



IRISH CHAMBER  
OF COMMERCE CHINA 爱尔兰商会



# 2025 the Year of Successssss?

An Irish business perspective  
on the Year of the Snake.

January 2025, Shanghai, China.

# WELCOME MESSAGES



**Ard-Chonsalacht na hÉireann**  
Consulate General of Ireland

## David Murphy

**Consul General**

**Consulate General of Ireland in Shanghai**

I am delighted to be invited by the Irish Chamber of Commerce China to contribute a message to this 2025 Year of the Snake Outlook report.

Since arriving in Shanghai, midway through the Year of the Dragon, I have been able to engage with the Chamber and meet its members at their excellent events, getting a sense of how the business landscape here is evolving for Irish and other international firms. I would like to commend Peter Markey and the Chamber committee on their work and activity in 2024, and look forward to positive collaboration and in engagement in 2025. Our Ambassador in Beijing, Nicholas O'Brien, also extends his best wishes to Chamber members and looks forward to the continued success of the Chamber next year.

Given the importance of the trade, investment, and economic links between Ireland and China, essential reading for me prior to my arrival was the Chamber's 2024: The Year of the Soaring Dragon? Report. I am happy to say that the 2025 version provides equally stimulating reading. The report is brought together in a really useful format, taking an interesting selection of contributors with diverse views, who share their insights and frank opinions on the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead. As ever, the business environment in Shanghai and China is rapidly changing, and the report captures the situation on the ground in a wide variety of industries from an Irish perspective, highlighting the range of sector-specific outlooks.

The Consulate, and the wider Team Ireland here at Ireland House and in China, including IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Bord Bia and Tourism Ireland, is excited about the year ahead and look forward to working closely with the Chamber throughout the Year of the Snake. Congratulations on the report and all the very best for 2025.

**David**



**IRISH CHAMBER**  
OF COMMERCE CHINA 爱尔兰商会

## Peter Markey

**Chairperson,**

**The Irish Chamber of Commerce China**

I am delighted to introduce our 2025 outlook report, insights from Irish experts living and working in China as to what to expect for the year ahead, the Year of the Snake.

The year just finished did not see the Dragon soar out of the problems of the Covid era. While high tech sectors surged, many more traditional sectors struggled in China, particularly real estate, hospitality and consumer goods. Concern about the future was widespread. The government has acknowledged these concerns and outlined areas for action. Will the Snake bring success? Our contributors bring stimulating and unique insights to this question.

While there is some continuity from our reports in previous years, there are also changes. In particular, we have two contributors, both Corkmen, with strong links to China but not based here. This is particularly appropriate as Cork and Shanghai have a sister city relationship that celebrates 20 years in this Year of the Snake. Conor Healy is the CEO of the Cork Chamber of Commerce and recounts the history behind the sister city relationship while looking forward to its future evolution. Sean Doyle is the CEO of British Airways and provides a fascinating insight into the challenges faced by the aviation industry in the current turbulent global environment.

We have new contributors from education and hospitality, service sectors of increasing sophistication which reflect the evolution of the Chinese economy, but which also have borne the brunt of the downturn in consumer confidence. We have gone back to past contributors from: retail and product sourcing to see how supply chains are responding; beverages to find out where consumers are drowning their sorrows; and B2B marketing on trends in digital communicating with customers.

In addition to being from different industry sectors, our experts work in a wide range of companies, including multi-nationals, Irish owned private companies and state organisations, as well as SMEs. Accordingly, the report captures diverse perspectives, with some common themes emerging. Many thanks to them all for taking the time at this busy time of year to provide their insights.

I'm sure our members will find this report stimulating reading during the Chinese New Year holiday!

**Peter**

### WITH THANKS TO:

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Food and Drink

**The ICCC posed the following questions to get our contributors started.**

1. What challenges and opportunities do you see for your sector in 2025 and how are you planning to overcome or take advantage of them?
2. What initiatives do you see happening during the Year of the Snake in your sector/company to enhance sustainability?
3. Besides sector challenges, what are the biggest challenges you and your company face for 2025 and how are you planning to address them?
4. How has the level of international interaction evolved for you and your business over the last year? Are you dealing more or less with foreign customers/suppliers/colleagues/visitors? How do you see this trending in 2025, especially considering the change in presidency in the USA?
5. AI: Do you see AI having an impact in your sector in 2025? What is your company doing to address AI? Do you see AI as a tool, a resource or a replacement worker?
6. What do you think we'll be all taking about in January 2026?
7. What one piece of advice would you give your younger self at the beginning of this new Year of the Snake?





# GRAEME ALLEN

**Owner**  
**The Flying Fox Irish Bistro**



## HOSPITALITY

Graeme and his wife Lee, a Ballymaloe trained chef, opened the Flying Fox Irish Bistro in Jinqiao in April 2006. It's located in a residential area, next door to two international hotels and backs onto a small Golden Bridge industrial park and is within walking distance of three international schools. It has a large garden with a playground for children and has both indoor and outdoor seating. Finance was easy 20-25 years ago as many expats had spare cash and wanted to be part owner of a bar or restaurant.

### 1. What challenges and opportunities do you see for your sector in 2025? How are you planning to overcome/take advantage of them?

#### The Challenges

Our business sector, restaurants serving international food are currently in shock with falling revenues as local people are spending less on eating out and the large free spending expat community has all but disappeared. Fine dining is in trouble and the tasting menu concept is nearly done! The Millennial generation and Gen Z are not drinking like the older generation affecting restaurant bottom lines. This has led to the closing of some of Shanghai's best-known bars and restaurants, some of whom had 14-15 outlets in their heyday and many free-standing outlets. Even in Ireland we are drinking 30% less alcohol than 20 years ago. In 2023 at the Fox we served over 65,000 meals, in 2024 meal numbers were down 19%. So, it's a very tough business environment for the international restaurant sector.

#### The Opportunities

Over the past months Beijing has announced a series of measures including stabilizing the stock market, putting a floor under the property market and a five-year plan for tackling local government hidden debt but haven't yet been able to boost domestic demand and get people spending money in restaurants as before. However, in early December the Politburo announced that 'China will adopt an "appropriate loose" monetary policy next year which will be the first easing of its stance for 14 years alongside a more proactive fiscal

policy to spur economic growth'. If this happens, we expect it to go some way to restoring confidence and encourage people to increase restaurant spending by mid-year. The Shanghai government's dining programme really helped some of the larger Chinese restaurant chains but didn't apply to stand alone outlets such as ourselves. And while Millennials and Gen Z are drinking less, they do eat out and are looking to experience different and health conscious choices. Even in these tough times there are always opportunities.

So, what have we done or doing for 2025 to increase revenue?

