

The Better Hong Kong Foundation's global efforts to promote Hong Kong's story and strengthen ties with mainland China

The Better Hong Kong Foundation (BHKF) resumes face-to-face global collaborations, achieving great success after pandemic travel restrictions were lifted.

For the past 28 years, the BHKF has been at the forefront of connecting and establishing relationships with various counterparts worldwide. Established in 1995 by a group of influential local business and community leaders, just before the Handover of Hong Kong to China, the BHKF has made it its mission to explain and showcase the concept of "One Country, Two Systems". They aim to effectively share Hong Kong's story alongside the larger China narrative while building bridges between Hong Kong, mainland China, and the global community. By highlighting the competitive advantages of the "One Country, Two Systems" framework and promoting global cooperation with mainland China, the BHKF has played a pivotal role in fostering international relations.

Forging relationships through international collaborations

Over the past decade, the BHKF has organised annual delegations to the United States and visited countries such as Israel, Russia, and Turkey. During these visits, members engaged with senior government officials and local business leaders, pursuing common interests and exploring potential collaborations.

Nurturing Middle East relations with BHKF's first visit to Saudi Arabia

Following nearly three years of restricted travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the BHKF resumed in-person meetings and overseas visits. They started their endeavours in May with a self-initiated and inaugural mission to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). With a delegation of over 20 influential business leaders, the BHKF acted as a non-official channel, connecting Hong Kong, mainland China, and the global community.

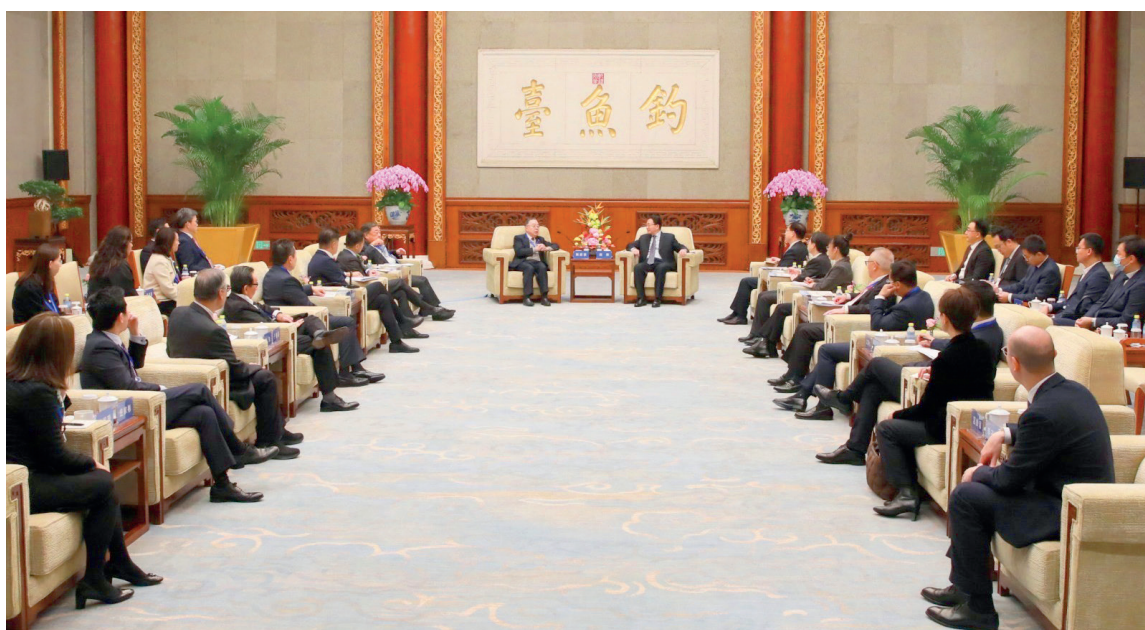
The choice of KSA as the first destination was strategic. With its position as the largest economy at the crossroads of three continents in the Middle East, the KSA shares common interests with Hong Kong, a global gateway anchored in China. During their visit to Riyadh and Jeddah, the BHKF deepened their understanding of the KSA's history, culture, and economic dynamics. The delegation explored potential opportunities related to the ambitious Vision 2030 initiative, spearheaded by HRH Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. They established vital business connections and explored opportunities in sectors such as finance, green energy, technology, smart cities, and industrialisation.

The fruitful communication resulted in four BHKF members being invited to speak at the October Future Investment Initiative (FII) 7th Edition conference in Riyadh, focusing on emerging economies, resources, and sustainability. This was followed by the FII's first Asia Summit in Hong Kong in December, further strengthening ties between Hong Kong and the KSA. The BHKF received an invitation for four delegates to speak at the FII Priority Hong Kong summit.

The burgeoning relationship between the BHKF and KSA was further showcased at a dinner hosted in September by His Excellency Fahd bin Abdulmohsan Al-Rasheed, Advisor of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, during his visit to Hong Kong.



The Better Hong Kong Foundation's delegation met with HE Khalid Al-Falih (seated, middle), Minister of Investment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in May.



