

MARKET UPDATE

Mainland China Financial Services Talent Outlook



INDUSTRY
INSIGHTS

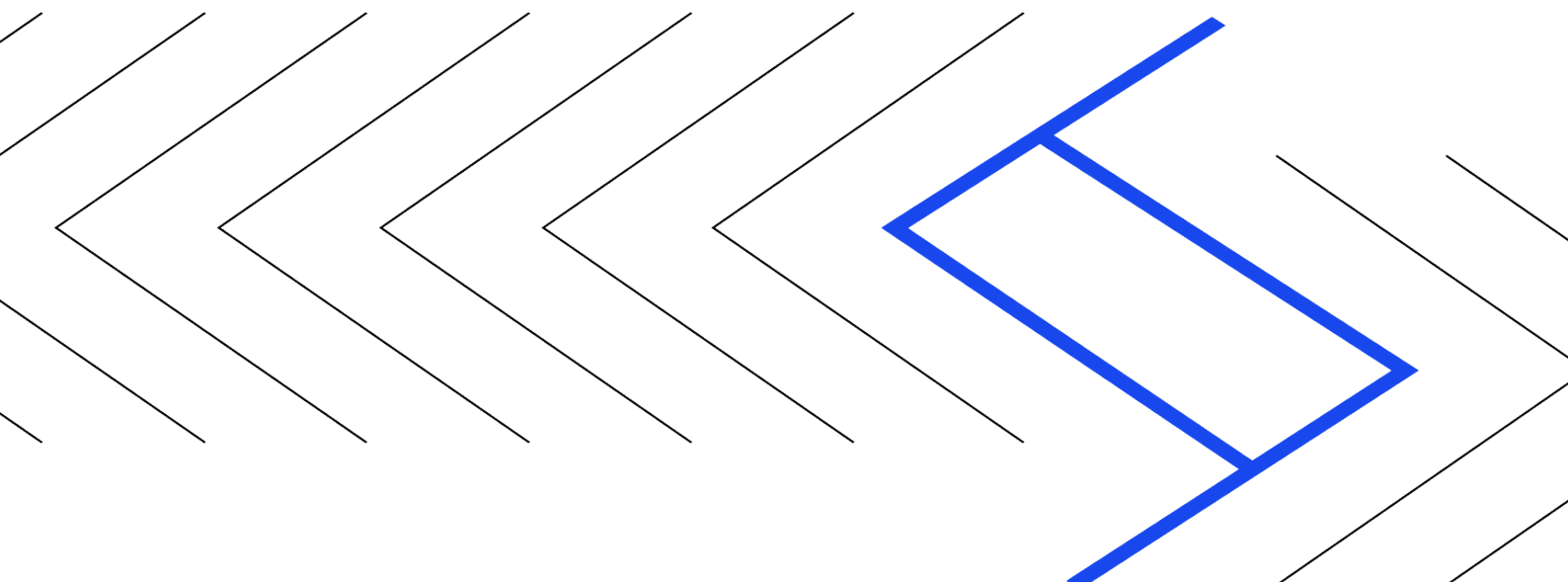
Discover the latest
insights into Mainland
China's financial sciences
& services industry

APAC
Report



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Introduction

Mainland China's financial services industry continues to evolve within a complex environment defined by economic recalibration, regulatory modernisation, and accelerating technological innovation. Institutions are increasingly adopting a strategy of measured, high-impact growth, prioritising quality of talent over quantity of hiring. This shift reflects a long-term emphasis on resilience, adaptability, and operational excellence.

Cross-functional expertise, spanning finance, technology, and regulation, has therefore become a decisive advantage. Professionals with deep domain knowledge, quantitative acumen, and cross-border fluency are in high demand, as firms navigate intricate global frameworks while advancing digital transformation and sustainable growth.

At the same time, structural trends, from the rise of AI-driven finance to the continued integration of Hong Kong and Mainland markets, are reshaping how companies define and acquire talent. Employers are looking beyond traditional credentials, prioritising adaptability, hybrid skill sets, and purpose-driven leadership.

This report explores the forces changing talent demand across China's financial ecosystem, highlighting key hiring trends, emerging priorities, and strategic recommendations for organisations and professionals where agility, innovation, and cross-border capability define success.





