Offshore Renminbi – A test of resilience

- **RGI rebounded in March after brief dip in February; seems well positioned to face renewed trade headwinds**
- **We continue to see improvement in underlying Renminbi trade settlement and northbound investment**
- **China shows strong commitment to further opening up the economy, boding well for CNH usage growth**

Click for Infographic

Good momentum heading into potentially choppier Q2

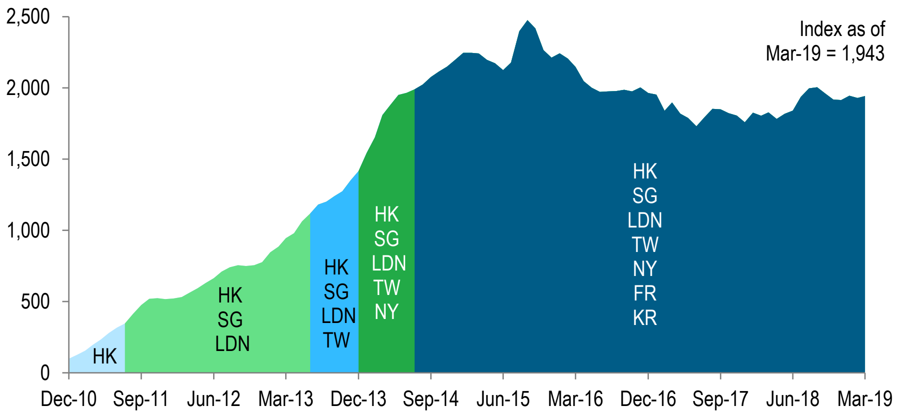
Kelvin Lau
+852 3983 8565
Kelvin.KH.Lau@sc.com
Senior Economist, Greater China
Standard Chartered Bank (HK) Limited

Chidu Narayanan
+65 6596 7004
Chidambarathanu.Narayanan@sc.com
Economist, Asia
Standard Chartered Bank, Singapore Branch

The *Standard Chartered Renminbi Globalisation Index* (RGI) – our proprietary measure of international Renminbi usage – rose to 1,943 in March from a revised 1,929 in January (Figure 1). The 0.7% m/m rebound recovered almost all lost ground in February, when Renminbi usage slowed around the Lunar New Year holidays. The rebound allowed RGI to end Q1-2019 on a higher note than end-2018 (1,914). As expected, RGI was driven higher mainly by cross-border payments in March, mirroring the strong pick-up in external trade (exports grew by 14.2%). Foreign holdings of onshore assets also increased materially, with equity holdings in particular growing 46% q/q in Q1, on index inclusion and a stabilising economy. Recent official comments, including Xi Jinping's keynote speech at the Belt and Road Forum, show continued commitment to further open up China's markets, encourage fair competition and protect foreign interests.

US-China trade friction has flared up again recently. Offshore Renminbi (CNH) activity is not immune to renewed risk aversion and higher CNY volatility, which was reflected in the near-5% drop in RGI in Q4-2018. However, Renminbi internationalisation quickly resumed its recovery as external headwinds subsided and the Chinese yuan (CNY) stabilised entering 2019. Cross-border payments survived a challenging Q4 without any major setback. Furthermore, the March RGI reading is more than 20% below the index's September 2015 peak, which implies much less room for another instance of major contraction in CNH activity.

