

# AN OVERVIEW OF MAJOR LAW FIRM MOVEMENTS IN CHINA (2024)



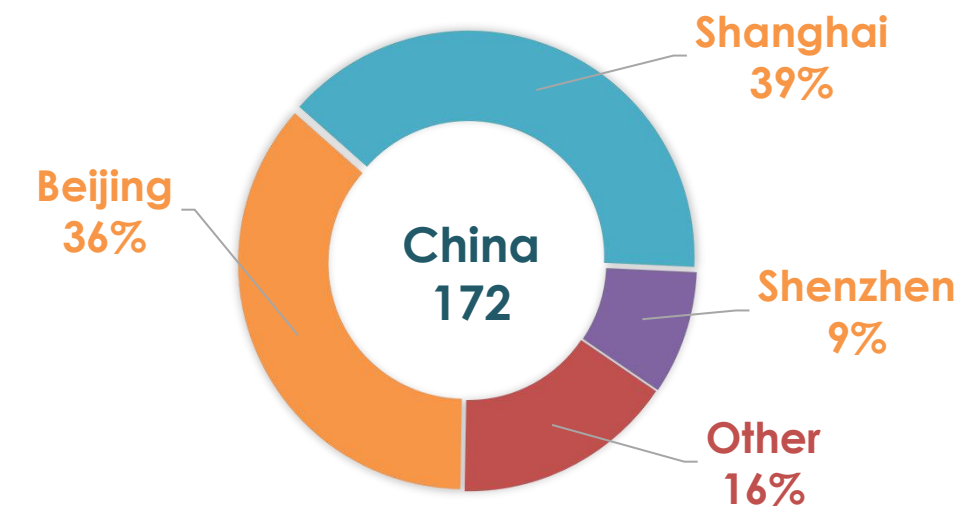
SSQ has collected and analysed major movement data on various types of law firms in China in 2024, including their key lateral moves, new office openings/closures and new firm mergers/alliances.

## LATERAL MOVES

### *Hiring Number and Location*

SSQ recorded 172 lateral partner moves in 2024, broken down by city location as follows:

Total number of Partner moves in 2024	Beijing	Shanghai	Shenzhen	Other
172	62	67	15	28



Beijing and Shanghai remained the most active lateral hire markets in China – collectively, they accounted for three quarters of the whole country, with each representing 36% and 39%, respectively.

In comparison with 2022 and 2023, which recorded a respective total of 97 and 171 partner moves across the country, lateral hire activity in 2024 continued to be busier. Much of this trend is probably due to the extreme uncertainty lingering in the market which encourages senior legal practitioners to balance their developing opportunities against different career options.



## LATERAL MOVES

### Three Firm Types

Among the 172 partner moves, only 10 were hired into major foreign law firms (9), 5 into China-foreign alliance law firms (3), while the remaining 157 partners moved into major Chinese law firms (37). The 37 hiring Chinese law firms include 'Red Circle' firms, around 15 large national firms, and a dozen well-regarded regional practices and boutiques.

Among these 157 partners moving into Chinese law firms in 2024, 125 of them moved out of peer Chinese law firms, 4 out of foreign law firms, 3 from China-foreign alliance firms and 25 from corporate in-house, government and judicial court positions (In-house). Among the 10 partners moving into foreign law firms in 2024, 7 moved out of peer foreign firms, while the other 3 were 1 from each of a Chinese law firm, China-foreign alliance firm and in-house. The 5 partners joining China-foreign alliance law firms moved from 3 different Chinese law firms, 1 peer alliance firm and 1 foreign law firm.