2025 Talent Hiring Sentiment

Stability with Selective Growth

Hiring sentiment across China's financial services sector has reflected a period of measured stability and selective expansion. Institutions are exercising greater precision in workforce planning, directing investment toward roles that enhance operational strength, regulatory compliance, and long-term growth capacity.

Yet, within this restraint, targeted areas of demand continue to show resilience. The moderation in onshore investment banking deal flow has redirected transactional momentum toward Hong Kong, elevating the value of cross-border expertise. Professionals capable of navigating multi-jurisdictional structures and regulatory regimes are increasingly sought after, particularly in capital markets and offshore wealth management roles.

On the buy side, quantitative and technology-driven strategies remain central to investment performance amid continued market volatility. At the same time, renewed momentum in China's equity markets is reigniting interest in fundamental research, especially within sectors aligned with national strategic priorities such as advanced manufacturing, semiconductors, and green technology.

Overall, 2025 has represented a targeted growth cycle, one defined not by scale, but by selectivity. Firms are investing into skill-intensive roles that align with strategic, structural shifts that reinforce long-term competitiveness in an increasingly dynamic market.





2026 Talent Outlook

A Market Rewarding Agility

The year ahead is expected to extend the theme of strategic selectivity, with firms increasingly focused on agility, foresight, and adaptability. While macroeconomic conditions are anticipated to remain stable, those organisations that plan proactively and invest early in emerging competencies will be best positioned to capture opportunity.

Cross-border capability will remain a key differentiator as deal flow continues to favour Hong Kong and offshore hubs. Institutions will prioritise leaders who can bridge Mainland and international markets - not only in investment banking, but also across wealth management, asset allocation, and compliance.

Technology will continue to reshape the industry's operating model. Investments in digital infrastructure, automation, and data-driven decision-making are creating demand for professionals who can integrate technology into core financial processes. At the same time, renewed confidence in equity markets may sustain a dual-track demand: quantitative and tech-driven talent on one side, and sector-focused fundamental analysts on the other.

Ultimately, 2026 will reward firms that invest early in hybrid, tech-fluent leadership and candidates who embrace cross-disciplinary skill sets. In a transforming market, waiting for certainty is the greatest risk.





Strategic Recommendations

Turning Insight into Action

For employers, the priority is to redefine what “must-have” talent looks like. Traditional credentials alone are no longer sufficient. The most valuable professionals will combine financial acumen with technology fluency and cross-border awareness. Compensation alone will not secure these profiles - firms must compete on career development, purpose-driven culture, and flexibility.

This is also the time to invest in upskilling, transforming existing teams to meet future demands in digital risk, automation, and data analytics. For hard-to-fill mandates - particularly in quant, technology, and cross-border leadership - partnering with specialist executive search firms will be critical to compress time-to-hire and access passive talent pools.

For candidates, the imperative is to future-proof your career. Build hybrid expertise by pairing core financial skills with technology or data science credentials. Target growth hubs such as the Greater Bay Area and Hong Kong, where cross-border activity is accelerating. And think beyond compensation: roles that offer exposure to transformation projects and leadership development will deliver the greatest long-term value.

2025 is a year of strategic restraint, not stagnation. The firms that act decisively in specialist areas today will set the pace in 2026. For both clients and candidates, the message is clear: adaptability is the new advantage.





Strategic Entry & Talent Advisory

Mainland China vs. Hong Kong

As global financial institutions expand across Asia, both Mainland China and Hong Kong present compelling opportunities - each with distinct regulatory pathways, operational requirements, and talent implications. Whether launching asset management platforms, brokerage operations, or fintech ventures, success hinges on aligning licensing strategy with a targeted hiring roadmap.

Entity Setup and Talent Strategy

Mainland China:

Foreign institutions typically begin with a Representative Office (RO) or Wholly Foreign-Owned Enterprise (WFOE). The RO serves as a non-revenue-generating base, while the WFOE allows full business activity under Chinese law. Initial hiring typically includes 3–6 strategic roles - legal representative, compliance officer, and finance/admin support - with Chinese nationals preferred due to visa efficiency.