- Source more health conscious choices and Irish food products as more and more people hear about Ireland
- Introduced a second brand, Tweek only for delivery at lower prices
- Made steak a feature on our menu and increased the steak selection which has and will increase our average check
- Increased commission on more menu items for our staff
- Stepped up our outside catering
- Installed two pet cats in the Fox which brings in the office girls for lunch and children at the weekend
- Installed display cabinets with antique style memorabilia with a local dealer
- Running cookery classes at a nearby international school

### 2. What initiatives do you see happening during the Year of the Snake in your sector/company to enhance sustainability?

In terms of sustainability we all know food waste has a large impact on the environment, and in China it is estimated that the amount of restaurant food wasted could feed 30-50 million people. It's a hardy annual in China as in mid 2020 the government launched a campaign under the banner of 'clean your plate',

announcing the campaign the President said that the problem of discarded leftovers was 'shocking and distressing' and quoted a Tang Dynasty poem 'implore people to know that each grain of rice in your bowl comes from the labour of peasants'. In the early '90's Deng Xiao Ping encouraged restaurant diners to take home uneaten food. But it's a slow road to depart from the old Chinese tradition that leaving uneaten food is a compliment to the bountiful generosity of the host of the dinner. At the Fox we try and serve reasonable size portions but it's always tricky to get it right but we do keep a close eye on returning plates. We use the same kitchen for Tweek and the Fox so this also helps to cut down on waste.

**3. Besides sector challenges, what's the biggest challenges you and your company face in 2025? How are you planning to address them?**

Our biggest challenges in 2025 will be rent and staffing. We currently pay around 20% of our revenue in rent, in the west we would be paying somewhere between 3-8%. So, we will be having discussions on rent with our landlord Golden Bridge which is a State-Owned Enterprise. We would never rent from a private landlord as they can be very difficult. Once they see your restaurant doing well they try to increase rent. We have an interesting relationship with Golden Bridge as while we pay the market price for rent, they see us as providing a service to the tenants of their housing compounds, industrial parks and schools and not strictly as a cash cow. And interestingly they are the ones who have instigated the discussion on rent reduction and certainly not us begging for a better deal. Staffing costs are increasing and it's not only salaries, it's housing which we provide and food and a lot of the time we aren't that busy so we will be looking for more part timers.

**4. How has the level of international interaction evolved for you and your business over the last year? Are you dealing more or less with foreign customers/suppliers/colleagues/visitors? How do you see this trending in 2025, especially considering the change in presidency in the USA?**

When we opened in 2006, 80% of our guests were foreigners, now in 2024 our guests are 90% Chinese due partly to localization but mainly due to the Chinese interest in western food. We are seeing less international business visitors but those we see and talk to are still positive about China. However, many companies were badly affected during Covid-19 and the fact that Shanghai port was closed down for 84 days badly

disrupted their supply chains. So, many are looking for alternate sources in countries like Vietnam, Thailand or Malaysia but will still part source from China due to its highly educated workforce and amazing infrastructure. The nearby International Expo Convention Centre had a boom year with nearly non-stop exhibitions and we expect this to continue into 2025 although we read reports that international visitors are down by 20% on pre-Covid-19 times. There is lots of talk about tariffs and counter tariffs but we think that once the new US administration is installed there will be more realistic discussions and we expect international visitors numbers to be higher in 2025 compared to 2024 helped by the visa waiver program which now applies to 38 countries although not the US and the UK and the visa on arrival program that applies to in-transit visitors from over 50 countries including the US and the UK. Also, the US State Department has lowered their Travel Advice for China from level 3 to level 2.

**5. Do you see AI having an impact in your sector in 2025? What is your company doing to address AI? Do you see AI as a tool, a resource or a replacement worker?**

AI is in its infancy in an independent stand-alone restaurant such as the Flying Fox but the experts tell me it's the future of helping the restaurant industry streamline operations by cutting costs, reducing errors, customizing orders, improving guest services and finding new customers so we look at AI as a major resource in future years.

**6. What do you think we'll be all talking about in January 2026?**

What a great year we are going to have to celebrate the Flying Fox's 20th anniversary in April.

**7. What one piece of advice would you give your younger self at the beginning of the Year of the Snake?**

The best bit of advice I've got since arriving in China in 1994 was from my first boss who said 'you'll immediately see things that you want to change or improve from your western business experience but my advice would be to wait at least three months to see how everything works before you decide on any changes'.

I've tried to carry that forward in my business by not making snap decisions or shock announcements. Make sure your senior colleagues are on board after discussions or better still work in a way that they think that anything major was partly their idea.



## Barry Colman

**Chief Consultant & Creative Officer  
GLAS B2B COMMUNICATIONS**

### B2B ADVERTISING AND MARKETING

With 30+ years Asia experience, Barry is recognised as one of China and the region's leading B2B marketing specialists. He first lived in Shanghai in 1987-88 as an exchange student at Fudan University, when he was fortunate enough to meet President Hillary on the first state visit of an Irish President to China. Barry started his marketing career in Hong Kong and moved back to Shanghai in 1998, where he has since worked with some of the world's biggest brands in some of the world's biggest agencies in some of the world's most challenging markets. Barry today lives in downtown Shanghai with three dogs, a bull and a horse!

#### **GOODBYE AI - HELLO SI.**

**Six Insights designed for Success Inspired by the Snake.**

The agency model is dead they're all shouting...again. I've heard this statement every 4 or 5 years for the last 25: first the internet, then the smart phone, then social media and now AI have all 'killed the agency'. When I challenge these doom-mongers to explain to me what they believe the agency model actually is, many struggle to answer. I'm yet to get a straight answer (cue keyboard warriors scuttling off to ask their favourite Gen AI platform to explain what the model actually is).

If the agency model is dead then so must Automotive, Retail, Education...the list goes on.

In advertising we are all trained to continually change with the times: 'what's the new-better-different' one client always challenged. She demanded new news at every point of contact, new marketing ideas, new products. She pushed everyone hard for change. Brands that stand still will die and brands that don't, won't. No-one is dying - it's just that time again for industries to shed their skins and move forward with a new focus, embracing new tech, new customer behaviours and the new opportunities (and challenges) that are offering themselves up today.

The advertising and communications industry is facing major upheavals across the world and it's not just the agencies who are suffering but the brands and the corporates too - both B2B and B2C.

Major holding companies are consolidating at a fast pace resulting in the industry losing some of the world's oldest and most famous names in advertising in 2024. People are getting laid off and there's huge pressure on those still in jobs to over-deliver. Small and medium-sized agencies are struggling to get noticed and to find new business. Financial transparency is a hot topic with agencies getting raided by the police and whistleblowers going public with allegations against senior management.

Every job is now an 'urgent' pitch yet clients are taking much longer to make decisions on who to work with. C-level management are getting more involved in making marketing-related decisions as they focus on cutting costs and increasing the bottom-line. Getting commitment on projects and then getting paid is taking so long agencies and marketers are all suffering. This all results in a slowdown in cash-flow and an increase in costs for agencies and a slowdown in sales for the brands.

