

Creating ecological jobs is Asia's best hope for dealing with climate change and rising unemployment, writes Janet Pau

Real green shoots

Asia faces the twin crises of climate change and job losses. Unemployed workers are a challenge to every government, especially now. The ranks of Asia's jobless are likely to rise. This year, more than 7 million college graduates are seeking jobs, including 1 million who graduated last year but are still jobless. India's Ministry of Labour reported more than half a million job losses between October 2008 and January 2009.

But the need to create jobs will be a political imperative long after the current crisis subsides. That's partly for good reason. As Asia gets richer, and as its industries become more productive, companies need fewer workers for the same output.

For its part, climate change is a long-term problem that will require an international response. The post-Kyoto-Protocol agreement to reduce greenhouse gases that emerges after the Copenhagen climate change conference this December is likely to make future economic growth dependent on less carbon-intensive industries.

Managed correctly, these twin challenges are an enormous opportunity for Asia to provide good jobs that will build the low-carbon economy of the future. But

steady employment declines. In China, a 3 per cent economic growth rate in the 1980s meant a 1 per cent increase in jobs. By the 1990s, a growth rate of almost 8 per cent was needed to get the same 1 per cent increase in employment. In the first half of this decade, a 10 per cent growth rate was needed. Although leaps in productivity lead to income and wealth gains, these vastly more efficient societies need to find new jobs for their workforces.

The longer-term picture is even more challenging. By 2025, Asia will be home to 300 million more working-age people, mostly in South and Southeast Asia. Economies facing ageing populations, including China, will need to employ workers in higher value-added jobs to limit the effect of a stable or shrinking workforce.

New growth needs to stimulate domestic consumption, generate decent jobs for the future workforce and provide higher value-added work to raise incomes.

Green jobs have the potential to yield these benefits. Jobs can be created in industries directly related to carbon reduction and in traditional industries that change their production processes to meet higher environmental standards. But to what extent are Asian economies creating the right conditions for green job growth? New research by the Asia Business Council provides a preliminary assessment through the creation of a "green jobs index", which measures current green job openings, the market potential of various green industry segments, availability of science and engineering, environmental, and managerial talent, and government commitments to green job policies in 13 Asian economies.

Results suggest that China possesses the most favourable conditions overall for total green job creation, followed by Japan and India. In the cases of China and India, the sheer size of many green industry sectors – such as renewables (notably wind for India and solar for China) and potential for trading carbon credits, as well as the number of university-educated talent – provide market opportunities and human

capital that can enable green development. Japan's high rank in areas including university environmental programmes and national environmental performance reflects the economy's long-standing focus on developing green expertise and policies.

