were fairly considered for jobs. The advertising period has since been doubled to 28 days and extended to include S-Pass holders. Administrative penalties for discriminatory hiring were also strengthened in 2020.

Notwithstanding, the Government has stressed that Singapore remains open to global talent – to fill shortfalls in numbers, skills or availability – “the number gap, skills gap and timing gap”, in the words of former Manpower Minister Lim Swee Say². Along with efforts to grow a local talent pipeline for industry and to build up a strong “Singaporean core” in the workforce, the Government encouraged the transfer of capabilities from foreigners to

² Lim Swee Say, speech at TAFEP's 10th Anniversary Event, 16 November 2016.

locals through the Capability Transfer Programme. Cognisant that other countries had been stepping up efforts to attract tech talent from abroad, Singapore launched a Tech@SG scheme, along with a new Tech.Pass, to help fast-growing companies access the talent they need to grow and scale their business in Singapore and the region.

These sustained efforts have propelled Singapore to ninth place in the IMD's ranking of the most globally competitive countries for talent, the only Asian country to be make it to the top ten. Singapore also placed third in INSEAD's Global Talent Competitiveness Index 2020 ranking, behind only Switzerland the United States.

2.1 Target Groups of Global Talent

The global talent strategy is multi-pronged, to fill a range of economic needs with a diverse spectrum of talent. These include "rainmakers" and leading entrepreneurs, who can anchor global businesses in Singapore and plug Singapore into global business networks. They also include domain experts – thought leaders, top scientists, professionals, C-suite business executives and the like. A third group are specialists, particularly those with frontier skills in emerging technologies and ICT domains such as Artificial Intelligence and Cybersecurity. Finally, there are the international students, particularly those from ASEAN, who can help with Singapore's internationalisation and regionalisation push.

2.2 Pathways to Permanent Residence (PR) and Citizenship

Among those attracted to Singapore, a subset have the intention to sink roots here. Singapore welcomes those who can make economic contributions and integrate into society.

The **Global Investor Programme (GIP)** accords PR status to global investors and entrepreneurs who bring in investments and good jobs to Singapore. Through the GIP, it is hoped that Singapore-based companies can benefit from the injection of capital from GIP funds, as well as tap on the GIP investors' entrepreneurial ability and networks.

From 1 March 2020, the GIP has been extended to next-generation business owners, founders of fast-growing companies from certain industries, as well as family office principals, all of whom can qualify to apply for PR status through the programme. However, the minimum revenue requirement for established business owners has been raised from \$50 million to \$200 million.

Foreigners holding Employment or S Pass may apply for PR under the **Professionals, Technical Personnel and Skilled Workers Scheme (PTS)**. Each PR and citizenship application is evaluated holistically on a set of criteria which includes factors such as the individual's economic contributions, qualifications, age and family profile to assess applicants' ability to contribute, integrate well into society and commitment to sinking roots in Singapore.

2.3 Work Pass Framework

The **Employment Pass** provides employers with considerable flexibility in recruiting skilled manpower for their needs, as long as the foreigner is paid above the prevailing minimum salary requirement, which depends on age and qualification. There is no levy or quota for EP holders. An EP is granted for up to two years in the first instance, and thereafter renewable (up to three years validity per renewal) if the pass holder remains with the same employer. If the EP holder wishes to change jobs, a fresh EP application must be made by the new employer.

High-earning EP holders (earning at least S\$12,000) or overseas foreign professionals (earning at least S\$18,000) may be eligible for the **Personalised Employment Pass**, which gives the pass holder the flexibility to switch employers without applying for a new work pass, and to remain in Singapore between jobs.

The **S Pass** allows firms to bring in mid-skilled foreign workers such as technicians and associate professionals, who are paid at or above the prevailing minimum salary requirement. They are subject to dependency ratio ceilings and foreign worker levies. The S Passes is granted for up to two years in the first instance, and is renewable if the pass holder remains with the same employer.

The **EntrePass** allows eligible foreign entrepreneurs to start and operate a business in Singapore that is venture-backed or possesses innovative technologies. Unlike the EP, there is no minimum salary requirement. EntrePass holders are also not subject to foreign worker levies or quotas.

The new **Tech.Pass** (launched in 2020) is aimed at attracting tech entrepreneurs, leaders or technical experts from around the world to come to Singapore to perform frontier and disruptive innovations. Unlike other work passes, Tech.Pass allow pass holders flexibility in the participation of activities such as starting and operating a business, being an investor, employee, consultant or director in one or more Singapore-based companies, mentoring start-ups and lecturing at local universities.