New technologies such as generative AI are changing the way companies make stuff, advertise stuff, sell stuff and how people buy stuff. Change is happening every 6 months. The demand (both push and pull) for sustainability and zero-carbon products and services is putting more pressure on everyone and forcing change in established industries: think the Electric Vehicle car category and the recent Jaguar rebranding.

Brands - aka 'clients' - are also finding it tough. Marketing teams and budgets are being cut and fewer people have to do more work. They are under pressure to get more bang for the their marketing buck and better quality sales leads on less marketing budget. One client I was talking to a few weeks back said his biggest challenge was keeping on top of the rapid changes in customer needs in this VUCA time we are in. I had to look VUCA up: V for Volatility = speed of change, U for Uncertainty = a lack of confidence in predicting the future, C for Complexity = information overload and A for Ambiguity = unclear interpretations of facts. In VUCA periods, we all need to be fast, smart and open to change. It's not a time to simply react but a time to be smart and to plan better.

So what does 2025 - the Year of the Wood Snake - hold in store for us all?

In the Chinese zodiac, the Snake is seen as representing **wisdom, intelligence, transformation, energy, change, resilience, insightfulness and leadership** while the wood element adds **creativity, stability, collaboration and growth**.

Here are **SIX INSIGHTS** inspired by the Snake designed to give us direction in 2025.

### 1: INTELLIGENCE = WORK SMARTER

This year let's not just talk Artificial Intelligence, let's talk Snake Intelligence, or as I call it SI.

SI demands you are approaching things from an educated and informed point of view and not just reacting to some angry sales director trying to divert blame for low Q2 results.

How? Analyse more data and not just the sales results (if you can get your hands on them) but the marketing data too. Marketing teams have access to much more data that the sales teams do so use it; track media investments, look closer at results (both good and bad), track engagement rates and any increase in number of followers for every post, monitor MQL and SQL conversions rates, CRM results and analyse through to sales and ROI. Share your results, learnings, plans and ideas more. Track results, revisit results and then develop plans based on a growth mindset. I was talking to a client a few weeks back and the head of marketing told me they don't know the value of sales generated by the marketing-generated sales leads so it was a struggle to know where to stop spending and where to invest more.

Train your teams. When was the last time you held a training session that wasn't focussed on compliance but more on how to best use AI to develop more detailed customer personas and industry profiles?

Do more research, understand your customer journeys better, document learnings in a playbook, refresh your brand's messaging house.

And if you want to save \$\$ don't forget your Search Engine Optimisation (SEO).

AI can help you with all of this...but don't cut out the human element. That's vitally important to keep the human as AI is still making mistakes and needs humans to prompt it better.

Big up on your 'SI' and you'll soon find it's your best new secret weapon to success.

### 2: EMBRACE CHANGE

WOOD SNAKE hungers for change. With all the new technologies, new platforms, new production techniques, new analytics tools and cheaper, faster content we - and that our customers - have suddenly at our disposal, we must be open to change.

A change mindset should be seen as a 'must have' not a 'nice to have'.

Digital transformation has been a thing for a while now but it's been given a super-boost by the explosion of Generative AI.

Embrace AI. It's no longer about being an early adopter, it's about making best use what's available. Now is the time to understand how best to use AI in your business planning (research tools, data analytics etc), your communications (creativity; content; short video etc) and processes (streamlining logistics; HR, finance etc).

The platforms are changing too and B2B content is working its way in to more and more platforms such as

XiaoHongShu. It's not just WeChat any more but when you consider these new platforms, use your SI to work out how to make them work for you.

### 3: COLLABORATION

The pressure is on to find new audiences for less budget and get better results. Word of mouth is king. In my experience, in times of economic 'stress', co-op marketing really delivers some great results. Look for opportunities to work creatively with other companies. Get creative. Work with brands no-one would expect you to. Share products, share KOLs, share communities, share stories. Don't forget the middle of the good old 'funnel' - which, like the agency model is not dead either - the Convince stage of your customer's buying journey loves a good story from someone not in your company. Sharing production and media budgets with a complementary brand is also a good way of saving \$\$ while maintaining quality production values.

Oh and clients: collaborate more with your agency partners by speeding up the decision making process and kicking off projects...please.

### 4: AIM FOR GROWTH

The ambitious Snake sets high goals and works hard to achieve them - and you should too. The Snake is resourceful, combining high degrees of creativity and flexibility making it easier for them to find innovative solutions to most challenges. Have a growth mind-set and think both short term sales and long-term growth. EVERYTHING YOU DO should be planned about growth: grow your number of followers, grow your ROI etc. Think growth with the passion of the snake.

### 5: RESILIENCE = BOUNCE BACK

Snake hates to fail, but if they do they bounce back fast and move on. But don't forget to log your learnings and make sure not to repeat mistakes. Add resilience to your SI mindset - it's the smart thing to do.

### 6: WORK HARD

It's not going to be easy - for anyone. Everyone needs to be prepared to work hard. There's the old adage 'don't work hard, work smart'. This year 'Don't just work hard, don't just work smart - work Snake-Smart' using your SI up.

To finish, let's look at which Chinese zodiac signs pair best with Snake.

**BEST MATCH - OX:** in 1949 both the People's Republic of China AND the Republic of Ireland were born, the year of the enthusiastic Ox

**BEST MATCH - MONKEY:** The USA born on the 4th July 1776, the year of the quick-tempered Monkey

**WORST MATCH - PIG:** The United Kingdom, born with the Acts of Union in 1707, the year of the popular Pig.

2025 promises to be a challenging one for everyone. Snake is the year to dust off our brains, wise-up our SI, embrace change, get creative, get social and work hard on growth.

**What advice would I give to my younger self:** Learn something new - with new technologies it's never been easier nor more important. Learn something new and then share it with as many people who have the wisdom to listen.

**What will we be talking about in 2026?** Sustainability, growth, ROI...and horses.



# Sean Doyle

**CEO  
British Airways**



## GLOBAL AIRLINES

**Q: A small introduction to yourself and to give some personal insights - such as what advice would you give your 20-year-old self if starting out now? what were some of the big challenges you faced in your career? and how do you apply lessons learned from them?**

A: I grew up in Youghal, Co Cork where my dad was a local Garda Sergeant. I undertook a BComm at UCC and qualified as a CIMA management accountant. I joined British Airways in 1998 and was fortunate to work overseas, spending a few years in Singapore from 2001 to 2003, and then becoming the Regional Finance Manager for Asia Pacific in 2003 based in Sydney. I had the opportunity to visit China on a number of occasions during my time and was part of the team that launched BA's service to Shanghai in 2005.

Apart from working in a range of roles in BA, I was fortunate to become CEO of Aer Lingus from 2018 to 2020, before coming back to British Airways as CEO in late 2020. In terms of challenges, we have had to withstand a few over the years, whether it was the impact of the September 11 attacks, the global financial crisis, and the most severe challenge of all, which was the pandemic. This was particularly brutal for airlines and rebuilding the industry has been difficult, and we still have many challenges that emanate from the COVID period.

