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Littler Moves Into Shanghai, Bangalore

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Petra Pasternak, The Recorder

Employment and labor boutique Littler Mendelson is dipping a toe into the warming Asia market. Its three-person Shanghai office opened in March, and an office in Bangalore, India, is expected to accept business as early as October.

Chairwoman Wendy Tice-Wallner said the office initially will be exclusively dedicated to providing immediate help -- without the cross-Pacific time difference -- with global migration matters and assisting multinational corporations in moving executives into China and, once there, in navigating through matters such as medical exams and police department registration.

"There is no labor and employment law U.S. boutique in China," Tice-Wallner said. "As our client base, some 7,000 companies, is expanding globally, the first step is to be able to move your human capital around the globe. We see it as our point of entry."

Littler is making what Tice-Wallner called a "modest" initial investment in Shanghai, expecting the office to grow with demand. The office is staffed with Chinese nationals, headed by attorney Becky Xia, who has experience with the Chinese government. Littler has not signed a long-term lease, Tice-Wallner said, working instead out of shared office space.

"We think that once clients understand the value of having resources on the ground in China, who are providing service in real time, we will see an expansion in business," she said.

Tice-Wallner said that eventually the office will also assist Chinese nationals through the U.S. immigration process.

The focus of the India office will be U.S.-bound immigration, according to Bonnie Gibson, managing director of cross-border employment at Littler Global, a Littler Mendelson affiliate that's setting up the office.

To date, Littler has handled immigration cases in Asia through local legal professionals. Firm representatives expect the process to significantly speed up with their own people in China.

Newport Beach, Calif., consultant Peter Zeughauser, who advises firms on China strategies, said Littler's "build it and wait for them to come" model is unusual today. "Most foreign expansions are driven by strong demand."

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