Figure 1: The RGI rose 1.5% in Q1-2019 after correcting 4.5% in Q4-2018



Note: RGI (Bloomberg: SCGRRGI <Index>) is a comprehensive index that tracks CNH internationalisation across markets and geographies; our interactive data visualisation tool enables exploration of the evolution of the sub-components: *https://research.sc.com/research/api/application/static/chart-packs/RGI*; Source: Standard Chartered Research

What drove RGI higher in Q1

Renminbi trade settlement continued to perform well

Renminbi trade settlement recovered for a third straight quarter in Q1

Cross-border payments (+1.10ppt) and foreign holdings of onshore assets (+0.44ppt) were key contributors to the 0.73% m/m increase in headline RGI in March (Figure 2). The increase in cross-border payments was not a surprise, as the February base was distorted by the slowdown in business activity around the Lunar New Year holidays. Encouragingly, Renminbi trade settlement – a key part of cross-border payments – continued to perform well, all things considered, as per the official data. Renminbi trade settlement eased marginally to 13.4% of all China goods trade in March, but this easing was from a 27-month high of 14.7% in February. The 13.7% average for Q1-2019, up from 12.0% and 12.4% in Q3- and Q4-2018, respectively, remains consistent with a healthy recovery story.

Northbound equity flows leading the latest charge

The 0.44ppt boost to headline RGI growth from the 'foreign holdings of onshore assets' component was the most in eight months and confirmation of an underlying improvement trend after a brief pause in Q4-2018. Further, the breakdown of this RGI component had a positive message – foreign holdings of onshore equities rose by a substantial CNY 532bn (+46%) in Q1. This eclipsed foreign holdings related to bonds (up USD 107bn, or +6%), which were the main driver of this RGI component for the bulk of 2018 (Figure 3). Receding China slowdown concerns and rising index inclusion prospects helped boost such northbound flows, which look to have carried over into the April base, based on the latest data from the Stock Connect schemes and China Central Depository and Clearing (CCDC). Specifically, inclusion of China bonds in the Bloomberg-Barclays Global Aggregate Index on 1 April should lead to monthly passive inflows of c.USD 6bn over the next 20 months.

Strong commitment to continue opening up

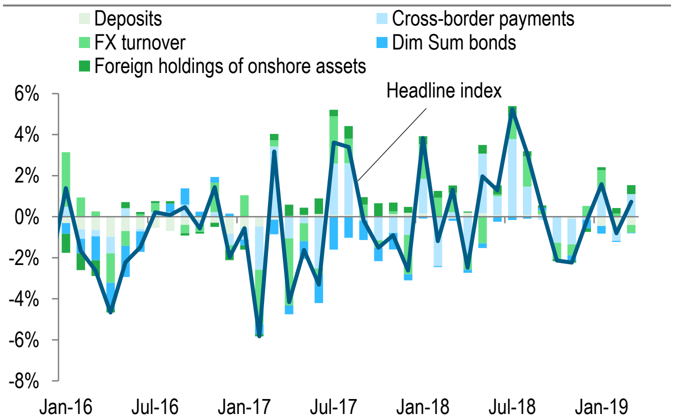
China has consistently reiterated its commitment to opening up the economy further

President Xi Jinping recently reiterated China's commitment to further opening up its economy in his keynote speech at the Belt and Road Forum on 26 April. Xi outlined the following 'next steps' to reform and to move along US-China trade negotiations (at least until the recent impasse):

1. **Further expand market access** – This includes embracing fair competition, materially shortening the 'negative list', and promoting the holistic opening of modern services, manufacturing and agricultural sectors. The plan includes

Figure 2: Wrapping up a good Q1-2019

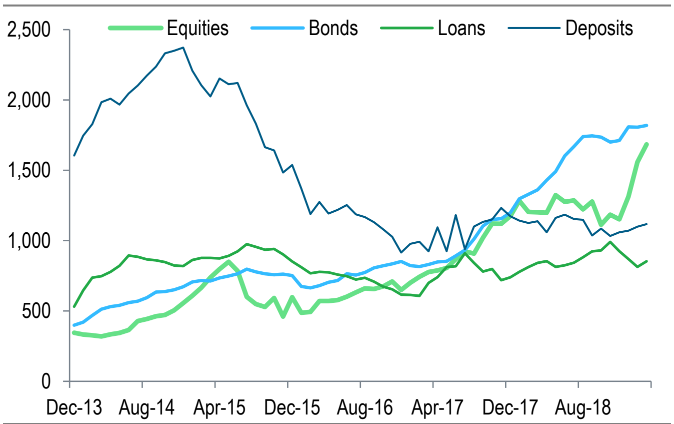
Contributions of RGI components to % m/m change