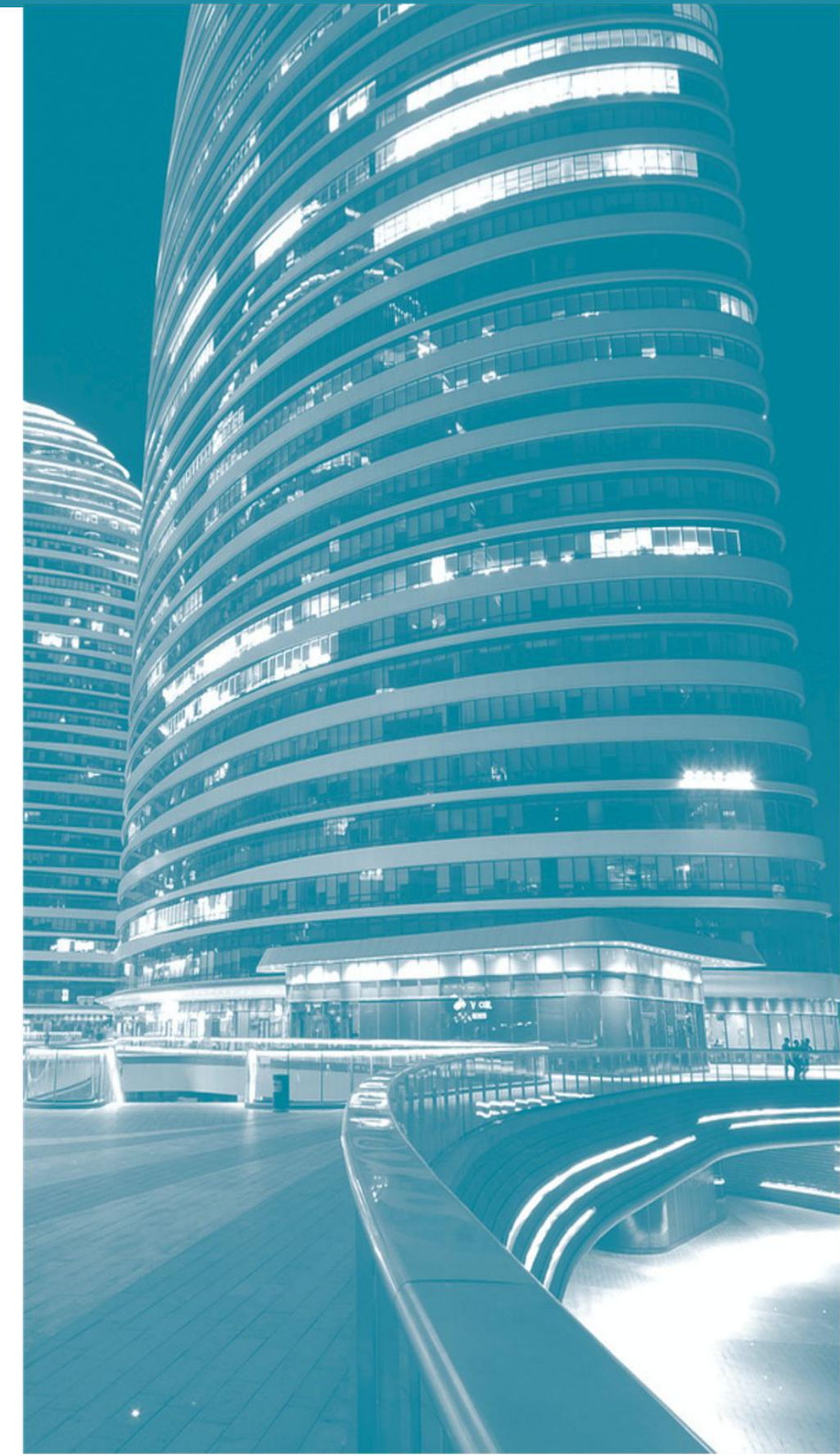
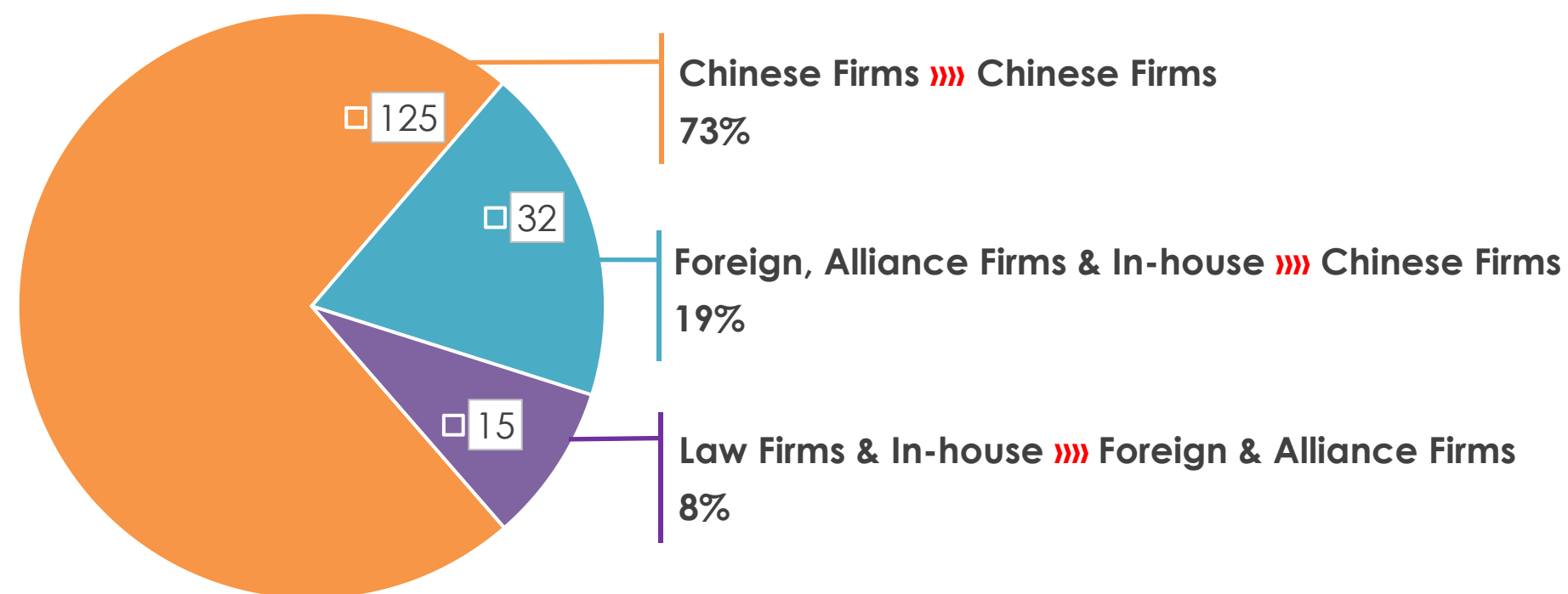
<b>Deprived Firm type</b> (Number of Hiring Firm type)	<b>Chinese law firms</b>	<b>Foreign law firms</b>	<b>China-foreign alliances</b>	<b>In-house</b>	<b>Total number of moves (in)</b>
<b>(37) Chinese law firms</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>(9) Foreign law firms</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>(3) China-foreign alliances</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Total number of moves (out)</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>172</b>

