

Episode One: Global Thinking with Karen Jiang (sponsored by Clifford Chance)

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Isabella is an Engagement and Events Co-opt for the GLSA.

Karen Jiang is a fourth seat trainee solicitor at Clifford Chance.

Isabella: The GLSA acknowledges that the Melbourne Law School is situated on stolen Wurundjeri land of the Kulin Nation, of which sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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Isabella: Hi there, welcome to the first episode of the Think Global: Careers in International Law podcast series brought to you by the Global Law Students Association and Clifford Chance. This episode explores what it is like to be a young international lawyer at Clifford Chance. Clifford Chance is a leading international commercial law firm with offices in 32 cities across the globe with their headquarters in London. As part of the Magic Circle, Clifford Chance is well known for their expertise in various areas of commercial law.

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Isabella: Welcome to the first episode of GLSA's Think Global: Careers in International Law podcast series. My name is Bella and I'm one of the Engagement and Events co-opts. Today I'm joined by Karen Jiang, a fourth seat trainee solicitor at Clifford Chance.

Isabella: Hi Karen, it's so nice to have you as our first guest on the 'Think Global' series. Would you mind briefly introducing yourself to our listeners?

Karen: I'm Karen. I used to study law in Australia where I did my JD degree at Monash University between 2014 and 2017. After I finished my law degree in Australia, I moved to Hong Kong to start my career with Clifford Chance in the Hong Kong office.

Isabella: Thank you. Now before we dive into your career in law and your current work experience, something we're asking all of our guests is why did you decide to get into law?

Karen: My first degree was financial engineering. I did that after the global financial crisis. I'm not sure how much you guys know about the change to the markets because of the crisis, but basically there are a large number of regulations for financial products right after 2009. During my bachelor degree I studied both the financial products and the laws governing them. Surprisingly, I was more interested in the regulations than the financial products, which was quite surprising to my financial professor back then because most of the students find the regulations sort of dry and not particularly intriguing. I spent a lot of time reading them and found that it is very intellectually stimulating to think about how the laws govern the markets and how different markets try to coordinate a piece of law to make smooth transitions into a huge new scheme. I think at that point of time, I sort of started to make up my mind that I should study a bit more about laws and regulations after my financial degree and that's why I moved to study law.

Isabella: It's interesting how you might start a career and then it takes you into a completely different direction. Could you share something else that surprised you since beginning your law career?

Karen: The surprising thing would be how important it is to have the ability to time manage projects and manage other people's expectations. When I was in law school, and I'm sure you guys are doing this, I spent tonnes of time just reading cases and reading journals and writing, just learning the law as the most important thing. It is very important, but after you start to work, especially when you are doing a lot of cross border transactions, it's very important to be able to stay organised to stay on top of things and manage your schedules and the schedules of clients. So, the need for time management is definitely a surprising part. After I got into working in law it took me I think about a year, which is a bit too long I guess, but it took me some time to adjust to this. I would say I'm only now getting to know how to manage things properly during my days at Clifford Chance.

Isabella: Thank you for the insight that's really helpful. Do you have any tips on how to start honing that skill now?

Karen: It's very beneficial and also important for students like you guys to start some initiative apart from the legal course of study you take. It helps you, the things you guys are doing, it definitely requires you guys to multitask and to manage things, so I think you guys are doing a great job.

Isabella: Thank you Karen, I mean today isn't about us but we do feel very lucky to do these types of extracurricular activities and learn from people like you. But moving on to our next question about your career, I know as a student you've studied in universities and completed work experience in both Australia and Hong Kong. So, what drew you to entering the workforce in Hong Kong?