As operations scale, firms expand to 10–15 employees, adding sales, risk, and operations roles. Increasingly, the Private Fund Manager (PFM) structure is favoured for foreign asset managers, enabling RMB-denominated strategies for domestic investors. Registering as a PFM with AMAC requires at least five full-time staff, a dedicated office, and qualified senior management - making strategic hiring essential for credibility and compliance.

SFC Licensing and Cross-Border Talent Strategy

Hong Kong:

Hong Kong remains a premier destination for regulated financial operations. Firms must navigate the SFC licensing regime, appointing at least two Responsible Officers (ROs) per regulated activity, with one being a Hong Kong resident and executive director. Managers-in-Charge (MICs) must be designated across eight core functions.

Strategic hiring priorities include:

- ◆ ROs with SFC licensing history or transferable experience
- ◆ Compliance and risk professionals with local regulatory knowledge
- ◆ Operations and finance managers to support MIC functions
- ◆ Bilingual client-facing staff with regional market familiarity

With schemes like Wealth Management Connect and GBA integration, cross-border talent is increasingly valuable. Professionals with Mainland regulatory experience and RMB fund operations are in high demand. In both markets, talent strategy is a regulatory and commercial imperative. Recruitment partners play a pivotal role - not only in sourcing qualified professionals, but in advising on hiring sequences, localisation, and onboarding.



Asset Management Outlook

A Market in Transition

China's asset management industry is entering a phase of structural sophistication. Growth will be driven by technology adoption, global connectivity, and evolving investor preferences. The imperative is clear: build teams that can navigate complexity, embrace innovation, and deliver performance in an environment where alpha is harder to capture - and more valuable than ever.

2025 Hiring Trends

Private markets hiring is focused on thematic investment areas - AI, fintech, consumer, and TMT. The return of fundraising momentum has intensified demand for investor relations professionals with global LP networks and structuring expertise.

In public markets, product innovation is reshaping talent needs. Firms are actively seeking AI-enabled research analysts, ETF product specialists, and compliance professionals who can navigate increasingly complex regulatory environments.

Compensation Expectations

Private equity bonuses range from a few months to 12 months of base salary, typically paid before the Spring Festival. Public market managers offer more predictable structures, with modest performance-linked components. Scaled platforms are better positioned to reward generously.

2026 Outlook

Asset managers face a dual challenge: deploying dry powder efficiently while managing tighter margins and operational complexity. Firms with scaled platforms and robust tech infrastructure will capture flows and talent. Mutual fund growth, active ETFs, and semi-liquid structures will sustain demand for professionals who can operate across traditional and alternative strategies.

Hiring Insights - How Firms Can Gain an Edge

- 1 Prioritise adaptability and cross-asset fluency
- 2 Move decisively on high-impact roles
- 3 Differentiate beyond compensation
- 4 Leverage executive search partners for sourcing, benchmarking, and branding





Quantitative Research & Trading Outlook

Precision in a Competitive Landscape

China's systematic quant industry is evolving rapidly. Larger firms are consolidating their infrastructure and scale, while smaller players face execution and fundraising challenges. The bar for talent is rising, and firms that treat hiring as a strategic priority will outperform.

2025 Hiring Trends

Demand is strongest for:

- ◆ Mid-to high-frequency trading across futures and options
- ◆ Alternative data and signal engineering
- ◆ Algorithmic execution and monetisation
- ◆ Machine learning and AI for predictive modelling

Junior candidates face intense competition. Advanced degrees and relevant internships are now baseline requirements.

Compensation Expectations

Top-performing researchers and PMs at leading hedge funds may receive 6–24 months of base salary in bonuses, typically distributed in Q1. Firms with domestic pay caps offer more modest payouts - 2–3 months for mid-level and junior staff.

2026 Outlook

Key trends include:

- ◆ Shift toward proprietary trading
- ◆ Expansion into U.S. and Southeast Asia
- ◆ Demand for overseas market experience
- ◆ Remote flexibility for senior talent

Hiring Insights - How Firms Can Gain an Edge

- 1 Prioritise Skills Over Titles
- 2 Move Quickly on High-Impact Roles
- 3 Partner Strategically with Recruiters
- 4 Differentiate Beyond Pay





Technology Talent Trends in China's Financial Industry





2025 Hiring Sentiment

AI as a Strategic Catalyst

China's financial services sector is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by the rapid adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital infrastructure. In Shanghai and other major hubs, hiring sentiment remains cautiously optimistic, with firms prioritising strategic technology roles that align with long-term innovation and regulatory resilience.