Source: Standard Chartered Research

Figure 3: Strong equity inflows in Q1-2019

Foreign holdings of onshore assets, CNY bn



Source: CEIC, Standard Chartered Research establishing more free trade experimentation zones and accelerating the exploration of the building of free trade ports. Xi also mentioned lowering the threshold for foreign ownership, which was backed up by the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission's announcement on upcoming new measures to further open the banking and insurance sectors.

2. **Increase intellectual property protection** – In another sign that China is pushing for a trade deal, Xi said there would be emphasis on improving the legal system for intellectual property protection, strengthening law enforcement, eliminating forced technology transfer and improving the protection of business secrets.

3. **Increase imports of goods and services** – China further plans to reduce import tariffs and eliminate various non-tariff barriers. There was also an explicit commitment to not purposefully pursue a trade surplus. China would also be willing to import more foreign competitive high-quality agricultural goods, manufactured goods, and services in order to promote balanced global trade.

4. **Strengthen international policy coordination** – Xi mentioned no competitive currency devaluation, saying that China would continue to improve the exchange rate formation mechanism and maintain the stability of the exchange rate at a reasonable and balanced level. Such reassurance is key in anchoring CNY expectations, especially with still-weak currency fundamentals (for example, no persistent trade surplus) and lingering trade negotiation headwinds, in our view.

5. **Take policy implementation seriously** – Xi noted that China places a high value on fulfilling multilateral and bilateral economic and trade agreements, and on establishing a binding international agreement enforcement mechanism.

China places more emphasis on quality and sustainability of Belt and Road projects

These comments stand against the larger backdrop of China demonstrating its commitment to expand the reach and scale of the Belt and Road initiative (BRI), stressing the pursuit of innovation, quality, multilateralism, transparency, social and environmental sustainability, and zero tolerance for corruption. There was also a strong call for the use of special loans, the Silk Road Fund and financing from multilateral agencies to support BRI projects – railways, roads and pipelines – to ease infrastructure bottlenecks that have constrained development in some countries.

We continue to see massive funding needs arising from such infrastructure projects (and other trade or investment projects), which should further boost the international use of the Renminbi over time. Beijing also addressed debt sustainability concerns through the release of non-mandatory guidelines for BRI participants, called the 'Debt Sustainability Framework for Participating Countries of the BRI'.

Disclosures appendix

Analyst Certification Disclosure: The research analyst or analysts responsible for the content of this research report certify that: (1) the views expressed and attributed to the research analyst or analysts in the research report accurately reflect their personal opinion(s) about the subject securities and issuers and/or other subject matter as appropriate; and, (2) no part of his or her compensation was, is or will be directly or indirectly related to the specific recommendations or views contained in this research report. On a general basis, the efficacy of recommendations is a factor in the performance appraisals of analysts.

Country-Specific Disclosures – This document is not for distribution to any person or to any jurisdiction in which its distribution would be prohibited. If you are receiving this document in any of the countries listed below, please note the following:

United Kingdom and European Economic Area: SCB is authorised in the United Kingdom by the Prudential Regulation Authority and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority. This communication is directed at persons Standard Chartered Bank can categorise as Eligible Counterparties or Professional Clients (such persons being the target market of this communication following Standard Chartered Bank's target market assessment) under the Markets in Financial Instruments Directive II (Directive 2014/65/EU) ("MiFID II"). In particular, this communication is not directed at Retail Clients in the European Economic Area (as defined by MiFID II). Nothing in this document constitutes a personal recommendation or investment advice as defined by MiFID II. **Germany:** In Germany, this document is being distributed by Standard Chartered Bank Germany Branch, which is also regulated by the Bundesanstalt für Finanzdienstleistungsaufsicht (BaFin). **Australia:** The Australian Financial Services Licence for Standard Chartered Bank is Licence No: 246833 with the following Australian Registered Business Number (ARBN: 097571778). Australian investors should note that this communication was prepared for "wholesale clients" only and is not directed at persons who are "retail clients" as those terms are defined in sections 761G and 761GA of the Corporations Act 2001 (Cth). **Bangladesh:** This research has not been produced in Bangladesh. The report has been prepared by the research analyst(s) in an autonomous and independent way, including in relation to SCB. THE SECURITIES MENTIONED IN THIS REPORT HAVE NOT BEEN AND WILL NOT BE REGISTERED IN BANGLADESH AND MAY NOT BE OFFERED OR SOLD IN BANGLADESH WITHOUT PRIOR APPROVAL OF THE REGULATORY AUTHORITIES IN BANGLADESH. Any subsequent action(s) of the Recipient of these research reports in this area should be subject to compliance with all relevant law & regulations of Bangladesh; specially the prevailing foreign exchange control regulations. **Botswana:** This document is being distributed in Botswana by, and is attributable to, Standard Chartered Bank Botswana Limited, which is a financial institution licensed by Bank of Botswana under Section 6 of the Banking Act CAP 46.04 and is listed on the Botswana Stock Exchange. **Brazil:** SCB disclosures pursuant to the Securities Exchange Commission of Brazil ("CVM") Instruction 598/18: This research has not been produced in Brazil. The report has been prepared by the research analyst(s) in an autonomous and independent way, including in relation to SCB. THE SECURITIES MENTIONED IN THIS REPORT HAVE NOT BEEN AND WILL NOT BE REGISTERED PURSUANT TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION OF BRAZIL AND MAY NOT BE OFFERED OR SOLD IN BRAZIL EXCEPT PURSUANT TO AN APPLICABLE EXEMPTION FROM THE REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS AND IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE SECURITIES LAWS OF BRAZIL. **China:** This document is being distributed in China by, and is attributable to, Standard Chartered Bank (China) Limited which is mainly regulated by China Banking and Insurance