Karen: So, I applied for a vacation scheme which is the equivalent to the clerkships in Australia, right after I finished the first year of my law school. Back then I was not sure about where to start my legal career and it was more like a strategic move for me to maximise my chance to secure a job after graduation. I think it's well known that the Australian market is highly competitive these days, and good grades from a decent law school doesn't necessarily mean that you can get your dream job. So, I thought I should just try every option I have and that's why I applied to Hong Kong. Once I started to work for Clifford Chance in the Hong Kong office, it was like my first internship and it amazed me by the scale of the work. Almost all the deals I worked on were high profile and cross border which was an eye-opening experience. It has been quite a few years, so I don't remember the exact projects that I worked on before, but I can give you a more recent example. In February I worked on a bond assurance that involved 12 jurisdictions so I was the junior who is in charge of running the workstreams and coordinating between the different jurisdictions. I got the chance to communicate with people from all different countries, from Spain, from Italy, from America, from the UK and also from Australia and from China. All of these countries. You get to know different people, different markets and different work styles. I think back then there was a similar feeling of exposure for me, so it's actually a great opportunity to choose to start your legal career in

Hong Kong. I think on the other hand, Australian markets are more domestically focused and I think a lot of people would think about going international after a few years of experience in Australia. I have seen a lot of lawyers move to London, to Hong Kong, to Singapore to explore more options. So, I thought if I was going to do that some bit later in my career, why not do it now? So that's why right after my vacation scheme with Clifford Chance I just decided I will start from Hong Kong.

Isabella: Thank you for telling us about that and no wonder you had to urge us to think about your time management skills because it sounds like a lot of juggling with people joining internationally from all different places.

Karen: Yeah, I do remember one time I had to call a legal consulate in El Salvador. Forgive me for my ignorance, but I didn't have much information about this country and if it's not for this job I don't think I would contact any person from El Salvador anytime soon in my life, so I think it's a great opportunity to work on these kinds of projects.

Isabella: Yeah, absolutely. So, you talked about starting in the vacation scheme and then continuing on. Could you talk us through that timeline about when you started that and then how you managed to stay on and how long you were doing that?

Karen: Yeah, I think if you are studying in Australia it's very important, if you are considering starting your legal career in other places, for you to make plans beforehand. As we all know the schedules in the North hemisphere and the South are very different, and it's important to look up the information as early as possible just so you can plan things according to your school schedule and schedules of the firm programs. I studied at Monash and the Monash JD program is a little bit different, it's on a trimester basis, but normally for Australian students they would do what we call in Hong Kong 'winter vacation scheme' which is the summer in Australia, or they do a 'summer vacation scheme' in the winter break of Australia. That usually happens in January and July of each year. When I was applying, Clifford Chance was still running a winter vacation scheme, so I applied I think sometime in September that year and got in and then came here in January. It's a very short one, most programs in Hong Kong are just for four weeks, so it's the same as the clerkships in Melbourne, but different from the programs in Sydney, where I think it's like about 10 weeks or something. I spent one month in Hong Kong and then I went back to study in Australia and then in the summer I tried another vacation scheme with another British magic circle firm in Hong Kong. It is the rule of the Hong Kong Law Society that all the results of training contracts will be announced on the 1st of August of every year. So, even if you do it in the winter you will only find out the results and the 1st of August, so I waited like seven months for the global transactions one, which was quite a torture to be honest. But as an update to our new recruitment information, I think from this year we will only do the summer vacation scheme, which I think is better because it places everyone on a level playground. Previously, I had to try very hard to maintain contact with the people in Hong Kong during the seven months which is not an easy job, but now it's better. They see all the candidates in June and July and they give them the results on the 1st of August at one time. I would say it's probably fairer and the transfer for the Australian students would be better. But there are still other firms doing winter vacation schemes so I think students that were interested in it should look it up. I got my results on the 1st of August that year and I know I got my job offer about the same time. I'm not sure if it's still the same