My advice is that resilience and tenacity are very important, and life and a career never grow in a straight line. The key is not to get too down about setbacks but make sure you bounce back quickly. Also, it's important to look at each new challenge through its own unique lens. Experience is helpful but sometimes the solution to a historic challenge isn't the right solution to new ones coming across the table.

**Q: Have you been to China and if yes, what did you enjoy most and what would you like to experience next time you come?**

A: I have been to China many times, having visited Shanghai, Beijing, Xian and Guangzhou. I love the differences depending on what region you are in whether it be the food, the cultural norms or the dialects. I find the diversity of China very fascinating. I also love history and China's history is fascinating and to understand China and how it navigates its way to the future, it's critical to understand its long history. My sense is China's rich heritage shapes its view of the world and how China will develop in the future. I also find every time I come back, the scale of development is light years ahead of what I would have encountered in the past. And in many areas, such as airports, the infrastructure and technology are leap-frogging what we see in the West.

**Q: What are your views on China/Europe routes, and what you believe may happen in the next few years with either an end, or a continuation to the war in Ukraine?**

A: I always tend to leave the politics to the politicians! My views are that businesses will always find a way of growing trade and investment. In fact, over the last six years, trade and investment between China and the West has grown, which is not what you might perceive from the media. I think the quality of goods such as EV's and solar panels coming from China are now best in class and I expect Chinese businesses and brands to develop globally in the next cycle. China is critical to global supply chains and Chinese manufacturing has also played a key role in moderating inflation – something I think the economies in the West will benefit from and appreciate in the future. I also expect the Chinese economy to evolve and opportunities for service-based trade to develop with Europe and particularly the UK will emerge.





**Q: What challenges and opportunities do you see for your sector in 2025? How are you planning to overcome / take advantage of them?**

A: I think the main challenges continue to be the performance of the aviation supply chain. As it stands right now supplies of parts are now back to pre-pandemic levels and consequently airlines are not able to utilise their assets as efficiently as we would have historically. We also are keeping a close watch on the delivery of new planes from the big equipment manufacturers. At a more macro level we have to keep a close eye on geopolitics in Europe and the Middle East. At BA we fly to over 200 destinations in over 80 countries so we have a lot of experience of managing in volatile environments. And we have been flying for 105 years!

**Q: What initiatives do you see happening in 2025 / future years in your sector / company to enhance sustainability?**

A: We're part of the way through a really exciting £7billion transformation at British Airways and sustainability is at the heart of that work. We have three key pillars to our sustainability strategy and both BA and our parent company IAG have been very much at the leading edge of getting to net zero by 2050. In fact, we were the first airline group globally to commit to this.

Firstly, we are taking delivery of new airplanes which are much more fuel and carbon efficient than our older ones. We retired our fleet of 747's a few years back and the planes replacing them are more than 40% more fuel efficient.

Secondly, we are working with many partners to develop supplies of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) which has carbon lifecycle reduction of over 80% compared to jet kerosene. We will advance on our ambition to secure 10% of our fuel requirements from SAF by 2030. And thirdly, we are investing in new technologies – we are a shareholder in Zero Avia which is developing hydrogen powered propulsion for regional aircraft here in the UK.

**British Airways fly daily from Shanghai and connect with cities across Ireland via London Heathrow.**



# Conor Healy

**Chief Executive  
Cork Chamber of Commerce**



## BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

“Cork Chamber of Commerce has been a champion for the business community and a strong advocate for the economic development of the Cork region for over 200 years. With approximately 1,200 members together employing 130,000+ people throughout the city, metropolitan area, county and beyond, the Chamber plays a central role in shaping the region's economic landscape. Our vision is to lead a transforming an ambitious Cork City and County, with a purpose to unite, represent and support our members and community. Cork Chamber plays a key role in connecting Cork internationally and promotes the city and county for investment, collaboration, talent and trade. Through our international Chamber connections, business networks and international programmes such as our “Connecting Cork” initiative, we help our members to connect and collaborate with businesses across the globe”.

The Sister City relationship between Cork and Shanghai, formalised through the Memorandum of Understanding signed in May 2005 has proven to be an invaluable asset for Cork Chamber members. With a shared history of trade, education, and culture, both cities recognised early on the mutual benefits that could emerge from fostering close ties. Since the signing of these agreements, Cork Chamber has been actively involved in leveraging the opportunities arising from this collaboration, benefiting not only Cork businesses but also contributing to attracting Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to Cork. The relationship has evolved into a strategic avenue for Cork companies to expand their global reach, gain access to the Chinese market, and foster new collaborations.

### **The Background of the Shanghai-Cork Sister City Relationship**

The origins of the Sister City relationship between Cork and Shanghai date back to 2002 when initial contacts were made between the two cities. In February 2004, Cork City Council led an official delegation to Shanghai, where the delegation met Vice Mayor Yan Junqi and visited Fudan University, strengthening academic and cultural exchanges. Upon their return, the Shanghai

Project Group was established, consisting of representatives from Cork City Council, Cork Chamber, and University College Cork, with the goal of overseeing and managing the expanding relationship between the two cities.

The Sister City agreement, signed in 2005, created a framework for cooperation in areas such as local government, business, education, culture, and tourism. Both cities recognised the importance of ensuring tangible results from the relationship, especially in business and trade. As a result, Cork Chamber became an active participant in the Sister City initiative, committed to increasing business contacts and facilitating collaboration between the two cities.

### **The Role of Cork Chamber in the Sister City Relationship**

Cork Chamber has played an essential role in cultivating business relationships between Cork and Shanghai, helping local companies access the Chinese market and attract Chinese investment. From the outset, increasing business links was a core objective of the Sister City project. In May 2005, Cork Chamber organised a Business Forum to mark the official signing of the Sister City Agreement. This forum brought together over 30 Shanghai-based companies and local Cork businesses, establishing a platform for mutual exchange and collaboration.

Cork Chamber continued to build on this momentum, facilitating business exchanges and networking events that allowed businesses from both cities to explore new opportunities. In October 2006, Cork Chamber organised a delegation of 20 Cork-based organizations to visit Shanghai. This trip saw members from sectors such as tourism, engineering, education, construction, and software meet with counterparts in Shanghai. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Shanghai Chamber of International Commerce (COICSH) and Cork Chamber, committing us to developing business contacts and fostering trade relations.

Over the years, Cork Chamber has developed partnerships with various Chinese organisations, further cementing the strong business ties between Cork and Shanghai. These include the Ireland China Chamber of Commerce, Shanghai Federation of Industry and Commerce (SFIC), the Hangzhou Chamber of Commerce, and Invest Shanghai. These relationships have provided Cork Chamber members with valuable support in navigating the Chinese market, whether they

are looking to establish direct business relationships or expand their operations into China.

### Attracting Chinese FDI to Cork

One of the most significant goals of the Shanghai-Cork Sister City relationship has been the attraction of Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to Cork. Cork's strategic location, skilled workforce, and reputation as a business-friendly city make it an attractive destination for Chinese investment. The city's access to the European market, its well-developed infrastructure, and its stable and pro-business environment further enhances its appeal to Chinese companies looking to expand internationally.