Regulatory Commission (CBIRC), State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE), and People's Bank of China (PBoC). **Hong Kong:** This document (except any part advising on or facilitating any decision on futures contracts trading) is being distributed in Hong Kong by, and any part hereof authored by an analyst licensed in Hong Kong is attributable to, Standard Chartered Bank (Hong Kong) Limited 渣打銀行（香港）有限公司 which is regulated by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority. Insofar as this document advises on or facilitates any decision on futures contracts trading, it is being distributed in Hong Kong by, and any part hereof authored by an analyst licensed in Hong Kong is attributable to, Standard Chartered Securities (Hong Kong) Limited 渣打證券（香港）有限公司 which is regulated by the Securities and Futures Commission. **India:** This document is being distributed in India by Standard Chartered Bank, India Branch ("SCB India"). SCB India is a branch of SCB, UK and is licensed by the Reserve Bank of India to carry on banking business in India. SCB India is also registered with Securities and Exchange Board of India in its capacity as Merchant Banker, Investment Advisor, Depository Participant, Bankers to an Issue, Custodian, etc. For details on group companies operating in India, please visit *https://www.sc.com/in/india_result.html*. **Indonesia:** Standard Chartered Bank, Jakarta Branch is a banking institution duly registered with and supervised by the Indonesian Financial Service Authority. The information in this document is provided for information purposes only. It does not constitute any offer, recommendation or solicitation to any person to enter into any transaction or adopt any hedging, trading or investment strategy, nor does it constitute any prediction of likely future movements in rates or prices or represent that any such future movements will not exceed those shown in any illustration. Future changes in such laws, rules, regulations, etc., could affect the information in this document, but SCB is under no obligation to keep this information current or to update it. Expressions of opinion are those of SCB only and are subject to change without notice. **Japan:** This document is being distributed to Specified Investors, as defined by the Financial Instruments and Exchange Law of Japan (FIEL), for information only and not for the purpose of soliciting any Financial Instruments Transactions as defined by the FIEL or any Specified Deposits, etc. as defined by the Banking Law of Japan. **Kenya:** Standard Chartered Bank Kenya Limited is regulated by the Central Bank of Kenya. The information in this document is provided for information purposes only. The document is intended for use only by Professional Clients and should not be relied upon by or be distributed to Retail Clients. **Korea:** This document is being distributed in Korea by, and is attributable to, Standard Chartered Bank Korea Limited which is regulated by the Financial Supervisory Service and Financial Services Commission. **Macau:** This document is being distributed in Macau Special Administrative Region of the Peoples' Republic of China, and is attributable to, Standard Chartered Bank (Macau Branch) which is regulated by Macau Monetary Authority. **Malaysia**: This document is being distributed in Malaysia by Standard Chartered Bank Malaysia Berhad only to institutional investors or corporate customers. Recipients in Malaysia should contact Standard Chartered Bank Malaysia Berhad in relation to any matters arising from, or in connection with, this document. **Mauritius:** Standard Chartered Bank (Mauritius) Limited is regulated by both the Bank of Mauritius and the Financial Services Commission in Mauritius. This document should not be construed as investment advice or solicitation to enter into securities transactions in Mauritius as per the Securities Act 2005. **New Zealand:** New Zealand Investors should note that this document was prepared for "wholesale clients" only within the meaning of section 5C of the Financial Advisers Act 2008. This document is not directed at persons who are "retail clients" as defined in the Financial Advisers Act 2008. NOTE THAT STANDARD CHARTERED BANK (incorporated in England) IS NOT A "REGISTERED BANK" IN NEW ZEALAND UNDER THE RESERVE BANK OF NEW ZEALAND ACT 1989, and it is not therefore regulated or supervised by the Reserve Bank of New Zealand. **Pakistan:** The securities mentioned in this report have not been, and will not be, registered in Pakistan, and may not be offered or sold in Pakistan, without prior approval of the regulatory authorities in Pakistan. **Philippines:** This document may be distributed in the Philippines by Standard Chartered Bank (Philippines) ("SCB PH"), which is regulated by Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (telephone no.: +63 708-7701, website: www.bsp.gov.ph). This document is directed to Qualified Buyers as defined under Section 10.1 (L) of Republic Act No. 8799, otherwise known as the Securities Regulation Code ("SRC"), other corporate and institutional clients only. This document is for information purposes only. SCB PH does not warrant the appropriateness and suitability of any security, investment or transaction that may have been discussed in this document with respect to any investor. Users of this document are required to undergo SCB's appropriateness and suitability determination process