



Under the reform and opening-up policy, Shenzhen in South China's Guangdong province has been transformed from a fishing village into one of the country's first-tier metropolises. LIU DAWEI / XINHUA



The signing ceremony for China's first international land lease is held in Shanghai on Aug 8, 1988.

>> FROM PAGE 14

to type. We called Shanghai officials to inform them of the contents and amended the documents according to their suggestions," he said.

"It was energy-consuming. But I told the Shanghai officials that we were writing more than bidding documents. We were writing history."

It took the group 20 days to finish the tendering document. The last working day saw just two paragraphs left to be translated into English. Leung invited the team to go on a Spring Festival shopping spree. He was surprised when the three Shanghai officials declined.

"They said they would not leave until the work was finished," he said. "And in the end they didn't do any shopping."

"It struck me the most. Our country became strong for a reason. People, like the team I worked with, are committed to the country and to working diligently toward progress. That is part of the reason."

On March 22, 1988, Shanghai settled the nation's first international tenders for a land lease. A 1.29-hectare plot in the city's Hongqiao district was leased to a Japanese real estate developer, marking the opening of China's land-lease market to the international community.

Leung never runs short of anecdotes about Hong Kong's involvement. In his eyes, the city's role changed as reform and opening-up gradually moved forward.

Hong Kong started by providing jobs, then channeling capital and technology. Today, it has become the place where mainland and foreign enterprises gather to work out deals.

"At the beginning, Hong Kong brought job opportunities to the vast mainland labor force," Leung said, referring to the time from 1979 to the mid-1980s when the policy was in its early stage.

During that time, the "three-plus-one" trading mix was prevalent in Guangdong province. It involved



Laborers make pencils at the A.W. Faber-Castell stationery factory in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, on Nov 26, 2013.

assembly work, making products based on provided samples, processing supplied materials, and compensation trade.

Guangdong was one of the first two provinces approved by the central government for direct foreign investment. Fujian in the country's east was the other.

At the same time, Hong Kong's manufacturing industry experienced a boom. The skilled but inexpensive labor force and the proximity to Hong Kong drew manufacturers to Guangdong.

"When I lined up at the Lo Wu border in 1979, I noticed that many people held bags of semifinished products, like tailored clothes that needed further processing," Leung said.

Data from Hong Kong's Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau show that the city's manufacturing

industry began shrinking around 1990. The number of enterprises engaged in manufacturing fell from 49,135 in 1990 to 26,536 in 1997, the year Hong Kong returned to the motherland.

Hong Kong's manufacturers moved their factories to the Chinese mainland. The city shifted its role and became the key source of investment capital.

July 15, 1993, saw Hong Kong's role in reform and opening-up experience another change, with Tsingtao Brewery becoming the first mainland company to list on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

"Hong Kong served as a capital pool, capable of satisfying the brewer's thirst for 900 million yuan (\$132 million)," Leung said. He added that role was soon to change, with mainland enterprises growing stronger

as reform and opening-up evolved in new areas.

"Now, Hong Kong is a two-way springboard, assisting mainland enterprises to go global and helping foreign companies seek business in the mainland," Leung said.

Hong Kong Monetary Authority data show that over the past four decades, Hong Kong has accounted for 50 to 60 percent of all overseas direct investment flows to the Chinese mainland.

The data also show that the mainland's outward direct investment reached \$196 billion in 2016, with around 60 percent being invested in Hong Kong or channeled to other regions via the city.

Leung, now vice-chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference — the country's top politi-

cal advisory body — still actively responds to China's call for a deepening of reform and opening-up.

Besides organizing events in Hong Kong reviewing the achievements gained through the past 40 years under the policy, Leung places equal weight on the Belt and Road Initiative. He sees the Belt and Road as the natural extension of the reform and opening-up policy, opening a new era.

"The Belt and Road Initiative emphasizes cooperation," he said. "We go out. We welcome friends from abroad to come in. That requires an open market that can be achieved through progressive reform."

Under the program initiated by former leader Deng four decades ago, mainland cities like Shenzhen and Shanghai have seen robust development. Shenzhen's GDP exceeded Hong Kong's last year, while Shanghai is on course to become a global financial center by 2020.

"Hong Kong is facing challenges. The challenges lie in whether it can make timely adjustments to meet the country's development needs," Leung said. "The special administrative region should be well-informed about what the country needs from it and pick up roles that best suit the country's development."

Leung added that assisting the internationalization of the yuan and contributing to healthy financial development are two possible options for Hong Kong.

"But I am upbeat about Hong Kong's future performance in the country's reform and opening-up," he said. "After all, it managed to reap fruits during its transformation in the past 40 years."

Throughout his participation in China's journey to become more open and inclusive, Leung has been a keen follower and an earnest promoter. He remains on that path, making Hong Kong a contributor to, and a beneficiary of, reform and opening-up — a mission he will carry on steadily and firmly.