Cork is particularly well-positioned for Chinese companies seeking to enter the European market, as it offers a diverse economic ecosystem. The region's strengths in technology, food and beverage, pharmaceuticals, and advanced manufacturing align well with the sectors in which many Chinese companies are seeking growth opportunities. The availability of top-tier research institutions, such as University College Cork and Munster Technological University, provides a valuable resource for innovation and collaboration between Cork and Chinese enterprises.

Cork Chamber continues to support these ventures by fostering connections and facilitating partnerships that can help Chinese businesses explore Cork as an attractive place to expand their footprint in Europe.

### Supporting Cork Chamber Members in Doing Business with China

Cork Chamber works to help its members engage with China, providing support to businesses that are looking to tap into the opportunities that the market offers. Through its active participation in the Sister City programme, Cork Chamber has created a range of connections and market information for our members. These resources are crucial for businesses that wish to understand the cultural nuances, regulatory environment, and potential partnerships that will enable them to succeed in China.

Cork Chamber's partnerships with key organizations such as the Ireland China Chamber of Commerce, Shanghai Chamber of International Commerce, the Shanghai Federation of Industry and Commerce, the EU

SME Centre in Beijing and Invest Shanghai have further enhanced the support available to Cork Chamber members. These partnerships provide local businesses with access to knowledge and expertise in international trade, enabling them to navigate the challenges and seize the opportunities that China offers.

### Looking Ahead: Expanding the Relationship

Cork Chamber is committed to continuing to strengthen the relationship with Shanghai and building on the success of the past two decades.

One of the key areas of focus will be supporting Cork businesses in embracing the digital economy and emerging technologies. Ireland and China are at the forefront of innovation in areas such as e-commerce and artificial intelligence with business benefiting greatly from building partnerships.

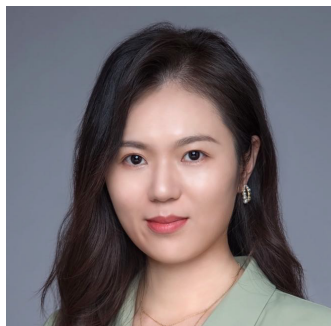
Cork Chamber will continue to engage with Shanghai's business community, fostering new partnerships and creating platforms for Cork businesses to access the Chinese market. By maintaining the momentum of the Sister City relationship, Cork Chamber aims to ensure that Cork remains a key player in the global business landscape.

Next year marks the 20th anniversary of the sister city relationship between Cork and Shanghai, a significant milestone between the two cities. Cork Chamber welcome delegates from Shanghai to visit Cork, which would provide an opportunity to reflect on shared achievements and explore new avenues for continued cooperation between our cities.

### Conclusion: A Valuable Partnership

The Shanghai-Cork Sister City relationship has been a catalyst for business growth, cross-cultural exchanges, and the attraction of Chinese FDI to Cork. Cork Chamber has been at the heart of this initiative, providing our members with invaluable support in navigating the complexities of the Chinese market, while facilitating partnerships that have created lasting economic benefits for both cities. With a continued focus on expanding business opportunities, fostering collaboration, and attracting investment, the future of the Sister City relationship promises even greater opportunities for Cork and our members to thrive in the global marketplace.





**Lillian Luo**  
**Head of Shanghai Office**  
**University College Cork**



## EDUCATION

### 1. What challenges and opportunities do you see for your sector in 2025? How are you planning to overcome/take advantage of them?

Besides looking for quality education abroad, Chinese parents and students tend to emphasise cost (good value for money) and getting a good job after graduation when making study abroad decisions.

A major emerging challenge is that, whereas most Chinese parents and students would traditionally consider western and especially English speaking countries, they are now open to other options. Some Asian countries and regions with lower cost and attractive scholarship policies are becoming more popular study destinations than before, including Singapore, Hong Kong SAR, Japan, Korea. Distance, safety and good ranking of the universities has also incentivised Chinese people choosing these Asian countries and regions.

UCC offers world class education and all-round support, not only to students' academic success but also to their future career, which reassures international students as to the value of their degree there. UCC PROPEL Pre-Entry Employability Module for International Students is one of the good examples that the university developed to enhance employability for international students at UCC. UCC PROPEL is available online to all international offer holders before they arrive at UCC, this module is designed to help students navigate the challenges of gaining employment and developing long-term employability while studying in Ireland.

### 2. What initiatives do you see happening during the Year of the Snake in your sector/company to enhance sustainability?

UCC ranked fourth in the UI GreenMetric World University Rankings, global environmental rankings, in December 2024. UCC's fourth place makes it the eighth consecutive year in which the university has finished in the top 10 of the rankings.

UCC Sustainability and Climate Action Plan (2023-2028) sets out how UCC will continue to embed sustainability goals and targets across all aspects of the University's educational, research, ancillary operations, infrastructural developments and interactions with the community. This plan seeks to help us as a university navigate this path and help shape and inspire a world that protects our environment and our society and furthers University College Cork's commitment to a sustainable future.

UCC Futures is an ambitious new programme of research prioritisation coupled with an innovative academic recruitment strategy across ten indicative areas of strategic importance that will build a foundation for economic, societal and cultural resilience and prosperity. Sustainability is one of the ten indicative areas where UCC Futures supports the delivery of superior quality in research, scholarship, and the translation of research to tangible impact on the world. The complexity of the global sustainability challenge requires experts from multiple disciplines and sectors to collaborate in new and reimagined ways.

### 3. Besides sector challenges, what's the biggest challenges you and your company face for 2025? How are you planning to address them?

Published university world rankings continue to play a vital role in decision making by Chinese parents and students when choosing universities abroad, including QS World University Rankings, THE World University Rankings, U.S. News, ARWU. There seems to be an invisible simplistic guideline/stereotype in the market that divides world universities into "two categories" in an unhealthy way. One category is "world top 100 universities" as priority choice when making a study abroad plan, while the second is "universities fall out of top 100 in the world rankings" as backup plan. This fails to take into account the valuable offerings of many universities which fit different and broader needs of students. Proper guidance to our Chinese partners and stakeholders on rationally understanding the relationship between university ranking and education quality needs to be provided.

To overcome this stereotype requires continuous and long-term effort, from all aspects of society, including the university, employers and governments. Areas for improvement include companies not listing graduation from world top ranked university as a compulsory requirement to recruit employees and government not listing it as compulsory when providing preferential policies to graduates.





**4. How has the level of international interaction evolved for you and your business over the last year? Are you dealing more or less with foreign customers /suppliers /colleagues/visitors? How do you see this trending in 2025, especially considering the change in presidency in the USA?**

The international interaction certainly bloomed largely over the past year between UCC and our Chinese partners, including bilateral visits, making up and recovering the projects suspended during the Covid times, exploring new cooperation opportunities with existing and new Chinese partners and so on. I expect the advantages of choosing Ireland as an international education cooperation destination will become increasingly clear and attractive to Chinese partners due to geopolitical impact in 2025 and the stable relations and policy between the two countries.