prior to engaging with SCB on any transaction involving any of the securities that may have been mentioned in this document. Nothing in this document constitutes or should be construed as an offer to sell or distribute securities in the Philippines, which securities, if offered for sale or distribution in the Philippines, are required to be registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission unless such securities are exempt under Section 9 of the SRC or the transaction is exempt under Section 10 thereof. **Singapore:** This document is being distributed in Singapore by SCB Singapore branch (UEN No.:S16FC0027L) and/or Standard Chartered Bank (Singapore) Limited (UEN No.: 201224747C) only to Accredited Investors, Expert Investors or Institutional Investors, as defined in the Securities and Futures Act, Chapter 289 of Singapore. Recipients in Singapore should contact SCB Singapore branch or Standard Chartered Bank (Singapore) Limited (as the case may be) in relation to any matters arising from, or in connection with, this document. **South Africa:** Standard Chartered Bank, Johannesburg Branch ("SCB Johannesburg Branch") is licensed as a Financial Services Provider in terms of Section 8 of the Financial Advisory and Intermediary Services Act 37 of 2002. SCB Johannesburg Branch is a Registered Credit Provider in terms of the National Credit Act 34 of 2005 under registration number NCRCP4. **Thailand:** This document is intended to circulate only general information and prepare exclusively for the benefit of Institutional Investors with the conditions and as defined in the Notifications of the Office of the Securities and Exchange Commission relating to the exemption of investment advisory service, as amended and supplemented from time to time. It is not intended to provide for the public. **UAE:** For residents of the UAE – Standard Chartered Bank UAE does not provide financial analysis or consultation services in or into the UAE within the meaning of UAE Securities and Commodities Authority Decision No. 48/r of 2008 concerning financial consultation and financial analysis. **UAE (DIFC):** Standard Chartered Bank, Dubai International Financial Centre (SCB DIFC) having its offices at Dubai International Financial Centre, Building 1, Gate Precinct, P.O. Box 999, Dubai, UAE is a branch of Standard Chartered Bank and is regulated by the Dubai Financial Services Authority ("DFSA"). This document is intended for use only by Professional Clients and is not directed at Retail Clients as defined by the DFSA Rulebook. In the DIFC we are authorized to provide financial services only to clients who qualify as Professional Clients and Market Counterparties and not to Retail Clients. As a Professional Client you will not be given the higher retail client protection and compensation rights and if you use your right to be classified as a Retail Client we will be unable to provide financial services and products to you as we do not hold the required license to undertake such activities. **United States:** Except for any documents relating to foreign exchange, FX or global FX, Rates or Commodities, distribution of this document in the United States or to US persons is intended to be solely to major institutional investors as defined in Rule 15a-6(a)(2) under the US Securities Exchange Act of 1934. All US persons that receive this document by their acceptance thereof represent and agree that they are a major institutional investor and understand the risks involved in executing transactions in securities. Any US recipient of this document wanting additional information or to effect any transaction in any security or financial instrument mentioned herein, must do so by contacting a registered representative of Standard Chartered Securities North America, LLC, 1095 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10036, US, tel + 1 212 667 0700. WE DO NOT OFFER OR SELL SECURITIES TO U.S. PERSONS UNLESS EITHER (A) THOSE SECURITIES ARE REGISTERED FOR SALE WITH THE U.S. SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION AND WITH ALL APPROPRIATE U.S. STATE AUTHORITIES; OR (B) THE SECURITIES OR THE SPECIFIC TRANSACTION QUALIFY FOR AN EXEMPTION UNDER THE U.S. FEDERAL AND STATE SECURITIES LAWS NOR DO WE OFFER OR SELL SECURITIES TO U.S. PERSONS UNLESS (i) WE, OUR AFFILIATED COMPANY AND THE APPROPRIATE PERSONNEL ARE PROPERLY REGISTERED OR LICENSED TO CONDUCT BUSINESS; OR (ii) WE, OUR AFFILIATED COMPANY AND THE APPROPRIATE PERSONNEL QUALIFY FOR EXEMPTIONS UNDER APPLICABLE U.S. FEDERAL AND STATE LAWS. Any documents relating to foreign exchange, FX or global FX, Rates or Commodities to US Persons, Guaranteed Affiliates, or Conduit Affiliates (as those terms are defined by any Commodity Futures Trading Commission rule, interpretation, guidance, or other such publication) are intended to be distributed only to Eligible Contract Participants are defined in Section 1a(18) of the Commodity Exchange Act. **Zambia:** Standard Chartered Bank Zambia Plc (SCB Zambia) is licensed and registered as a commercial bank under the Banking and Financial Services Act Cap 387 of the laws of Zambia and as a dealer under the Securities Act, No. 41 of 2016. SCB Zambia is regulated by the Bank of Zambia, the Lusaka Stock Exchange and the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Document approved by
Shuang Ding
Chief Economist, Greater China and North Asia

Document is released at
03:59 GMT 08 May 2019