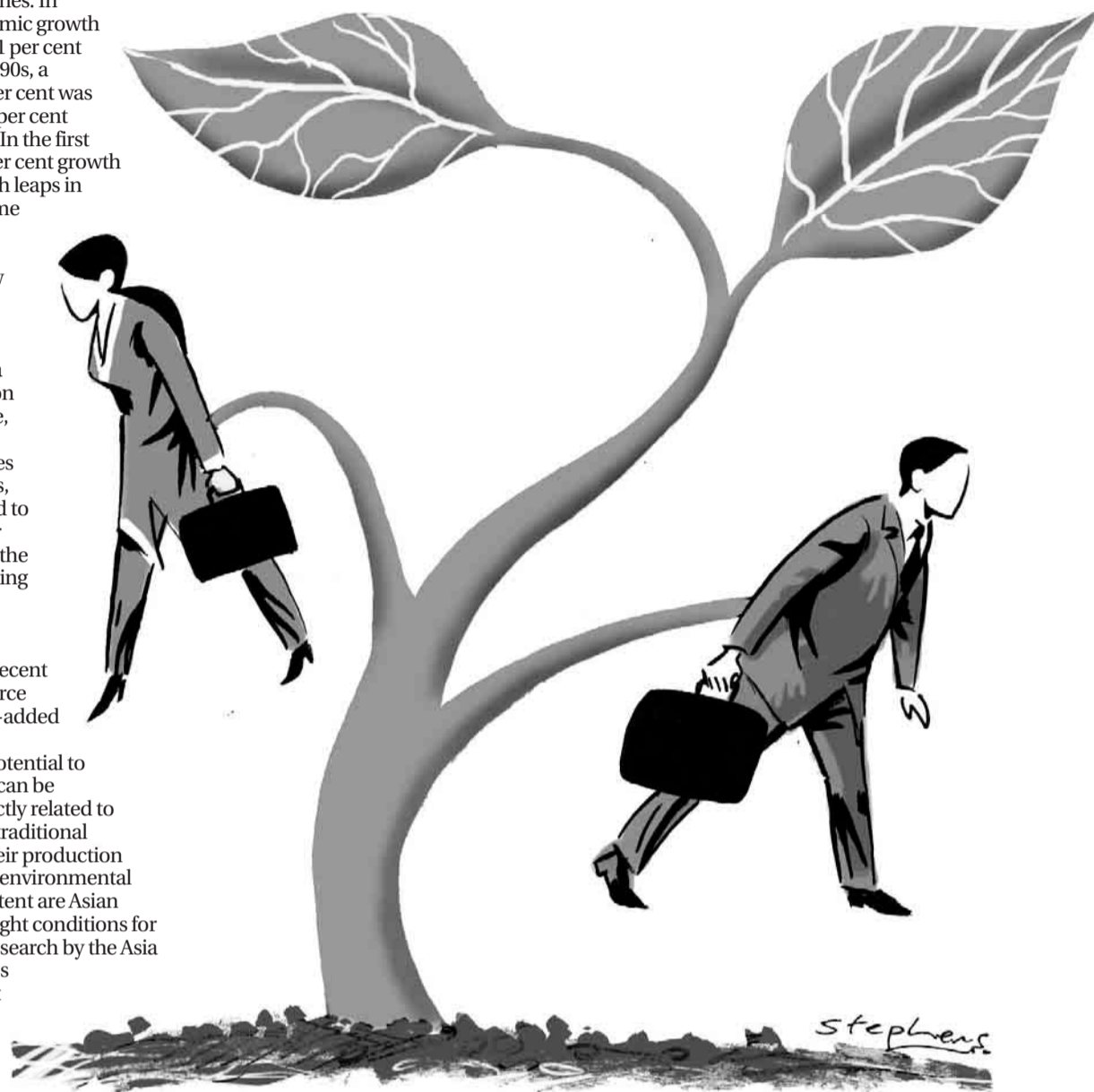
The last battle in the global war for talent, which started in the 1990s and was at its fiercest during the recent offshoring industry boom, has created employment opportunities for university-trained, English-speaking graduates in Asia, notably in India and the Philippines.

Today, the emerging green economy has the potential to employ workers with an even wider range of skills and

experiences, in agriculture, manufacturing and services industries, whose work contributes to a sustainable, low-carbon economy.

Asian nations should address deficiencies that hinder green job development by supporting businesses' attempts to find opportunities, extending training for existing workers, attracting more green-industry-ready talent from around the world, and implementing coherent and concerted government policies to foster green job growth.

Janet Pau is the Asia Business Council's programme director



China has the most favourable conditions [in Asia] for overall green job creation, followed by Japan and India

the obstacles are daunting. Over the next three to five years, at least, Asian exporters will face continuing headwinds. The unwinding of government debt issued to fund stimulus packages and muted demand from US consumers will depress demand in the west. That will limit any expansion in export-oriented factory jobs, especially affecting China's migrant population.

Due to large productivity gains, manufacturing employment growth has already declined. Despite the growing number of workers, manufacturing jobs have been lost in Asia as factories have become more efficient. Capital- and carbon-intensive industries have seen

Other Voices

Why dull CEOs are best for business

David Brooks

Should CEOs read novels? The question seems to answer itself. After all, they work with people all day. Novel-reading should give them greater psychological insight, a feel for human relationships and a greater sensitivity towards their own emotional chords.

Sadly, most recent research suggests that these are not the most important talents for a person who is trying to run a company. Economists Steven Kaplan, Mark Klebanov and Morten Sorensen recently completed a study called "Which CEO Characteristics and Abilities Matter?"

They relied on detailed personality assessments of 316 corporate chiefs and measured their companies' performances. They found that strong people skills correlate loosely or not at all with being a good CEO. Traits like being a good listener, a good team builder, an enthusiastic colleague and a great communicator do not seem to be very important when it comes to leading successful companies.

What mattered, it turned out, were execution and organisational skills. The traits that correlated most powerfully with success were attention to detail, persistence, efficiency, analytic thoroughness and the ability to work long hours.

In other words, warm, flexible, team-oriented and empathetic people are less likely to thrive as CEOs. Organised, dogged, anal-retentive and slightly boring people are more likely to thrive.