**5. Do you see AI having an impact in your sector in 2025? What is your company doing to address AI? Do you see AI as a tool, a resource or a replacement worker?**

AI is a rapidly growing technological phenomenon in all aspects. UCC has been actively embracing Artificial Intelligence, including embedding AI into teaching, learning and research. For example, Artificial Intelligence & Data Analytics is one of the ten indicative areas of UCC Futures which supports innovation and translation of research to tangible solutions to address emerging societal needs and global grand challenges, to secure a better future for all. In the meanwhile, UCC developed the toolkit of Ethical Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in learning and teaching that is specifically designed to assist staff in considering the responsible integration of GenAI into their learning and teaching practices.

AI is also a popular topic in our interactions with Chinese partners. For example, Prof Paul McSweeney, UCC Vice-President for Learning and Teaching gave a talk on "Academic integrity in the age of generative AI" to our Shanghai partner's International Education Forum on the theme of "Talent Cultivation in the AI Era: Opportunities and Challenges" in June 2024.

**6. What do you think we'll be all taking about in January 2026?**

With China implementing unilateral visa-free policy and transit visa exemptions to more countries, more foreign friends can be encouraged to visit China. In January 2026, people who have visited China might be talking about how different China actually is than they might have thought.

For UCC, it could be UCC students on exchange programmes coming to study at our Chinese partner universities talking about their exciting life in China.

**7. What one piece of advice would you give your younger self at the beginning of this new Year of the Snake?**

Protect and keep the curiosity to the world and passion to the life!



Jo McFarland

Global Sourcing Director  
The Senza Group

## SOURCING AND LOGISTICS

### 1. What challenges and opportunities do you see for your sector in 2025? How are you planning to overcome/take advantage of them?

I am in the General Merchandise sourcing sector where we source goods from factories on behalf of (mostly) UK retailers. 2025 will be another challenging year as we navigate an evolving landscape marked by the need to balance cost-efficiency, compliance, and risk management with increasing demands for digital innovation and sustainability.

Cost efficiency is becoming more challenging as labour cost in China are increasing as young people do not want to work in factories and factories are having to invest in more automated production. This is further compounded by a tough global economy as volumes through factories are declining.

To win in 2025 we need to continue to nurture strong supplier relationships and implement strategic sourcing practices such as:

- Resilient Supplier Networks: We pride ourselves on our strong supplier relationships and we must maintain this network of reliable suppliers so we can mitigate risk and ensure continuity of supply. We must also balance this with new emerging suppliers who we find at Trade Fairs who can offer solutions for sustainable materials and production methods. This involves having a robust vendor strategy whereby critical suppliers have regular performance reviews and strong relationships are maintained. We have a supplier development program which allows us to capitalise on supplier capabilities as well as foster long-term partnerships.
- Cost Control: The purchase price is one element of cost control but other factors such as delivery costs, quality, and supplier reliability must also be considered to make more cost-effective decisions.
- Collaboration: Strong collaboration with suppliers drive innovation and efficiency. We have Joint initiatives with key vendors such as collaborating on sustainability initiatives which can help achieve environmental goals while reducing costs.

### 2. What initiatives do you see happening during the Year of the Snake in your sector/company to enhance sustainability?

As mentioned already Sustainability is a key focus in sourcing and is demanded by our customers although this does vary greatly on the customer. We have some customers who are still slow to implement a sustainability agenda into their businesses. However, as a responsible Sourcing Office there are a number of initiatives, we support such as the HIGG Index which is the most comprehensive and holistic framework in the world for measuring sustainability performance as well as offering factories support and advice on how to improve their credentials. These include:

- Environmental Impact: Evaluating the carbon footprint of suppliers, choosing eco-friendly materials, and reducing waste. We will always prioritise factories that have implemented a green factory policy
- Sustainable Sourcing: Source materials and products from sustainable suppliers. This involves assessing suppliers' sustainability practices and ensuring they meet environmental standards. For instance, we use sustainability scorecards to help evaluate and select suppliers based on their environmental performance.

### 3. Besides sector challenges, what's the biggest challenges you and your company face for 2025? How are you planning to address them?

The biggest challenge we have is trying to satisfy our customers who are becoming more demanding to the point where it is difficult to make money. The retailer wants to constantly have newness to bring to their customers as they have a reason to engage with them. Whilst this is understandable as a strategy the reality is that the retailer wants to order one off small quantities of lots of different products. This is not attractive to the factory as there is no money to be made in the first order due to the set up costs and the profit comes in the repeat orders. This makes managing the vendor base extremely difficult. We are trying to overcome this by using suppliers that have their own strong design team and have a catalogue of developed product that they supply across a number of markets. We can therefore jump on the back of product that is being supplied to other markets. The UK market has quite a distinctive look versus other markets but we can make this work in areas such as ceramics.



**4. How has the level of international interaction evolved for you and your business over the last year? Are you dealing more or less with foreign customers /suppliers /colleagues/visitors? How do you see this trending in 2025, especially considering the change in presidency in the USA?**

Our dealings are mostly UK based so this has less impact on our business. It impacts our suppliers as the change in US presidency will not see any ease on Tariffs some of which are astronomically high. For example, PPE has a 100% tariff. Chinese suppliers have opened 'factories' in south east Asia but really these are more assembly facilities to avoid the tariffs and are not as efficient as supplying direct from China. If the tariff situation changed, suppliers would close down these facilities and move it all back to China.

**5. Do you see AI having an impact in your sector in 2025? What is your company doing to address AI? Do you see AI as a tool, a resource or a replacement worker?**

AI is a useful tool for us in areas such as the working of Instruction books labelling etc. AI can also unlock value through enhanced data insights to assist with decision-making, productivity gains and cost optimisation.

It will not replace people as our differentiating factor as a business is our design and creative input to product. As I understand it AI uses what's already out there and we need newness.

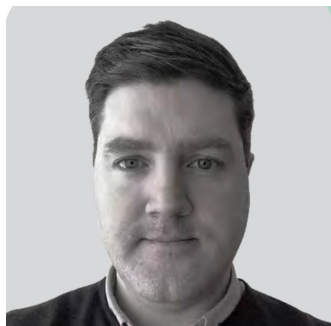
**6. What do you think we'll be all taking about in January 2026?**

I think world politics will continue to take centre stage as we see what changes Trump makes and whether Starmer can hold onto his role as British Prime Minister. Given both have tough relationships with China and each other it will be interesting to see how this plays out.

**7. What one piece of advice would you give your younger self at the beginning of this new Year of the Snake?**

Go with the flow. Expect the unexpected and be ready to face into it.





# Andrew Mitchell

**Regional Director Asia  
Vamos Drinks**

## LIQUORS AND SPIRITS

### 1. What challenges and opportunities do you see for your sector in 2025? How are you planning to overcome/take advantage of them?