This is positioned as an extension of **Tech@SG**, a joint programme by the Economic Development Board (EDB) and Enterprise Singapore that provides eligible digital or technology-oriented firms with company-level endorsement to the Ministry of Manpower to minimise the risk of EP rejections. Both the Tech.Pass and Tech@SG are intended to contribute to the development of Singapore's tech ecosystem, which is vital to Singapore's economic growth strategy.

2.4 Dependants

Admission to Singapore as a work pass holder does not automatically qualify one to bring in family members. EP and S Pass holders may bring their spouse and unmarried children under 21 years old if they meet the minimum fixed salary requirement of \$6000 per month. Those earning at least \$12,000 may bring their parents to Singapore.

EntrePass holders can bring family members to Singapore if they meet certain requirements for business spending and local employment.

Currently, Dependant's Pass holders are issued a Letter of Consent if they wish to work in Singapore. From 1 May 2021, they will need to qualify for a regular work pass (EP, S Pass or Work Permit) in order to work in Singapore.

2.5 Taxes

Singapore's low personal and corporate income tax rates make it an attractive location for businesses and professionals.

Cross-border economic activity is facilitated by Avoidance of Double Taxation Agreements with partner jurisdictions. There are also tax benefits to encourage the use of Singapore as a base for regional activities. Under the Not Ordinarily Resident (NOR) scheme and Area Representative Scheme (ARS), eligible foreigners may only pay taxes on Singapore employment income based on the number of days spent here. This allows them the flexibility to use Singapore as a base while maintaining regional activities elsewhere. However, NOR has lapsed after Year of Assessment 2020.

2.6 Identifying and Attracting Talent

Contact Singapore is the public agency tasked with marketing Singapore to global talent and drawing them to Singapore to work, live and invest. Set up under the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) in 1998, Contact Singapore became an alliance between MOM and the EDB a decade later, to leverage the business networks and investment promotion ability of the EDB.

With offices in the Asia-Pacific, Europe and North America, Contact Singapore partners Singapore-based employers to organise career fairs and networking sessions in cities across the world. It also provides updates on career opportunities and industry developments to individuals who may be interested in taking up a job in Singapore.

Another target group are those keen to invest in or initiate new business activities in Singapore. Contact Singapore facilitates business development and relocation to Singapore, such as by facilitating entry to Singapore via work pass or permanent residence programmes.

The task of identifying and attracting global talent is also taken up by the relevant agencies keen to build up specific clusters of expertise in Singapore. For example, the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR) has been active in identifying top scientific talent, especially in the area of life sciences, and enticing them to Singapore. In the early to mid-2000s, some of the leading global scientists (dubbed "whales" by former A*STAR Chairman Philip Yeo) netted by A*STAR included Edison Liu, Neal Copeland, Nancy Jenkins, David Lane, Birgitte Lane, Judith Swain and Edward Holmes.

2.7 Liveability

Besides the economic opportunities it offers, a city's "liveability" is a key advantage in the global "war for talent". Singapore was ranked 25th in Mercer's Global Quality of Living

Survey in 2019, the highest in Asia. The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) placed Singapore 40th in its 2019 Global Liveability Index, behind Osaka, Tokyo and Hong Kong but still among the best in Asia. Human resources consultancy ECA International ranked Singapore the most liveable city for Asian expatriates for the 15th consecutive year in 2020.

Singapore is well regarded for personal safety and quality of life in terms of access to good healthcare, education and recreation. On the flip side, living costs are high, particularly for expatriates, with housing, cars and private education especially expensive. This is largely due to Singapore's small size and its success as a global city and talent magnet.

According to the EIU's Worldwide Cost of Living Survey, Singapore was the world's most expensive city for expatriates for six consecutive years, before falling to 4th place in 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Singapore is regarded as one of the safest countries in the world, with a low crime rate, reliable police force and sound legal system. It also scores well in terms of environmental quality, with many green spaces and public parks, and low pollution.

Before the onset of COVID-19, many expatriates have used Singapore as a base to explore travel destinations in Southeast Asia, facilitated by the proliferation of budget airlines serving the region. Efforts have been made to enhance the attractiveness of Singapore in terms of entertainment and recreation options, and to cater to the needs of expatriates. There is a packed calendar of international sporting events, ranging from the Rugby Sevens to the Singapore Grand Prix and Women's Tennis Association Finals.