because my information is a little bit dated but I think back then it was about the time when the Australian clerkships were open for application. So, I was already determined to move to Hong Kong after graduation so I didn't apply to the programs in Melbourne. But I think for students who are not certain, it's probably better to apply to both places or at least consider such options because you do have multiple schedules, multiple openings in one year time that you can try different firms and different locations. I know some other students also applied for the programs in Melbourne and do clerkships there, and then probably learn about their results the next year from the Australian firms. Some of them will decide to go to Hong Kong and some of them may have preferred the Australian firms and they choose to stay in Australia. I think from the student's perspective I would encourage students to keep an open mind and explore all the options. After that, if you need to move to Hong Kong to work, but you studied law in Australia, you will have to take conversion exams. I did six subjects, but I think for each uni it's different, like for Melbourne Uni it is probably 4-5. There are some subjects that are different from the Australian law. One example is the land law. In Australia we have the Torrens system, but in Hong Kong they are still using the General Law system. You have to take the property law and the land law tests, but those tests are quite short and are easy to prepare. I think most of us take all of them in one batch and quite some people can manage to pass at one time. After you have passed the conversion exam, you apply to PCLL which is the equivalent of our PLT in Australia and study. The difference would be you can't really do PCLL as part time as you can do for PLT, which is very easy to do online or while you're working. In Hong Kong it's [PCLL] one year of study, which is more similar to the UK program. You spend one year in school and finish the course before you can qualify, and then you start the two-year training contract with the firm. That's the timeline for then, my information is from a few years back for any of the audience interested.

Isabella: Yeah absolutely. For listeners we will provide follow-up links for up to date processes after the release of the episode, but thank you for that comprehensive layout of the process. It's really helpful for us to help visualise how you would actually kind of make these opportunities work. I bet waiting on tenterhooks from doing the process back in January and then waiting until August to hear back must have been really hard for you.

Karen: Yeah it was such a torture, it's almost like you're having a baby if you got pregnant then chose not to know about the gender and you wait for nine months. I was like, if I'm a parent, I don't know how I would do that after the eight months of waiting for the answer from Clifford Chance. So, it changed my life entirely.

Isabella: That's funny, at least when you have a baby, you know there's a baby coming, here you're not sure if this offer is coming!

Karen: You're right, you're totally right.

Isabella: Well it sounds like a really worthwhile process now you've been through it. Could you tell us a little bit more about what maybe a regular day looks like for you, as a fourth seat training solicitor Clifford Chance? Talk us through kind of what the day or what the normal week looks like now?

Karen: Now I'm in litigation between non-transactional work, which is quite different from the transactional seats I have done before. Maybe I can talk about my days in both transactional areas and also non transactional. For first, a little bit as a background, in Hong Kong your training will be rotated in four different practise areas. That's at least the case with Clifford Chance. So, [for the first seat, it's] public companies, which are IPO and M&A for public companies. The second seat is finance, so like aviation financing and leasing. The third seat is derivatives, which I mentioned about why I was attracted to law at the very beginning, so like financial derivative products. And I'm now in my fourth seat rotation. When I was training working on the transactional teams, I would usually come in at 9.30am or even 10.00am sometimes. It's quite usual to have some late nights so people are chill about when you come in. So, I come in at like 9.30am – 10.00am to check with my partners and supervisors about what they expect me to finish that day and where the projects are going. Sometimes not all the phone calls that the partners are on with clients involve you, so you do have to keep yourself updated by talking to your colleagues actively. I got a general idea from them about the status of things and then I started just thinking about what I can delegate to other people. I think the art of delegation is very important when you start to work, especially for lawyers because you're continuously dealing with so much information and so many to-do items. Also, at Clifford Chance we have very good supporting facilities. For example, we have a document production unit (DPU). They are the professionals on helping you to fix documents and all kinds of problems. You can just email them and 8- 10 minutes later, they will be done, with maybe a table of contents or adjusting cross references, like everything you want, they will do it for you. We also have a legal support centre located in India. They can deal with the work that I give the DPU, but they're also more like legally trained so they can do some primary legal work for you, like some company searches, litigation searches and yeah, all kinds of stuff that you think that does not involve high level deliberation and decision making. So, I would decide what I can delegate to other people before I start to work my day. After the delegation, I will work on whatever is assigned to me and during the day normally you would get multiple emails, so many emails. 200 emails is a very normal day and multiple conference calls. It's very important to get prepared 15 minutes before the call or before the meeting with the clients and juggle between the schedules. And then in the afternoon around four or five I would again check up with my partner about how late they expect me to work on that day, because we don't have a facetime policy. They encourage you to take up the technologies to use some flexible working tools. So, if I want to go home and work from home and have dinner with my families or friends, I can do that, but it's also important to check with the colleagues beforehand to make sure they don't need you in the office to deal with, for example, some hard copies of documents at night. So I will do some communication with them and know I will be home around 7-8pm or sometimes a bit later and then I work till night to finish whatever I need to finish. Sometimes it's also very important to leverage the time zone, because for a global firm all the facilities all the support that I mentioned like DPU are also available in other offices, so if it's like 11.00pm and I need some documents to be done and I want to work on it on the morning of the next day, I will send them to the London team and they will fix things for me and send it back. So, just to leverage the time zone to make sure no one is working too late. Yeah, so that's when I was in the transactional team. Now I'm in the litigation team which is quite different. The deadlines are no longer from the clients, they are from the courts or the arbitration tribunal. So, most of the cases I would know that for a document or following weeks or even months beforehand, so I can schedule my time and I know for this week I need to finish this and next week I need to finish that. So,