AI is now viewed not merely as a productivity tool, but as a core growth engine. Financial institutions - especially large state-owned banks - are building proprietary large models to meet strict data security standards, avoiding reliance on external providers. This shift is fuelling demand for in-house AI engineers, model trainers, and infrastructure architects, particularly in areas such as risk management, customer profiling, and intelligent trading systems.

Cross-industry adoption is also influencing talent dynamics. Sectors like manufacturing and pharmaceuticals are hiring AI consultants and application trainers, creating competition for top-tier engineering talent. Meanwhile, leading AI model companies are expanding globally, increasing hiring demand in overseas markets and elevating the value of bilingual and cross-border tech professionals.

Hiring is now highly selective, and skills driven. Key trends include:

- ◆ **AI Infrastructure Roles:** Financial institutions are recruiting engineers to build scalable, secure environments for proprietary model training and deployment.
- ◆ **Quantitative Finance Surge:** A bullish A-share market has triggered aggressive expansion among quant firms, with hiring focused on AI-integrated trading strategies and signal engineering.
- ◆ **Migration from Multinationals:** U.S.-China trade tensions have led to layoffs at multinational tech firms, prompting talent movement toward domestic internet giants, high-potential AI startups, and quant funds.

In-demand profiles include:

- ◆ **LLM Prompt Engineers** (for localised language models)
- ◆ **Robotics/ML Engineers** (for embedded AI applications)
- ◆ **Data Security Architects** (to ensure compliance with China's evolving data laws)
- ◆ **AI Ethics Officers** (required in some zones for responsible scaling)



2026 Hiring Trends

Financial Technology in China

China's financial technology sector is poised for continued expansion in 2026, driven by the deepening integration of artificial intelligence (AI), regulatory innovation, and global market ambitions. Financial institutions are embedding AI into core operations - from credit scoring and fraud detection to customer service and investment analytics - creating sustained demand for AI engineers, data scientists with financial domain expertise, and machine learning specialists focused on predictive modeling and automation.

As China's fintech ecosystem becomes increasingly global, firms are actively recruiting talent with cross-border experience and regulatory fluency. This includes professionals familiar with international compliance frameworks such as GDPR and Dodd-Frank, as well as blockchain developers supporting digital asset infrastructure and cross-border payment systems. Cybersecurity expertise is also in high demand, as regulatory scrutiny intensifies around data governance and digital risk.

The talent market is also being shaped by internal reskilling and mobility initiatives. With demographic shifts and a competitive hiring landscape, financial institutions are investing in upskilling programs to build hybrid capabilities across finance, technology, and compliance. Remote and hybrid work models are gaining traction, particularly for roles in data engineering, infrastructure, and AI operations.

In terms of specific roles, 2026 will see strong demand for fintech product managers with experience in mobile payments, embedded finance, and digital lending. Quant developers integrating AI into trading algorithms and risk models will remain highly sought after, alongside cloud infrastructure engineers supporting scalable fintech platforms. Digital compliance officers and blockchain architects will also be critical hires as firms expand their digital offerings and prepare for international growth.

Regionally, Shanghai continues to lead in cross-border fintech and quant hiring, while Shenzhen is emerging as a hub for blockchain and embedded finance innovation. Hangzhou remains strong in consumer fintech and AI-driven platforms, and the Greater Bay Area is increasingly attractive for bilingual talent with cross-jurisdictional experience.

To compete for top talent effectively, firms must prioritise hybrid skill sets, accelerate internal reskilling, and offer flexibility and global exposure. Recruitment partners will play a key role in talent mapping, compensation benchmarking, and strategic hiring - particularly in emerging domains such as blockchain, AI ethics, and digital compliance.





Hiring Insights

How Firms Can Gain an Edge

To compete in the 2026 fintech talent market, firms should:

1

Invest in Hybrid Talent Pipelines

Build teams with cross-functional capabilities - finance, tech, and regulatory fluency.

2

Accelerate Internal Re-skilling

Upskill existing staff in AI, data science, and cloud technologies to reduce external dependency.