Healthcare, while expensive, is of high quality with many options for treatment and medical care. In regard to education, Singapore has attracted a number of Foreign System Schools such as the Global Indian International School and the Stamford American International School, to provide options for expatriate children outside the national school system. In 2015, Singapore announced plans to attract more international schools by making available sites with longer leases to encourage long-term investment and enhance quality of education.

2.8 Local-Foreign Integration

The **National Integration Council (NIC)** was set up by the Government in 2009 to coordinate and drive efforts to integrate locals and foreigners, in partnership with the private and people sectors.

One of its key initiatives is the Singapore Citizenship Journey, a mandatory programme for new citizens co-organised with the People's Association and the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority. This programme comprises both online modules and experiential learning, to deepen new citizens' understanding of Singapore's history, norms and values, while providing opportunities for meaningful interaction with the local community.

The NIC has set up working groups for community, schools, workplaces and media, to further its objectives in these key domains. For instance, the National Integration Working Group for Workplaces fosters inclusive and harmonious workplaces by supporting diversity management practices, while the National Integration Working Group for Community brings together Singaporeans, recent immigrants and foreigners through shared interests such as sports, arts and volunteerism.

The NIC also administers a **Community Integration Fund** that supports ground-up projects that create opportunities for locals and foreigners to interact, as well as help newcomers better adapt to Singapore society.

These efforts help both locals and foreigners adapt to living, working or studying with one another. Their aim is also to make foreigners feel welcome, and to strengthen their sense of attachment to Singapore.

2.9 International Students

Singapore's autonomous universities have a significant proportion of international students who are attracted to Singapore by the high quality of education. They receive tuition grants subsidies from the Ministry of Education, in return for which they are required to work in Singapore for three years upon graduation. They form a talent pipeline to meet the needs of the economy, as well as a potential pool of candidates for naturalisation, since they would already have formed bonds with Singapore and Singaporeans.

A number of international students are also in the national school system at the secondary and pre-university level. Singapore has for many years offered scholarships to students from ASEAN and China, to promote regional understanding, as well as to support Singapore's economic regionalisation by developing people-to-people links with countries in the region.

Besides those in publicly-funded educational institutions, other international students are enrolled in private educational institutions. In 2002, the Government launched the "Global Schoolhouse" initiative to promote education as an "exportable service" by attracting foreign institutions and students in large numbers. This led to suite of renowned foreign schools and universities setting up branches in Singapore over the next few years. However, subsequent concerns over population growth as well as several high-profile exits by well-known schools saw a scale-back in ambition.

Foreign students or trainees from a foreign office or subsidiary who wish to undergo training in Singapore may apply for a **Training Employment Pass**. Students are required to be enrolled in an acceptable institution or earn a fixed monthly salary of at least \$3,000, and must be sponsored by a Singapore-registered company. The training attachment in Singapore must be part of their course of study. Likewise, foreign trainees must earn at least \$3,000 and be sponsored by a Singapore-registered company.

Under the **Work Holiday Programme**, up to 2,000 students or young graduates aged between 18 and 25 are also permitted to work and holiday in Singapore for up to 6 months. Work holiday passes are open to undergraduates and graduates of universities in ten countries or regions.

While foreigners under the TEP and WHP are only in Singapore for a limited duration, it is hoped that the experience working or training here may entice some of them back to Singapore in the future, or to join the global network of Singapore's "family, friends and fans" who can contribute to Singapore's development.

2.10 Tapping talent in situ and the "Family, Friends and Fans" (3F) network

Besides attracting and retaining talent in Singapore, there is a concurrent effort to cultivate and sustain talent networks abroad. This is in recognition that global talents are increasingly mobile, and that Singapore's internationalisation push requires firms to have access to local partners and capital abroad. Furthermore, Singapore aims to be plugged into technological developments in innovation hubs across the world.

To this end, the **Singapore Global Network (SGN)** was launched in 2019. Its aim is to nurture a strong 3F ecosystem, not just for talent identification and attraction, but also to cultivate links that can help Singapore firms grow and internationalise.

