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Sunday, May 1, 2005

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ILLUSTRATION BY KIP AOKI

# Asia on the horizon

## **Go West, young man (or woman), and grow up with the region**

By Johnson W.K. Choi

It is important how you present yourselves and how prepared you are to land your first job. It is equally important that where you land your first job could determine your future and your future career path! When I say "where", I meant from the prospective of taking a world view!

What does Hawaii mean to you?

For students attending the university here where I once was as a foreign student, this is a place for higher education.

For many of us Hawaii is our home, the place we work, live and maybe raise our family.

If the world begins and ends in Hawaii with no other choices, maybe everything will be fine. The reality is the world does not begin and end in Hawaii. With less than 25 percent of Americans, including our elected officials on both federal and state levels, carrying a valid passport, the world may begin and end here.

Since 75 percent of the people do not travel outside of the United States many in politics would like you to believe that since 70 percent of our population in Hawaii has Asian blood that we automatically know and understand Asia and our tie with Asia is automatic.

Is it really? I asked my Asian clients frequently on their knowledge of their countries of origin, mostly those of the second or third generation of Chinese and Japanese immigrants. The majority of them think they know or thought they have relatives back home, but were not in touch with them for decades and most of them do not even know where they are. Therefore, our ties with Asia may look distinctive on the surface but yield little substance. More Asian Americans in Hawaii know more about Las Vegas than their original home countries.

I have spent my entire adult life in Hawaii after completing my high school at Rosaryhill in Hong Kong. During the past 25 years, my business has allowed me to travel extensively to Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, Canada and in the mainland United States. I have seen many cities in Asia progress with time, by leaps and bounds. Hawaii and its citizenship, especially our children are handicapped by the limited opportunities here.

Since my arrival in Hawaii in 1973, I have seen Hawaii gradually

shift from businesses controlled by the Big Five -- to now be dominated by many mainland businesses like Federated Department Stores, Costco, Wal-Mart, Kmart, Home Depot, Office Depot and the list goes on.

In 1973, we had a little more diverse economic base with sugar, pineapple, tourism, federal and state government and military. Today, we have two categories of employers. They are the tourism-related industries in one category, and the state, city and federal governments in the other, which includes military.

Between 1990 and 2002, we had a big exodus of Hawaii residents, who mostly left Hawaii for the mainland. A number also went to Asia and found opportunities there. We have commonly referred it to the brain drain of Hawaii in the '90s.

But now companies wanting to export are confused. When we discuss with the major exporters of Hawaii goods and services on opportunities in Asia, most of them asked us "Are there really business opportunities in Asia?" We were dumbfounded when they asked us the question. So we followed up and asked them to qualify their statements. Most of them told us the state has been sending 35 to 50 business delegations to their stores or factories every year for more than 10 years. In the earlier years, they were excited to produce high-quality presentations with nice gift packages to the delegates after each of their visits. As time goes by, participating companies found out almost all business delegates from Asia just want to plan a business agenda to justify their Hawaii visits with no intention of doing any business transaction.

The "Hawaii" brand, according to our market research in Asia, is reinforced by our regular dealings with clients in Hong Kong, Japan, China and Taiwan. What does the word "Hawaii" mean to them? The images of sun, sea, surf, beautiful weather and hula dancers immediately come to mind. It is one of the top five desired travel destinations in the world. For those that have almost everything, "Hawaii Inc." will continue to attract the rich. They love Hawaii and they could enjoy the beaches and doing leisure shopping without worry. Many have purchased multimillion-dollar vacation homes in Hawaii.

But the Hawaii Inc. for many of our college graduates, especially those who attended universities in the mainland, means returning to Hawaii for a reduction in pay of up to 60 percent? It may also limit their future job prospects with very limited employers to choose from.

What can Hawaii Inc. offer you in the next 10 years?

China will challenge the United States as a dominant military and economic power in the coming years. The unpopularity of military bases in Asia has forced the United States to scale back or close down operations there. Hawaii is a natural choice as one of the major staging ground for future military operations in Asia. With the help of our Sen. Daniel Inouye's help, we will expect billions of dollars

**BUSINESS**

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continued to come to Hawaii in the foreseeable future. Therefore, if you have the skill and/or technical know-how working in all phases of this military build-up you can expect to get a good high-paying job -- but you must be a U.S. citizen and pass security clearances.

Demand for Hawaii real estate will continue to grow. Much of the demand is from wealthy individuals from the mainland. Businesses supporting real estate and development will continue to prosper.

Working for the government, the largest employers in Hawaii -- is also an alternative. But if you are planning to work for the government, plan to work for them for life as most privately owned businesses do not want to hire former government employees.

For some of you with technical or professional skills and the ability to speak a second language like Mandarin or Japanese, I will suggest you go to Asia. You will increase your chances of success as opportunities there are plentiful. When you shall become successful, if a Hawaii employer wants you, they will pay you the higher mainland wages.

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Johnson W.K. Choi is president and executive director of the China Hawaii Chamber of Commerce and the Hong Kong China Hawaii Chamber of Commerce.

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## Schiavo case illustrates importance of planning

**A living will expresses your wishes  
regarding possible life support**

By Judith Sterling and Michelle Tucker

None of us ever expects tragedy. Some of us plan in case it strikes us, but we never really expect it to happen.

But on Feb. 25, 1990, tragedy struck Terri Schiavo and her family. At age 26, Terri's heart stopped beating. She became comatose and unable to communicate.

The strain was hard on Terri's family -- her husband, Michael Schiavo, and her parents, Bob and Mary Schindler.

Terri's husband eventually gave up hope and finally decided to try to remove Terri's feeding tube. The Schindlers reacted by going to court to block Michael's attempts. The battle raged on.