3

Offer Flexibility and Global Exposure

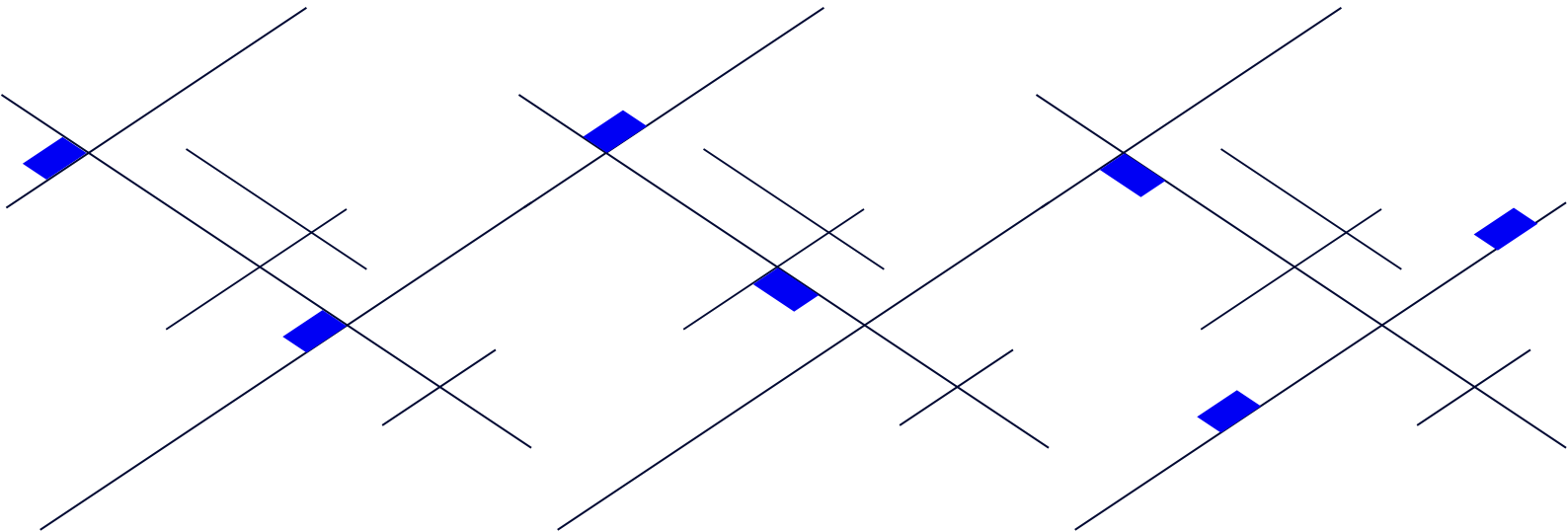
Remote work options and international project rotations are increasingly valued by top-tier candidates.

4

Partner with Talent Experts

Leverage recruitment partners for talent mapping, compensation benchmarking, and strategic hiring, especially in emerging domains like blockchain, AI ethics, and digital compliance.





Closing Perspective

Talent as a Strategic Differentiator

Across China's financial services landscape, talent is no longer a support function - it is a strategic differentiator. Whether in asset management, quant trading, or fintech innovation, firms that invest early in hybrid, tech-fluent, and globally aware professionals consistently outperform peers.

In an environment defined by complexity and transformation, adaptability has become more than an advantage, it is the foundation of sustained success. Organisations that align their talent strategy with innovation, foresight, and purpose will define the next era of financial leadership in China.



About Selby Jennings

We support the financial sciences & services industry with talent that can truly shape the future of a business.

Whether that be quantitative analytics, research & trading professionals developing complex financial models to improve a firm's bottom line, or investment management specialists leading the charge on sustainable investments and greener assets to make an impact, we are here to build the right team for you, and have been doing so for nearly 20 years.

As an award-winning talent partner working with the world's largest financial institutions to revolutionary fintech start-ups with all their hiring needs, we have developed relationships with the brightest and boldest minds in banking and finance, and deliver this talent to leading, innovative organisations around the world.

OUR SPECIALISMS

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- ◆ Wealth Management
- ◆ Investment Banking
- ◆ Investment Management
- ◆ Sales & Trading
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