## LATERAL MOVES

### Lateral Directions

PRC law firms continued to dominate (i.e., over 90%) the China lateral hire market in 2024 – acquiring talents from all types of sources including their peer Chinese law firms (73%) and foreign-related law firms (i.e., foreign law firms and China-foreign alliance firms) and in-house (19%). In the meantime, they lost less talent to their foreign counterparts in China (only 4 in 2024).

In contrast, foreign-related law firms in China hired only 15 laterals in 2024 which accounts for just 8% of the whole market, but they lost more (i.e., 17) to PRC firms (7) and foreign-related law firms (10).

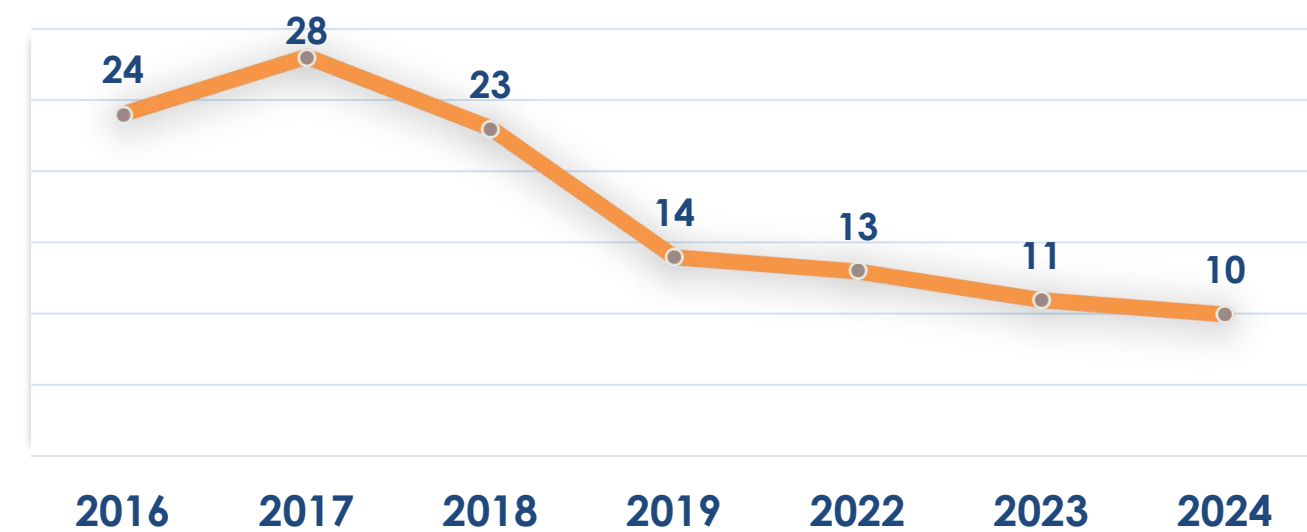


## LATERAL MOVES

### *Foreign Law Firm Hires*

The number of partner hires made by foreign law firms in China continued to decline in 2024, according to the historical SSQ data:

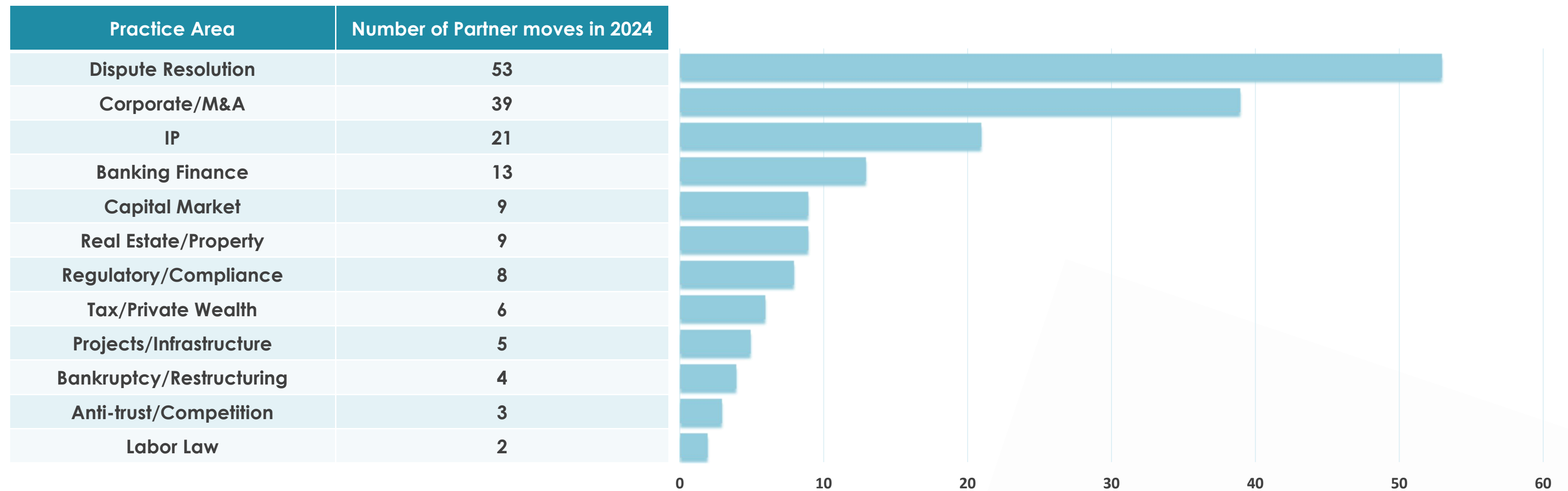
Year	Number of partner hires by foreign law firms in China
2024	10
2023	11
2022	13
2019	14
2018	23
2017	28
2016	24



## LATERAL MOVES

### Practice Areas

A breakdown of the 172 lateral partner hires by main practice areas is as follows:



Following the latest trend, the dispute resolution practice became the number one area again in 2024 that attracted the most lateral hires in China. The lateral movements in this single area accounted for 31% of the whole market (53 of 172). This significant practice focus change from transactions to dispute resolutions, has meaningfully changed the whole market and will no doubt continue driving every firm and individual player to adapt.

## OPENINGS AND CLOSURES

### Chinese Law Firms

SSQ recorded 8 new domestic offices opened by 7 national Chinese law firms. All these new offices are in tier-2 and tier-3 cities in the country. In the meantime, SSQ also recorded 12 Chinese law firms launching 14 new offices outside Chinese mainland, covering major legal jurisdictions in Asia such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand and Laos; the USA and Canada; the UK and Europe.

Below is a list of these Chinese law firms' domestic and overseas expansions in 2024:

Domestic new office launches	
Law Firm Name	City Location
China Commercial Law Firm	Chongqing
DeHeng Law Offices	Quanzhou
Tahota Law Firm	Harbin
Tian Yuan Law Firm	Zhengzhou
Tiantai Law Firm	Urumqi
Wintell & Co	Shenzhen and Wuhan
Zhong Wen Law Firm	Kunming

Overseas new office launches	
Law Firm Name	City Location
AllBright Law Offices	Hong Kong
DOCVIT Law Firm	
W&H Law Firm	
Duan & Duan Law Firm	London
Yingke Law Firm	Tokyo
Zhuo Jian Law Firm	
Wintell & Co	Singapore
Tahota Law Firm	Vientiane
Guida Law Firm	Bangkok
Grandall Legal Group	Madrid and Kuala Lumpur
JunHe	Seattle
Anli Partners	Canada (Prince Edward Island)