The significant downturn in the Chinese economy and the imposition of retaliatory tariffs on brandy, particularly French cognac, will pose considerable challenges for the overall imported alcoholic beverage industry, including Irish Whiskey. The economic slowdown is likely to reduce overall consumer spending on premium spirits, while the tariffs could lead to price increases and reduced demand for cognac, the largest imported spirits category in China. Down-trading is particularly prevalent amongst younger consumers, with ever mounting job security and affordability challenges.

However, this situation also presents an opportunity for smaller more niche categories, such as Irish whiskey, gin and tequila to capture market share, as younger consumers seek alternatives to Cognac and high-end Scotch. For example, by positioning Irish Whiskey as a high-quality yet more affordable premium option, it can tap into strong consumer demand shifts among Gen Z and Millennials, who have an increasing desire for craft spirits and avoid more 'staid' categories. To navigate these challenges, brands should plan to strengthen their local partnerships, emphasize their unique value proposition, and tailor their marketing to highlight affordability, quality, and heritage.

### 2. What initiatives do you see happening during the Year of the Snake in your sector/company to enhance sustainability?

In 2025, sustainability will be a core focus for the alcoholic beverage sectors. Distillers and brand owners are increasingly investing in environmentally friendly production methods, such as utilising renewable energy in distilleries, reducing waste and carbon footprints. Cazcabel Tequila, which I represent across Asia, recently opened its new \$48M facility in Jalisco, Mexico, with a large emphasis on protecting the existing landscape. The new facility will be fully powered by solar panels and wind turbines by 2030, and the company has committed to planting 300 additional trees in the area as well as ensuring the conservation of surrounding flora and fauna.

Other initiatives could include sustainable packaging, promoting responsible drinking, and integrating local sustainability standards. Brands are increasingly looking to partner with concepts such as that developed by EcoSpirits of Singapore, who are rolling out their low carbon, low waste packaging system for premium spirits and wine. Pernod Ricard recently bought into their business as proof of their commitment to 'green causes'.

### 3. Besides sector challenges, what's the biggest challenges you and your company face for 2025? How are you planning to address them?

Aside from the inherent challenges of the alcoholic beverage sector, the biggest challenge for our company in 2025 will be maintaining consistent growth amidst shifting economic conditions in China. The evolving consumer behaviour, especially post-pandemic, poses uncertainties in demand, while potential changes in tariffs and regulations due to geopolitics could affect growth and profitability. To address this, we will be diversifying our product offerings, expanding into smaller Tier 2 and 3 cities where premium spirits are growing in popularity, and strengthening relationships to ensure stability in our supply chain.

### 4. How has the level of international interaction evolved for you and your business over the last year? Are you dealing more or less with foreign customers /suppliers /colleagues/visitors? How do you see this trending in 2025, especially considering the change in presidency in the USA?

Over the last year, our international interaction has increased significantly, particularly in the expansion of our presence across Asia. As China remains a priority for most global spirits companies, we've seen a greater exchange of knowledge and collaboration between foreign distilleries and businesses in navigating market entry and other compliance-based challenges. In 2025, we expect to see even more collaboration with international partners to adapt to regulatory shifts, though the geopolitical climate will play a critical role in shaping these interactions. The re-enthroning of Donald Trump in the US will keep us all on our feet!





**5. Do you see AI having an impact in your sector in 2025? What is your company doing to address AI? Do you see AI as a tool, a resource or a replacement worker?**

AI is expected to have a profound impact on the alcoholic beverage industry, especially in areas like production efficiency, supply chain management, customer engagement and brand building and activation. In China, AI could be used to cheaply and quickly localise marketing campaigns and predict consumer behaviour. Our company is slowly embracing AI as a tool to streamline operations and enhance consumer interactions. While AI will not replace workers yet, it will certainly become a critical resource for improving decision-making, operational efficiency, and understanding consumer preferences on an ever-deeper level. However, accessing key global AI tools will remain challenging in China and the effectiveness of 'home-grown' Chinese AI tools remains unclear at this stage. The next 2-3 years will be very telling.

**6. What do you think we'll be all taking about in January 2026?**

In January 2026, the conversation will likely centre around the continued impact of technology (AI) on our industry. Consumer behaviour will also shift further

towards sustainability, with brands needing to showcase their commitment to ethical practices. Additionally, the broader economic landscape, influenced by international relations and local policies in China, will play a crucial role in shaping industry trends. It's not a stretch to imagine other beverage categories being hit with crippling import tariffs, as previously experienced by Australian wine, and now EU brandy and cognac, which will push them beyond the reach of many consumers.

**7. What one piece of advice would you give your younger self at the beginning of this new Year of the Snake?**

Looking back, I would tell my younger self to embrace change and not be afraid to take risks, especially in the fast-evolving China market. Success often comes from adaptability and a willingness to innovate, whether it's through new distribution channels, embracing new technologies, such as AI or newer social-commerce platforms like XiaoHongShu (Little Red Book) or finding novel ways and occasions to consume beverages. Always be open to learning, particularly from the local market, and don't underestimate the value of building strong relationships with partners. Above all, remain true to the brand's core values, but stay flexible to meet changing demands and a 'fluid environment'.



# Conor O'Sullivan

**China Manager  
Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board**

## FOOD AND DRINK

Conor has been supporting the growth of Irish companies in China for over a decade. He joined Bord Bia in Shanghai in 2016. Prior to this, he worked for Enterprise Ireland in Beijing. He holds a BCom International with Chinese from University College Cork.

### 1. What challenges and opportunities do you see for your sector in 2025. How are you planning to overcome or take advantage of them?

2024 wasn't easy. China's overall import demand for all the sectors we operate in dropped, as the market suffered a combination of oversupply and weaker demand. We saw a double-digit decline in Irish food and drink exports to China, though that masks strong growth for shellfish, whiskey, and certain dairy products. But, while few expect major improvements to the economic situation in China, there are reasons for more optimism in 2025.

The first is that in recent months, domestic production of dairy and meat has been stabilising. China's dairy, beef, and pork industries have been hemorrhaging increasingly severe losses for more than two years. They are cutting back on production, which should leave more space for imports this year, and possibly at improved prices.

Restaurants, retailers, and bar owners now fully understand the needs of a more value-conscious consumer. Business models have adapted, product demand has shifted, and the general sense is that those that have made it this far are no longer concerned about survival. Margins aren't coming back to their previous levels, admittedly, but Chinese food business operators seem more relaxed about their prospects for 2025.

In the same way, we have adapted. For some products, other markets offer better prices than China for commodities right now. But for products that have a strong value for money position, that can beat similarly priced competitors on quality, or where domestic production is limited, China remains a very strong market. In 2025, we will focus on working with our partners to develop higher value channels and applications for these products.

For us, the biggest wildcard is the potential for trade barriers. MOFCOM announced investigations into European pork, cheese, and cream over the summer, and in December announced one for all imported beef. We're still awaiting the results of these investigations, but should extra tariffs be introduced, it will of course be a challenge for the competitiveness of these products in China.

