



Business

Singapore's OCBC Bank eyes expansion in China, Southeast Asia to tap growing demand for wealth management

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* The group will invest more in China and Asean countries to capture the growing opportunities in the post-Covid era

* China-Asean bilateral trade defied the pandemic, rising from US\$641.5 billion in 2019 to US\$975.3 billion in 2022

Singaporean banking giant OCBC Group plans to expand in China and Southeast Asia in a bid to capture the strengthening trade relationships and growing [demand for wealth management](#) in the area, its boss said on Monday.

The bank aims to generate an additional S\$3 billion (US\$2.22 billion) in revenue by 2025 on top of its existing income. To achieve this, it will invest more than S\$50 million over the next three years in its digital banking and other capabilities in mainland China, on top of S\$140 million it has spent there over the last three years, said Helen Wong, group CEO of OCBC.

Wong said the bank is "in the right markets at the right time" with its strong presence in China and Southeast Asia, and hence is well placed to capture the [growing business opportunities](#) there.

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"The effects of China's reopening post-pandemic, the rise of Asean [the Association of Southeast Asian Nations] ... and other geopolitical factors have amplified this potential," Wong said in a media briefing in Hong Kong on Monday.

"We will use a twin-hub approach, using Hong Kong and Singapore to develop our businesses in China and key Asean markets including Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam."

Bilateral trade between China and Asean countries has climbed in the last few years, defying the pandemic. It rose from US\$641.5 billion in 2019 to US\$975.3 billion in 2022, Hou Yanqi, the Chinese Ambassador to Asean, said in February.

"Our two sides have been each other's largest trading partner for many years," Hou said.

As part of its expansion plan, the bank on Monday unified its brands in key markets by shedding its [Wing Hang Bank](#) title. OCBC Wing Hang Bank will now be called OCBC Bank (Hong Kong) in the city, while Banco OCBC Weng Hang is now OCBC (Macau). Its mainland unit, OCBC Wing Hang Bank (China), will also be renamed OCBC Bank in the fourth quarter.

OCBC acquired Wing Hang Bank in 2014 as a way of fast-tracking its entry into the markets of Hong

Kong, Macau and mainland China.

It is one of the top foreign players by total assets, at S\$93 billion, with 4,500 staff and 60 branches in 17 cities in mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. It also has a 20 per cent stake in Bank of Ningbo.

It plans to hire 30 per cent more commercial bankers in the coming year, taking the number to about 400, and add 100 relationship managers to its private banking business.

OCBC wants to attract US\$21 billion of fresh funds from clients for it to manage in the next three years, bringing its total assets under management to US\$145 billion by the end of 2025, said Jason Moo, CEO of its private bank unit, Bank of Singapore.

The bank's assets under management tripled between 2013 and 2022, driven mainly by mainland China, Moo added.

Wong said the bank can help mainland Chinese firms expand in Asean markets and vice versa.

"While the international geopolitical environment may have tension, it is time for countries to get closer to their neighbours," she said. "The relationship between China and Asean is going to get closer, and they are going to be the fastest growing regions worldwide."

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