

News

Kirkland & Ellis Targets Asia Deals With Skadden, Latham Hong Kong Hires

Kirkland & Ellis LLP, the law firm with the fifth-highest profit-per-partner, said it hired eight new partners from U.S. and U.K. rivals in Hong Kong as part of a plan to more than double its lawyers in Asia to 50.

Nick Norris, Dominic Tsun and Li-Chien Wong will join from Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP; David Zhang, Benjamin Su and John Otoshi from Latham & Watkins LLP and Ashley Young and Douglas Luring from Allen & Overy LLP will also join.

Kirkland, whose clients include private equity firms Bain Capital LLC and Silver Lake Partners, joins Wall Street firms including Sullivan & Cromwell LLP and Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP in expanding in the Chinese city in the last two years. The expansion represents a long-term investment in Asia, according to Jeffrey Hammes, the Chicago-based chairman of Kirkland's global management executive committee.

"The cost of not being there in the future far exceeds any cost of being there right now," Hammes said in an interview from Chicago.

Companies raised \$50 billion through initial shares sales in Hong Kong over the past twelve months. Tsun, who with Wong has advised on more than 30 IPOs in the past five years, said funds need to know if exits through IPOs from their investments are viable as deals become more complex.

Norris, a member of the Hong Kong Panel on Takeovers and Mergers, said the work doesn't stop at the IPO.



Nick Norris



Dominic Tsun



David Zhang

Source: Kirkland & Ellis LLP, via Bloomberg

200 COMPANIES

"There are more than 200 newly listed companies in Hong Kong over the past five years that will be looking to make strategic acquisitions or will be the subject of take-private or PIPE transactions," he said, referring to private investment in public companies in the form of share or bond issuances.

While U.S. firms have had Hong Kong offices since 1972, most New York firms focused on offering advice on U.S. law until 2005, when Skadden hired Norris and Tsun from London firms to offer Hong Kong law advice. Kirkland opened its first Asian office in Hong Kong in 2006 and now has 18 lawyers in the city and Shanghai.

David Patrick Eich, who opened the Hong Kong office, said in a statement that Kirkland intends to be the leading adviser to sponsors of complex deals in Asia.

Zhang, formerly vice chair of Latham's Greater China practice, has advised Chinese companies on capital-raising in the U.S. and merger activities. Young

led Allen & Overy's leveraged acquisition finance practice in Asia.

CHINA FIRE

Kirkland represented Bain Capital LLC in its pending take-private of China Fire & Security Group and Silver Lake Partners' acquisition of Allyes Online Media Holdings last year.

Private equity investment in China totaled \$11.3 billion so far this year, compared with \$22.3 billion in the whole of 2010, according to the Asian Venture Capital Journal.

Profit per equity partner at Kirkland rose 28 percent to \$3.1 million in 2011, according to *Legal Business*, a trade magazine. Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz LLP, Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan LLP, Sullivan and Cromwell and Cravath, Swaine & Moore LLP, were more profitable.

Skadden's profit per partner was \$2.2 million, Latham's \$2 million and Allen & Overy's \$1.7 million, according to the ranking.

By Debra Mao