### 2. What initiatives do you see happening during the Year of the Snake in your sector to enhance sustainability?

Sustainability remains at the heart of the Irish food and drink industry. As we continue to work towards ambitious climate mitigation targets, we are driven to achieve sustainable growth that maximises market value and safeguards the environment.

A key nuance here is realising higher returns from what we already produce in Ireland, rather than seeking growth purely from higher levels of production. For our industry, that means adding value through product innovation, more advanced manufacturing processes, and channel optimisation.

Origin Green, our national food and drink sustainability programme, remains the cornerstone of maintaining Ireland's reputation on the world stage for verified, measurable, and transparent sustainability progress. In 2024, Bord Bia launched AgNav in partnership with Teagasc and the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation. AgNav has been created for Irish farmers, to support climate action and sustainability improvements on Irish farms. AgNav is a digital portal that leverages the animal and farm data already collected to provide farmers with personalised sustainability action plans. Driving adoption and bringing further improvements to this platform will be key in 2025.

Among a wide range of projects launched by our government, I think worth calling attention to DAFM's world-leading genotyping programme, launched 18 months ago. This aims to collect the genetic data of Irish dairy and beef cattle over five years, and combine that with already tracked data on each animal's health, productivity, and carbon efficiency. This would empower farmers to make informed breeding decisions, to optimise their herds with healthier, more carbon efficient cattle that can produce beef and dairy with a lower reliance on inputs.

Across these three programmes, it's clear that the collection and analysis of data is a critical step in improving the sustainability of Irish food and drink.

**3. Besides sector challenges, what's the biggest challenges you and your company face for 2025? How are you planning to address them?**

We need to dig deeper than before to find growth. It requires strong collaboration with our clients and their partners in China, and focus on a smaller number of categories and applications that really can deliver.

Deeper market insight will be the key to identifying the most promising use cases and customers for Irish ingredients. We're looking to engage more with companies further along the supply chain. And to explore opportunities in emerging areas like food for special medical purposes, food for health, new retail, or the ready-to-cook channel.

**4. How has the level of international interaction evolved for you and your business over the last year? Are you dealing more or less with foreign customers or suppliers or colleagues or visitors? How do you see this trending in 2025 especially considering the change in presidency in the United States?**

The visa free scheme has been a huge boon. Travel from Ireland is so much simpler, and we have seen a significant increase in the numbers of colleagues and clients visiting China. It's great to see the scheme extended and expanded, and I expect just as many visitors this year as well.

China is the world's biggest importer of dairy, meat, and seafood. What happens here has massive implications for world markets. The prospect of another US-China trade war has all eyes on these two countries. Our stakeholders are very keen to understand the potential impact on the Chinese economy and Chinese food demand.

In the reverse, another notable trend of the past year has been China's continued push to expand overseas. I firmly believe that the next generation of global food companies could well be Chinese. They certainly have both the capability and the ambition, and some of the big companies are already making strong inroads in Southeast Asia. For our clients, visiting China can increasingly help them to see new trends and business models firsthand before they emerge in their other markets.

**5. Do you see AI having an impact in your sector in 2025? What is your company doing to address AI? Do you see AI as a tool, a resource, or a replacement worker?**

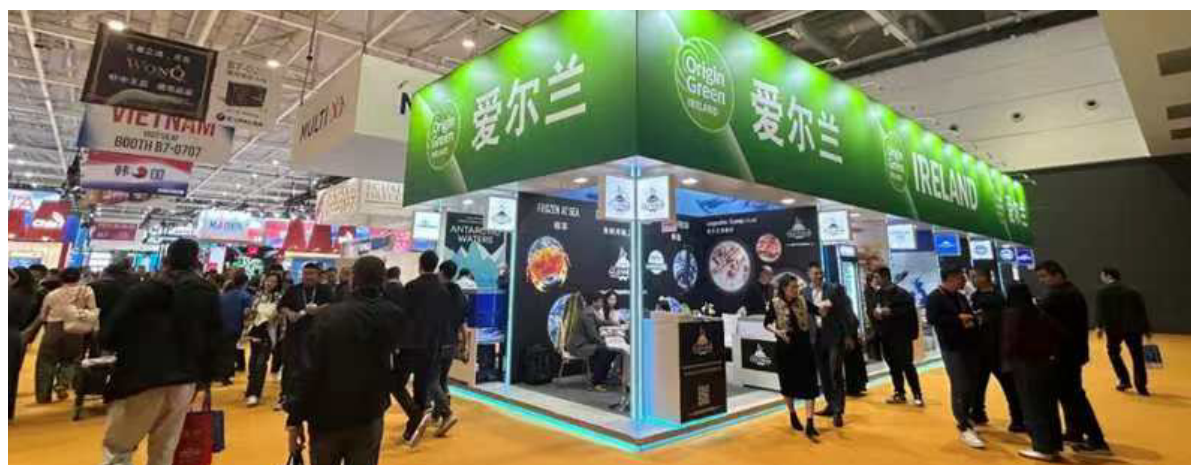
Across Bord Bia, we're already using AI tools like copilot. For now, they are very much a tool. But, as I hinted earlier, there is an enormous opportunity for data to inform improvements in Irish food and agriculture. We're exploring how to better collate and analyse data, and to integrate more real-time data. It's our aim to provide more timely insights for our industry, enabling them to be more responsive to changing global dynamics and customer demands. As part of that, we are seriously assessing how to best leverage AI. But we'll never lose the human touch. Our stakeholders continue to value our on-the-ground insights just as much as the reports we develop.

**6. What do you think we'll all be talking about in January 2026?**

I'm going to be cautiously optimistic. My sense is that we may be talking about improved economic prospects and mood within China this time next year. As I've said already, the prospects for Chinese food demand appear to be improving. More broadly, the Chinese government over the last few months has been implementing more direct measures to addressing the issue with consumer confidence that many believe is the key to getting things moving again. There's still plenty of money in Chinese bank accounts. The issue remains restoring the confidence to spend it. But it seems the will is there.

**7. What one piece of advice would you give to your younger self at the beginning of this new year of the snake?**

A reminder that things are always more nuanced than they first appear. It would have been easy over the past year to feel down about weaker demand in a stuttering economy. But, as we've dug deeper, we've found that there are still many opportunities for Irish food and drink. What's happening here cannot be summarised in a headline. And what I've witnessed from the Chinese food industry is that the key to success in these more challenging times is a willingness to adapt. Doing things the same way has not worked, but those that have responded to changing consumption have not just survived. They've thrived. It's harder work, but it gives me a lot of optimism.





Dea-rath oraibh do bhliain na nathair nimhe  
Happy New Year of the Snake  
蛇么都好



**The IRISH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE CHINA – ICCC**

Our mission is to represent and support the Irish business community in China in promoting, developing and maintaining business relations by providing access to information, resources and networking opportunities.

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