## OPENINGS AND CLOSURES

### Foreign Law Firms

In 2024, the most eye-catching happening in the market is probably the series of office closures announced by a dozen foreign law firms in China. In total there were 12 international law firms deciding to shut down 16 Chinese offices in the year, which significantly surpassed any record in history and created a noticeable peak number (on average only 1-3 office closures in the past). A list of these 2024 closures is on the right:

As a silver lining to the cloud, SSQ also recorded a few limited new foreign office launches in China in 2024 – two by leading Singapore law firms and one by a China-foreign alliance firm, as follows:

Office launches	
Law Firm Name	City Location
Allen & Gledhill	Shanghai
Rajah & Tann	Shenzhen
Wei Tu (Stephenson Harwood's China alliance firm)	Shanghai

Office closures	
Law Firm Name	City Location
Dechert	Beijing and Hong Kong
Eversheds Sutherland	Beijing
Milbank	Beijing
Morrison & Foerster	Beijing
Orrick	Shanghai and Taipei
Paul Weiss	Beijing
Perkins Coie	Shanghai and Beijing
Reed Smith	Beijing
Sidley Austin	Shanghai
Skadden Arps	Shanghai
Weil Gotshal	Shanghai and Beijing
Wilmer Cutler	Beijing



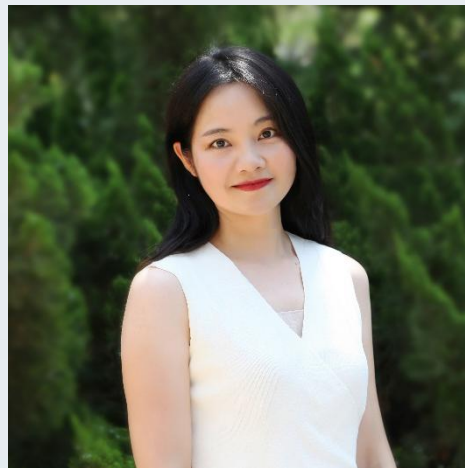
## MERGERS AND ALLIANCES

On the global front, 2024 witnessed one landmark divorce: **Mayer Brown - JSM** and two transatlantic marriages: **Allen & Overy - Shearman & Sterling** and **Herbert Smith Freehills - Kramer Levin**. All three deals have involved some China elements but so far not much. On the local front, SSQ recorded four serious mergers and alliances that were led by major Chinese law firms with the purpose of pursuing international development, details of which are as follows:

Law Firm	Law Firm	M&A Details
<b>Hylands Law Firm</b>	<b>Woo Kwan Lee &amp; Lo</b>	Beijing-headquartered Hylands Law Firm entered into an association with Hong Kong's Woo Kwan Lee & Lo (WKLL) to formally establish a joint firm in the Guangdong Qianhai Free Trade Zone.
<b>Beijing East IP</b>	<b>SIPS</b>	PRC IP firm Beijing East IP Agency (and its affiliated law firm) has merged with the Hong Kong-headquartered SIPS, also known as Simone Intellectual Property Services. The merged firm will brand together as East IP.
<b>Guantao Law Firm</b>	<b>Gallant</b>	The Hong Kong office of PRC law firm Guantao has entered into an association with Hong Kong law firm Gallant with the aim to better service clients when it comes to cross-border legal work, specially in relation to the Greater Bay Area.
<b>Grandall Law Firm</b>	<b>Richard Wee Chambers</b>	Beijing-headquartered Grandall Law Firm and Malaysian law firm Richard Wee Chambers (RWC) have entered into a collaboration agreement, which marks the 36 <sup>th</sup> branch globally for Grandall.

## CONTACT SSQ

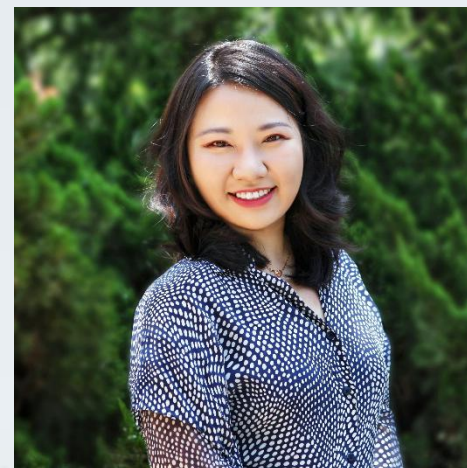
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