it's more like I can manage my own time and manage my own workload. I can choose to work a little bit later tonight, but have a lighter day tomorrow or vice versa. So it's different but I think the skill to communicate with each other and manage their expectations and use the support teams are the same for four different areas.

Isabella: Thank you so much for laying that out. I think I'm a bit new to knowing how these different seats work and how you went from transactional to non-transactional. Does that happen kind of automatically, for everyone in your type of situation? You go from that type of work to the next one?

Karen: Yeah so, I think in Hong Kong the trainees are required to take one litigation seat. So some students want to take them earlier, some prefer to do it later. So, it doesn't have to be the first seat but students do litigation sometime during their training contract. But now I think Clifford Chance, a couple of years ago, implemented a more flexible policy, because some students are very clear they don't want to be a litigator in their legal career because it's very different. Some people don't know, but some people probably know at the very beginning of their career. So if that's the case it is not necessarily the case that a trainee can benefit from a six months litigation seat. So now they do a split set, so if you are ready to determine you want to be a transactional lawyer, you can choose to do like three seats for a transactional seat and once it is split - three months in litigation as three months and another, like one more, transactional team. So yeah, that's quite different from other firms as far as I know, because I think most firms would require students to do six months litigation.

Isabella: So, there's some flexibility with Clifford Change is what I'm hearing. I heard the kind of benefits of the non-transactional, in terms of being able to manage your own time or having a deadline that you can then work towards. What would you say are some of the more enjoyable challenges to the transactional work that you were doing?

Karen: Yes I think for some people, because in transactional work you have to communicate with people on an ongoing basis, some people do enjoy that feeling. For example, in a litigation seat you don't always hear from the court maybe for one or two months at a time and you communicate with your clients maybe like once a few weeks, but most of the time you can be more focused on your own like research work. If you want to you can work on your own a bit more compared to transactional work. But if you do a corporate seat your client will call you all the time when they can, they expect to get it also very soon because the market is changing very soon. Sometimes the morning and afternoon could be totally different so yeah, some people would prefer to get the first-hand experience of communication with clients. Another benefit I would say is that you have more exposure to the business side of the market because, for litigation, you do see the business side, but when the matter proceeds to you, it may be in trouble and it may be under investigation, so what do you do? You focus on solving that problem for your clients. Whereas for the transactional side, things are still going alright, right? So if you see the business side and you get to see how your client is as a business person and make decisions for the company and take different strategies to adapt to the market. So some people do like the business side of the transactional teams.

Isabella: Absolutely, I can see the benefit of it now you kind of lay it out like that, in getting that experience with clients and business and the market forces. Thank you. I really appreciate that. We were thinking about advice for students who wanted to follow a similar path, but I think you kind of laid out the pathway that you had to take and just reminded [us] to pursue that path early and put out the feelers and do as much as they can to be aware of the process. But I also wanted to ask, after you were telling us about that really great experience you had recently about coordinating different people in different countries for a project, if there's any moment or experience that you feel has really shaped your career in law or perhaps where you want to take your career in law? Has there been anything that's really spoken to you and said yes, I'm in the right place and this is where I want to go?