These results are consistent with a lot of work that's been done over the past few decades. All this work is a reminder that, while it's important

to be a sensitive, well-rounded person for the sake of your inner fulfilment, the market doesn't really care. The market wants you to fill an organisational role. It seems to want CEOs to offer a clear direction for their companies. The second thing the market wants from leaders is a relentless and somewhat mind-numbing commitment to incremental efficiency gains.

These traits add up to a certain ideal personality type. The CEOs most likely to succeed are humble, diffident, relentless and a bit unidimensional – often not the most exciting people to be around. For this reason, people in the literary, academic and media worlds rarely understand business. It is nearly impossible to think of a novel that accurately portrays business success. That's because the virtues that writers tend to admire – those involving self-expression and self-exploration – are not the ones that lead to corporate excellence.

Likewise, business and politics do not blend well. Business leaders tend to do poorly in Washington, while political leaders possess those talents – charisma, charm and personal skills – that are of such limited value in corporate execution. The US now has an administration freely interposing itself in the management culture of industry after industry. It won't be the regulations that will be costly, but the revolution in values. When Washington is a profit center, CEOs are forced to adopt the traits of politicians. That is the insidious way that other nations have lost their competitive edge.

David Brooks is a New York Times columnist

Team Tsang walk their boss into a PR debacle

Joseph Wong

At the Legislative Council question-and-answer session last Thursday, Margaret Ng Ngoi-ye asked Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam-kuen whether he would support the vindication of the students involved in the Tiananmen Square crackdown on June 4, 1989. In response, Mr Tsang trotted out the well-worn official line that, as China had made significant progress in many areas, contributing to Hong Kong's economic prosperity in the past 20 years, Hong Kong people, including him, now came to a more objective assessment of the situation. He also said his view represented that of the people of Hong Kong in general.

The 20-odd pan-democratic members lost no time in questioning the representativeness of the chief executive's view and walked out of the meeting in protest. After the session, Mr Tsang clarified that his view on June 4 did not represent that of all Hongkongers; and he apologised for his wrong choice of words.

That the chief executive could have made such a serious public relations blunder is an interesting case. First, Mr Tsang's comments on June 4 could not have been off-the-cuff remarks. The Chief Executive's Office treats every legislature Q&A session seriously. It is reasonable to assume that the matter had been discussed, and a suitable response included in his brief for the session.

Mr Tsang's main message on June 4 – that Hong Kong people should not delve into the rights and wrongs of what happened 20 years ago but should, instead, focus on the progress made since then – has been the

standard official line in recent years. But there is no evidence that a substantial proportion of Hong Kong people subscribe to this view. Thus, the added point that this view represents that of the people of Hong Kong in general was probably included to make it more pleasing to Beijing.

As it turned out, the chief executive and whoever prepared his response seriously underestimated the adverse reaction, not only from the pan-democrats but also from most of

It is reasonable to assume the matter had been discussed, and a response was included in his brief

the public. Also, in adopting the official line, the chief executive's team did not seem to realise that the Chinese leaders had in fact become more conciliatory and open recently on the lessons of June 4.

During an interview on September 30 last year, CNN showed Premier Wen Jiabao (温家宝) a picture taken before the Tiananmen Square crackdown depicting him in the company of then-premier Zhao Ziyang (赵紫阳) visiting the students on hunger strike. Mr Wen did not use the standard "forget the past and look ahead" line that our chief executive used recently. Instead, he said that, while moving ahead with economic reforms, China also needed to advance political reforms, as comprehensive development required com-

Frank Ching

frank.ching@scmp.com



Spies? Who, us?

When one government leader was told of the arrest of two of his citizens by a neighbouring country for espionage, he reportedly said: "This is no surprise. We do it. They do it. Everyone does it." That seems to be the attitude of most countries towards spying – everyone does it, just try not to get caught.

But China seems to be an exception. Almost every time someone is accused of spying for Beijing, the charge is vehemently denied. Thus last week, when a Foreign Ministry spokesman was asked about allegations that a Chinese agent had been involved in espionage in the United States, his answer was that the charges had been "totally made up".

The charges involved a retired air force officer, Lieutenant Colonel James Wilbur Fondren, a deputy director of the US Pacific Command's Washington liaison office. He was accused by the US Justice Department of leaking classified information to China between November 2004 and February 2008.

Ma Zhaoxu (马朝旭), the Foreign Ministry spokesman, waxed indignant. "We urge the US to abandon its cold war mindset," he said, "stop its groundless accusations against China and do more to improve mutual trust and friendship between peoples."

Mr Ma seemed to imply that now the cold war is over, espionage – at least on the part of China – no longer exists. Beijing, it appears, no longer needs to spy.