Singapore's **Global Innovation Alliance (GIA)**, a network of Singapore and overseas partners, has set up "innovation launchpads" connecting Singapore entities with businesses and communities in major innovation hubs. At present, the GIA has established links with Beijing, Suzhou, Shanghai, Jakarta, Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Bangalore and Tokyo in Asia, as well as Berlin, Munich, Paris and San Francisco.

3 Learning Points for FTZs in China

There are several learning points from Singapore's experience which may be useful to China's FTZs as they develop their overarching talent strategy.

1) Pursue concurrent efforts in developing and providing opportunities for local talent.

It is important that foreign talent is seen as complementing, rather than displacing, local talent. Hence, attention should be given to providing skills and professional development opportunities for locals, and where appropriate, facilitating the transfer of skills and know-how from foreigners to locals. In selecting foreigners for entry, those who are able to create local employment opportunities or add value to local networks should be prioritised. This way, the international talent attraction strategy can gain buy-in from locals and complement local talent development.

2) Besides facilitating entry and relaxing conditions for work visas, actively seek out and attract talent to build clusters of expertise, especially in niche and emerging areas.

While opening doors to talent across all sectors will certainly provide an economic lift, this can be complemented by a targeted approach to seek out talent to build clusters of expertise, similar to how Singapore identified top talent in building up its capability in Life Sciences, and more recently in areas such as Artificial Intelligence, Data Analytics and Cybersecurity.

A critical mass of talent in specific domains, in line with FTZs' economic development priorities, will in turn be a magnet for other talented locals and foreigners, including younger professionals and entrepreneurs. Such an approach would require close coordination across economic development agencies and the immigration authorities.

3) Seek to improve liveability to attract talent.

Liveability requires a holistic approach to make a city welcoming to foreigners and to make working and living there a pleasant and rewarding experience. This requires attention to improve personal security, transport, environment and air quality, as well as to ensure access to affordable and high-quality housing, education and healthcare services, along with a diverse offering of recreational activities.

To this end, all the FTZs' efforts to provide preferential housing, strengthen social security, improve medical services, facilitate enrolment of children in public and international schools, etc. will go some distance in improving its attractiveness to international talent. Another area of focus could be the provision of high-quality sporting and recreational amenities – whether nature parks, playgrounds for children or running tracks and gymnasiums. Opportunities to travel and discover the cultural heritage of the city where the FTZ is located or surrounding areas would likely be attractive to foreigners, and can help to market the FTZ as an exciting place to live, work and play.

4) Focus on integrating global talent into the domestic ecosystem to facilitate knowledge-sharing, and to better anchor talent.

Mixing among locals and foreigners should be encouraged, both at the workplace and in the community. Much learning takes place through interaction among team members at work, in their sharing of their experience and expertise, and not just through formal training courses.

While it is natural that foreigners may feel more comfortable interacting with their compatriots, especially when in a new environment, they should be given opportunities to meet and interact with locals. Examples could include social gatherings, sporting

events and joint community projects, such as with local schools and welfare organisations, to the extent permissible under COVID-19 restrictions.

5) Invest early to build up talent pipeline, including younger talent with potential.

Integrating foreigners into the domestic ecosystem and culture takes time. While it is certainly important to attract successful, experienced talent, it is also worthwhile to invest in younger persons with potential, by sponsoring promising foreign students for undergraduate or postgraduate studies. It may also be worth expanding student exchange programmes with other universities or facilitating work-holiday stints in the FTZs post-COVID-19.

In this regard, the effort to attract young foreign talents under the age of 40 to Suzhou for work or post-doctoral research is useful. Tianjin also has schemes to promote foreign graduates from either local or foreign universities to set up new enterprises in the FTZ.

6) Consider ways to tap talent in situ and overseas nationals.

Given the mobility of international talent and their dispersion across innovation hubs worldwide, it is important to strengthen the FTZs' position in global talent networks. Effort should be made to keep in touch with both Chinese nationals and foreigners who have spent time in the FTZ but who are currently working elsewhere. This would allow firms and individuals to leverage the wider network of family, friends and fans, and potentially attract some of these global talents back to the city or FTZ in the future.

4 Conclusion

The global "talent war" is by no means a zero-sum game, since global cities can feed off each other's strengths in an interconnected world. Nonetheless, Singapore and China are well-positioned to capture an outsized share of global talent through a deliberate and well-executed talent strategy. This will be a key competitive advantage going forward, as technology advances, business models evolve and supply chains are reconfigured in the post-COVID-19 world.