Karen: I would say there's some moments, but I think it's the continuous experience with Clifford Chance during my 2-year training contract. I have been working with so many talented and extremely hardworking lawyers. They are such inspirations for me and changed my views towards my legal career. Before I officially started work with Clifford Chance I knew that I may be interested in law and I'm interested in doing some high profile work, but I still did not have a very clear picture about where I wanted to go, in say 10 years' time. But after I started to work with partners, associates and consultants at Clifford Chance it's amazing to see how hardworking and inspiring these people are, the brilliant ideas they generate, the everlasting energies they have, it is just unbelievable. They kind of speak to me about what kind of person I want to be. As an example, we have a lot of clients from the tech industry and it could be a fantastic financial technology, it could be some computer programmers and could be cryptocurrency...all kinds of so called 'cutting edge' technology companies. Some of our partners, because it takes at least ten years for you to become a partner, our partners are close to 40 being the youngest and some of them are like 60s or even in their 70s. They always continue to learn about the most updated technology and they can take in, and have a deep understanding of the industry, and use their knowledge to help clients in a very short period of time. It's just amazing to me. All of this is only made possible because of them being so hardworking. You don't always see these people in your life because at least my parents aren't working this hard their entire life, they probably were in business and their 30s and 40s but then they had developed into a stage of life where you want to take things slow. These people[at Clifford Chance], they're highly hardworking. So for example, I have a partner, he's very talented and he has a photographic memory. For one case we had to study an app on your phone, how to use that app and the user experience, which is not related to law at all. He was travelling to Hong Kong last year, and because of Covid-19 he had to do 14 days of hotel quarantine, a very typical Covid-19 story. He self-studied the technology during the quarantine, and post quarantine. He's an expert in that industry, in software development, and the client was amazed by that. All of these kinds of experiences, first-hand viewing them, how they work, has gradually shaped my career and made me know that I want to be something like that in the future.

Isabella: Thank you, I hear what you're saying, it's like you might not know where you want to exactly be in 10 years, but you can see the type of person that you want to be, in terms of the career you're in and someone who's still absorbing knowledge and learning how to best serve clients and keep on being challenged and becoming more of an expert in the field and being able to give back in that way.

Karen: Yeah, definitely.

Isabella: That's great, thank you so much for spending time with us today and talking to us about your experience. I know we have to wrap up soon for time's sake but just one last thing. I know you talked about your time management for students, before entering the legal field, is there anything else that you would love to [tell us], or any other tips or any other advice you'd love to give us before we finish in regards to maybe our time in school or our time transitioning into the workforce?

Karen: Every time someone asks me this, I would tell them to read the client briefings published by law firms on their website. I was not aware of this before I did the vacation scheme with Clifford Chance. During my vacation scheme I got to draft one client briefing and I realised it was such great material for law students because for one, they are prepared for clients, so it's not highly technical. They're mostly in layman language and law school students can understand them. Secondly, the client briefings are the updated information about law firms, what they are working on, what they care for and what changes in the market they are watching for. So it's very useful, for example, when you are interviewed by some law firms and they ask you about marketing news and business news that you're watching. Some of us prepared by reading Bloomberg or Wall Street journals. I think that's one great source of news and knowledge to know about the information about the market, but at the same time they can be a bit general, and it takes you a long time to grasp what's going on. But by reading the client briefings, I think it's very tailored to the legal industry. So I think for students who are listening to this and who are going to be applying to jobs in the in this year or next year, start to read some client briefings published by the law firms that you're interested in and see what kind of work they are working on, and what kind of expertise they have. That can be the most efficient and helpful resource to help you prepare for your vacation scheme or clerkships interviews in the future.

Isabella: Thank you so much, that's really helpful advice. Well, it's been really great to talk with you today and just really invaluable to receive your insights on working internationally and with Clifford Chance for all of us interested in international law, so thank you again for your time Karen.

Karen: Thank you guys, it's really lovely to talk to you.

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Isabella: Thank you for listening to our first episode of the 'Think Global' series. To learn more about what we've discussed today, please see our Facebook page for further links.