

2026 China-ASEAN Commercial Law Forum

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**Speech delivered by Dr James Ding, Law Officer (International Law),
Department of Justice, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region**

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

1. Good afternoon! It is my pleasure to share with you on the “New Pathways for Hong Kong-ASEAN Legal and Business Cooperation”. Hong Kong and ASEAN have a strong and long-standing relationship. In fact, ASEAN has been Hong Kong’s second-largest merchandise trading partner for the past 16 years. Besides, our bilateral trade in goods last year reached US\$214 billion. Since the signing of the Free Trade Agreement and the Investment Agreement between Hong Kong and ASEAN a decade ago, Hong Kong’s investment in ASEAN has risen by 54 %. Today, I will focus on how Hong Kong’s legal and dispute resolution services could contribute to the cross-border trade and investment between Hong Kong and ASEAN.

2. Let me first introduce Hong Kong's unique advantages under the "One Country, Two Systems" principle. Hong Kong, as the only common law jurisdiction of China and also the only common law jurisdiction using both Chinese and English as the official languages, ranked second globally in "2026 World Competitiveness Report" of the International Institute for Management Development. Hong Kong has a simple tax system, and enjoys free flow of capital, information and talents, together with robust intellectual property protection. These advantages make Hong Kong an ideal business partner for ASEAN, as well as a perfect springboard for mainland enterprises expanding overseas and ASEAN businesses seeking to enter into the Chinese Mainland. Last year, about 830 ASEAN companies operate in Hong Kong, capitalising on Hong Kong's distinctive feature of "enjoying the strong support of the motherland, and being closely connected to the world".

3. In addition, Hong Kong has a strong pool of legal talents who are proficient in international law, common law, civil and commercial law as well as dispute resolution. Currently, Hong Kong law firms have over 260 overseas offices across the globe and around 80 representative offices in the Chinese Mainland. There are also over 40 registered associations of

Hong Kong and foreign law firms, over 90 foreign law firms and around 1800 foreign registered lawyers in Hong Kong. Besides, many of the lawyers in Hong Kong qualified in multiple jurisdictions, offering end-to-end professional support—from setting up a business, due diligence, deal-making to dispute resolution, restructuring and insolvency, providing a full spectrum of sophisticated professional services for the whole lifecycle of a business trading and investing abroad.

4. Apart from providing comprehensive legal services, Hong Kong is also proud to provide a full spectrum of top-quality dispute resolution services, ranging from litigation, arbitration and mediation. Hong Kong's judiciary is renowned for its quality, independence and respect for the rule of law. Hong Kong's ranking in the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index 2025 ranked sixth in East Asia and the Pacific and 24th out of 143 countries and jurisdictions globally. Hong Kong also ranked among the top 10 globally in respect of “Absence of Corruption” and “Order & Security”. Recently, our judiciary has announced the plan to establish the Hong Kong International Commercial Court. Hong Kong courts are also highly supportive of arbitration, respecting parties' choice of arbitration and the arbitration procedures, maintaining a pro-enforcement approach for

arbitral awards. Therefore, it is not surprising that Hong Kong has been among the top five preferred seats for arbitration globally since 2015 and ranked the most preferred seat in Asia-Pacific last year by the survey of the Queen Mary University of London. At the same time, Hong Kong is also establishing itself as the “Global Capital of Mediation”. We have launched a number of initiatives to encourage wider use of mediation, including adopting a general policy of incorporating a mediation clause in all government contracts. Last year, the International Organization for Mediation established its headquarter in Hong Kong, which is be the first international intergovernmental organisation devoted to the use of mediation in resolving disputes between States, disputes between State and a foreign investor as well as international commercial disputes between private entities.

5. Ladies and gentlemen, looking ahead, legal and business cooperation between Hong Kong and ASEAN would certainly go beyond legal and dispute resolution services. In particular, we should also enhance our cooperation in capacity building and professional exchanges. In this regard, the Hong Kong International Legal Talents Training Academy launched by the Department of Justice in 2024 provides a useful platform

for capacity building and professional exchange. Since its launch, the Academy has collaborated with around 30 international, regional and local professional organizations to provide capacity building on a wide range of topics for over 5000 participants worldwide. For instance, in addition to the International Dispute Resolution Symposium here in Nanning, which some of you participated this morning, the Academy also organised a training programme on cross-border financial crimes and mutual legal assistance, in collaboration with the National Anti-Corruption Commission of Thailand at Bangkok a few months ago. The Academy will continue collaboration with different jurisdictions in ASEAN and beyond, and we would welcome your suggestion for possible collaboration in your jurisdiction.

6. Lastly, may I take this opportunity to invite you to participate in Hong Kong Legal Week 2026 to be held on the 2nd to 6th of November in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Legal Week 2026 will host a number of international conferences including the centenary celebration of the UNIDORIT, the celebration of 60th anniversary of the UNCITRAL, Legal Forum on Interconnectivity and Development, the Greater Bay Area Lawyers Forum, and the Hong Kong LawTech Fest. You may simply

register on our website and join us in person or online so that we can continue our exchanges and further explore pathways for cooperation.

7. On this note, I wish you all a very fruitful and constructive discussion this afternoon. Thank you.