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MARKET REVIEW

Global equities advanced in September buoyed by the combined impulse of a 50-basis point rate cut and a slew of stimulus measures from the Chinese government. The Fed's half-point cut was the largest downward policy rate adjustment in 4.5 years and market optimism was supported by growing expectation of an easier monetary policy environment as the Fed and other global central banks pursue lower rates to support growth and employment in the months to come. Investor sentiment shrugged off intensifying geopolitical tensions in the Middle East driven by direct but targeted strikes between Israel and Iran as oil prices were largely stable over the month.

Asian economies outperformed broader emerging markets over the month with China and Hong Kong being the better-performing markets on a relative basis, while Korea and Japan lagged. Over the course of the month, Chinese and Hong Kong equities rallied as market sentiment was boosted by a comprehensive range of monetary and fiscal support aimed at reviving the world's second-largest economy. On the flip side, Korean markets ended the month lower on the back of sluggish domestic demand and industrial output. Japanese equities also underperformed as investors priced in a more hawkish environment with the surprise election of Prime Minister Ishiba. The BOJ kept rates unchanged as widely expected but flagged steady growth in inflation and upgraded consumer outlook which was taken as hawkish by the market.

The MSCI AC Asia ex Japan Net returned 8.4% over the month. Within the index, nine out of 11 sectors rose for the period. Consumer discretionary and communication services were the top performing sectors, while energy and information technology were the bottom performing sectors for the period.

FUND PERFORMANCE AND ATTRIBUTION

- The fund underperformed the index over the month, however delivered overall positive returns.
- Security selection was the primary driver of relative underperformance. Weak selection in consumer discretionary, information technology and financials was modestly offset by selection in communication services and real estate. Sector allocation, a result of our bottom-up stock selection process, contributed to returns. Allocation effect was driven by our overweight to consumer discretionary and real estate and lack of exposure to energy, but modestly offset by our underweight to communication services and consumer staples and lack of exposure to materials. On a market basis, strong stock selection in China, India and Indonesia was partially offset by selection in South Korea.
- At the issuer level, our top two relative contributors were overweights to KE Holdings and China Pacific Insurance, while our top two relative detractors were an overweight to Samsung Electronics and not owning Alibaba.
- Shares of KE Holdings rose in September. The People's Bank of China is rolling out policies to stabilize the real estate market such as lowering existing mortgage rates by no lower than 30 bps, lowering the minimum down payment ratio to no less than 15%, and greater funding for financial institutions to offer loans for affordable housing. Shares of Samsung Electronics fell during the period to their lowest levels since May 2023 amid analyst downgrades on weaker expectations for upcoming Q3 results. The major appliance and consumer electronics company announced cutting up to 30% of its overseas staff as part of a global headcount reduction plan.

FUND POSITIONING AND OUTLOOK

From an outlook perspective, we remain constructive on the outlook for Asian equities. In China, we believe the recently-announced monetary and fiscal support packages signify a – long awaited by us – recognition at the highest levels within the Chinese government of the serious consequences of slowing economic growth and depressed investor confidence. We are assessing implications and have modestly added to our existing holdings in China. We continue to observe a range of attractive bottom-up opportunities in India, supported by the country's more favorable economic backdrop, younger demographics and rising importance in the context of the global supply chain. In the long run, we continue to be focused on finding attractive high-quality companies, which are able to sustain higher returns on capital at undemanding valuations, and we are optimistic on the outlook for portfolio alpha. We believe that over time, high-quality businesses trading at reasonable valuations have good potential to outperform the broader market on the strength of their stock-specific fundamentals.

At the end of the period, our largest overweights were real estate and industrials. We were most underweight to materials, health care and energy, all of which we had no exposure to. From a market perspective, our largest overweights were India and Indonesia. We were most underweight to China and Taiwan.

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do not arise, or if the team does not implement its investment strategies successfully; then a fund may underperform or experience losses.
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