This has been China's attitude for some time. Nine years ago, when Washington was abuzz with reports that China had stolen details of the most advanced US nuclear weapons, another Chinese spokesman cited a "cold war mentality" in which some Americans had "made up the lies that China stole the nuclear technology from the US in an attempt to defame China and undermine China-US relations".

Of course, not all charges of espionage on the part of China are justified. The Fondren case has not yet gone to trial, and there is some truth to the Chinese assertions. Certainly, Wen Ho Lee, a Taiwanese-born American scientist who had been identified in the US press as a mainland spy, was ultimately vindicated. And the anti-China charges at the time were, to a large extent, being used as political ammunition against the Clinton administration. But it is simply not credible for China to maintain that, while other countries continue to spy

on China, China does not spy on other countries.

China certainly knows full well that the world is full of spies. The day after the Foreign Ministry denied the need for spying now that the cold war is over, a Beijing court handed down an 18-year sentence to a former senior Chinese journalist for accepting 3 million yen (HK\$245,000) from Japanese diplomats in exchange for providing state secrets.

And last December, China executed a man charged with spying for Taiwan, despite appeals from the international community. Instead, it presented evidence which, it said, proved that the man had leaked strategic missile data to Taiwanese intelligence and had brought about an "extraordinary loss to national security".

There are many allegations of Chinese spying in various forms, including industrial and computer espionage. But, every time, the charges are denied with expressions of injured innocence.

This does no good for China's credibility. Other countries believe that Beijing has a vast network of agents and to deny each charge as it comes up is simply not effective. It would be a much better strategy for China to adopt the same policy as other countries; that is, simply refuse to comment on individual cases.

In this regard, a 2002 case provides a model. A reporter at a Foreign Ministry press conference on July 4 posed the question: "It's reported that a Russian scientist was tried in Vladivostok ... with espionage for China. What's your comment?"

The response: "I have no such information and therefore I am in no position to make any comment."

That should be the standard response to cases of espionage, rather than emotional denials that have worn thin over the years.

Frank Ching is a Hong Kong-based writer and commentator

Sustainability is the way to prosperity

Ban Ki-moon

Sustainability has become the foundation for almost all economic thinking nowadays. It is essential not only to economic recovery today, but to ensuring peace and security tomorrow.

Factoring sustainability into all our thinking is necessary because, as a global society, we are living on the edge. The last two years have brought a series of crises: energy, food, climate change and global recession. I fear that worse may be in store. Indeed, today's global economic crisis, if not handled properly, could evolve into a full-scale political crisis – one defined by social unrest, weakened governments and angry citizens who have lost faith in their leaders and their future.

In addition, we are entering a new age of austerity. We are facing more problems with fewer resources. National budgets have shrunk. Aid programmes are being squeezed. Voluntary contributions are drying up.

Yet there is a third reality, which provides cause for optimism: the challenges that we face are interrelated so, if we are smart about it, if we spot and utilise the interconnections among these problems, solutions to each problem can be solutions to all. We can get more bang for our collective buck, peso and real, and find effective, efficient and enduring paths to a more sustainable, inclusive and prosperous future.

At the recent G20 summit in London, world leaders explicitly recognised these linkages.

They agreed on a genuine global stimulus that advanced the interests

of all countries, not just a few. They stood against protectionism and they recognised the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals as an engine for development, growth and creation of quality jobs worldwide.

They took a major step towards a "Green New Deal" and vowed to reach agreement at the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen in December.

But bold, visionary leadership will be needed to seal a successor deal to the Kyoto Protocol in Copenhagen. The agreement reached there must be ambitious, effective and fair, offering rich countries a way to cut greenhouse-gas emissions while supporting poorer countries as they adapt to the adverse impact of climate change.

All of us see the links between economic growth and political stability, democracy and human rights. For me, as UN secretary general, collective social and economic security is a basic principle of justice – global social justice. But to achieve this goal, we must think about and work to advance the sustainability agenda for what it really is: a prosperity agenda.

Ultimately, solidarity and common cause must be our greatest strength. For, today, we have before us an opportunity to reinvent how we as countries work together to deliver collective solutions to our collective problems. Indeed, the times require a new multilateralism as the foundation of a new and sustainable prosperity for all.

Ban Ki-moon is secretary general of the United Nations. Copyright: Project Syndicate



Contact us Agree or disagree with the opinions on this page? Write to us at letters@scmp.com

If you have an idea for an opinion article, e-mail it to oped@scmp.com