Deputy Director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, Mr Zhou Ji (centre, right), received the Better Hong Kong Foundation's delegation in Beijing in November.

Strengthening the Europe connection

Parallel to their Middle East endeavours, the BHKF focused on strengthening European connections. As the EU increased its attention on diplomatic sovereignty, the business sector, in particular, remained open and pragmatic in its approach to international relations and receptive to Hong Kong. This provided fertile ground for the BHKF to continue their outreach.

In May, a BHKF delegation visited Paris, France, for three days to re-engage with the global business community and gain insights into European perspectives on China-EU relations and China's role in the post-pandemic era. The delegation shared their views on fostering a constructive and peaceful global order against a rapidly evolving international order shaped by the pandemic, the Russian-Ukraine conflict, and tensions between China and the US. They also explored collaboration opportunities in various



After the Better Hong Kong Foundation's visit to Saudi Arabia in May, Mr Dario Pong (2nd right) was invited to speak at the FII Priority Hong Kong in December.

sectors, such as financial institutions, chambers of commerce, cultural organisations, and academia.

Contributing to global solutions in Germany

The BHKF delegation's participation in the annual Global Solutions Summit (GSS) in Berlin, Germany, in May marked a significant milestone for Hong Kong. Operating under the unique "One Country, Two Systems" framework, Hong Kong could contribute and participate in global events. The GSS brought together experts from think tanks, research organisations, governance bodies, the private sector, and civil society to discuss international issues and policies.

While attending the GSS, the BHKF's Executive Committee Chairman, Mr Ronnie Chan, along with two invited speakers, Dr Jun Ma and Mr Wang Shi, shared their insights from the Chinese perspective. This contribution not only highlighted Hong Kong's role but also fostered a better understanding of the city's viewpoints on global challenges.

Reciprocating the exchange, Prof Christian Kastrop and Ms Agnes Michalik from the Global Solutions Initiative visited Hong Kong in October, where BHKF members further shared their views on Hong Kong and mainland China developments. The face-to-face engagements were fruitful, resulting in an invitation for the BHKF to join the next GSS again in May 2024.

Meaningful exchanges between Beijing and Hong Kong

Recognising Hong Kong's importance in the national development strategy, the BHKF has actively sought to deepen connections and understanding with mainland China and Hong Kong's role under "One Country Two Systems". Since 2019, the BHKF

has been conducting delegations to Beijing, inviting and hosting officials, think tanks and journalists to tell positive stories about Hong Kong and China.

In November, the BHKF visited Beijing again. Meeting with the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), central government agencies, research think tanks, experts, and scholars, the 18-member delegation gained a deeper understanding of national policies and strategies for Hong Kong's future development. These exchanges allowed the BHKF to further share their positive narratives about Hong Kong and China, highlighting the competitive advantages under the "One Country, Two Systems" framework. These efforts further strengthened the BHKF's role in promoting understanding between Hong Kong and mainland China.

Following the visit, the BHKF members met with the NDRC again in December during their visit to the city. During these meetings, the BHKF members shared and exchanged views on Hong Kong's financial services, technology and innovation, talents and professional services.

Continuous collaborations with Shanghai

Since 2003, Shanghai has been high on the BHKF's agenda, organising the annual Shanghai-Hong Kong Cooperation and Development Forum with the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Shanghai Committee and the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS). The aim was to explore and enhance collaborations between Hong Kong and Shanghai.



Ms Karen Tang, the Better Hong Kong Foundation's Executive Director, chaired a session at the 2023 Shanghai-Hong Kong Cooperation and Development Forum in November.

On November 30, the BHKF participated in the 2023 Shanghai-Hong Kong Cooperation and Development Forum to further deepen cooperation. Focusing on "China's Green Finance Standard: Roles and Functions of Shanghai and Hong Kong", the forum provided a platform for in-depth discussions on strategic coordination and development paths in green finance. The BHKF had the honour of inviting the Financial Secretary of the HKSAR Government, Mr Paul Chan, to deliver a keynote speech online.

With over 100 participants from Shanghai, Hong Kong, Beijing, and other cities, the conference explored the establishment of Chinese standards for green finance and avenues for future collaboration in this sector.

The recent efforts of the Better Hong Kong Foundation demonstrate their unwavering commitment to promoting Hong Kong's success and proving to the world that "One Country, Two Systems" is a thriving framework, as well as strengthening ties with China and the international community. Amidst the challenging and fast-changing global environment marked by complex geopolitics, the BHKF continues to forge connections and build bridges worldwide. Their aim is to tell positive stories about Hong Kong and China, dispel misunderstandings, and overcome misconceptions.



The Better Hong Kong Foundation's delegate, Mr Dario Pong (right), shared his views on Hong Kong's social, economic, and political developments with business community leaders in Paris in May.



Mr Ronnie Chan, the Better Hong Kong Foundation's Executive Committee Chairman, shared his views on global cooperation at the Global Solutions Summit in Berlin in May.