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# Delivering an Effective, Resilient and Sustainable EU-China Food Safety Partnership

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EU-China-Safe aims at reducing food fraud and improving food safety through focusing on improving food legislation, food inspection and increasing access to information across Europe and China. State-of-the-art technologies including a virtual laboratory will create a unique space to share and demonstrate best practice. The use of innovative technologies will result in improved detection of adulteration of food products as well as increased traceability and transparency of global supply chains.

The project runs from September 2017 to August 2021. It involves 33 partners and is coordinated by QUB (The Queen’s University of Belfast, UK).

More information on the project can be found at [www.euchinasafe.eu](http://www.euchinasafe.eu) (website in construction)

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<b>R</b>	Document, report (excluding the periodic and final reports)	R
<b>DEM</b>	Demonstrator, pilot, prototype, plan designs	
<b>DEC</b>	Websites, patents filing, press & media actions, videos, etc.	
<b>E</b>	Ethics	
<b>OTHER</b>	Software, technical diagram, etc.	

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<b>PU</b>	Public, fully open, e.g. web	PU
<b>CO</b>	Confidential, restricted under conditions set out in Model Grant Agreement	
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## 1. SUMMARY

This report will detail the actions taken during the project to promote EU-China cultural awareness.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Cultural awareness is of pivotal importance to the success of this project. For that reason, the Project Management Board (PMB) is composed of the EU coordinator (QUB), the Chinese coordinator (CFSA), work package leaders (Nofima, arc-net, WU, Teagasc, FERA and VSCHT) and their Chinese deputies. The PMB represents the highest level of decision making within the consortium and will take the decisions required to keep the project focused on its objectives. The consortium is aware that each culture not only differs due to language and expression but that it also has its own set of standards including ethics, behaviour and etiquette. Being unaware of these may lead to communication difficulties and thus impede the success of any collaboration. The project is designed to exploit new technologies and methodologies in the food safety control system and relies on substantial technical/scientific knowledge transfer between a wide range of EU and China actors, however, it is important to extend that to include organisational culture and social knowledge. Successful knowledge assimilation and dissemination depends not only on an understanding of the culture and behaviour of its people but also the political system concerned.

## 3. IMPLEMENTATION OF CULTURAL AWARENESS WITHIN THE PROJECT

East-West cultural aspects were introduced to all PMB meetings and within QUB, a Chinese member of academic staff supported cultural awareness throughout the project. Additionally, QUB has a Chinese Culture Forum that aims to provide opportunities to anyone that would like to gain insights into contemporary Chinese culture, as well as the experiences of Chinese people living and working in Belfast. This is facilitated through a series of interactive talks from a range of invited speakers, both Queen's staff and students, as well as external guests as part of the Queen's Internationalisation agenda. This forum is a platform for ongoing exchange of ideas and sharing experiences of individuals who are interested in Chinese culture, contemporary or traditional, with an intention to understand better Chinese cultural products, practice and perspectives through intercultural dialogues. A Chinese culture programme has been running since 2015 and includes links to festivals, art, food, literature etc. <https://blogs.qub.ac.uk/mandarinchinese/chinese/chinese-culture-forum/>.



Throughout the project, it was important that dates of festivals and public holidays were noted so that trips were not booked over these periods. The Chinese New Year also referred to as the Lunar New Year or Spring Festival is the most significant holiday for those of Chinese heritage. Most Chinese businesses are closed for a week. The Lantern Festival signifies the end of the New Year celebrations.



Another festival we celebrated with our Chinese colleagues was the Mid-Autumn Festival, a thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest and is celebrated by friends and family who gather to pray for happiness, prosperity and good fortune. The celebrations include Lantern lighting, mooncake making and sharing, fireworks, family gatherings and meals, dragon dances, visiting friends and relatives and gift giving. Our Chinese colleagues shared mooncakes with us, a traditional Chinese pastry made from wheat flour and sweet stuffing, such as sugar and lotus seed powder. It is a symbol of family reunion, and the cake is traditionally cut into pieces that equal the number of people in the family. Eating mooncakes is the most common and representative tradition of the day.



Although Chinese cultural practices are very different to Western ones, many Chinese professionals have some experience working with westerners. Many have lived, studied and worked overseas before returning home therefore, some of the strict practices that may have existed in the past when collaborating with them, have been relaxed. However, it has been important to understand cultural nuances to ensure the success of this partnership.

Chinese values stem from Confucianism, emphasising the principles of patriotism, relationships, hierarchy, family and the importance of saving 'face'. Another concept critical to successful working partnerships is Guanxi, which refers to having trust and a strong relationship with someone and may involve moral obligations and exchanging favours. In China, relationships come before business therefore enormous emphasis must be placed on forming the right type of relationship with the right people in any sector. Relationships are not built overnight, the process needs time, consistency, face-time and an understanding of the expected outcomes. This can be highlighted by the fact that the first meeting to start a collaboration between EU and China to facilitate trade between the two continents was held four years prior to the start of this project and that it took two years to set up the project and make the bid. Therefore, it was expected that forging working relationships within the project consortium between European and Chinese partners



would take time. The fact that Professor Elliott and Professor Wu had already formed a strong working relationship during the early discussions, prior to and during the set-up of the project, that Professors Wall and Fanning had already established excellent links in China and because of the industry connections in place at the beginning of the project, all facilitated mutual respect, understanding and therefore progress in the project. Also critical in east-west relationships is that the Chinese partner must feel that they are dealing with a representative of equal seniority. By having joint coordinators and having WP leaders in Europe and deputy WP leaders in China, this was achieved.

### 3.1. COMMUNICATION

Good communication was key to the success of the project in terms of improving relationships and fulfilling the key objectives. To strengthen communications within the project consortium between European and Chinese participants, Dr Ting Lu was employed as Communications Officer by WP6 leader, Professor Jana Hajslova. Key tips for effective communication were to stick to the point, speak slowly and clearly using short sentences to avoid misunderstandings and mistakes. As in all professional settings, it was important to listen closely, show respect and empathy and pay attention to non-verbal cues. This is very important in Chinese culture as Chinese non-verbal communication speaks volumes and they rely on facial expression, tone of voice and posture to convey meaning or intention. It was also important to understand that most Chinese maintain an impassive expression when speaking and consider it disrespectful or confrontational to stare into another person's eyes unlike in Europe where this would be considered rude. Moreover, giving a straight 'no' to a question or request is highly offensive to the Chinese as it causes loss of face and damages the working relationship. Instead, use polite excuses or offer alternative suggestions or ideas.

One issue that we had at the beginning of the project was communicating via email. Very often after emailing our Chinese colleagues, we did not get a response. Initially to overcome this problem, Professor Wu was copied into the emails resulting in much better communication between WP partners. Following this, we learnt that actually the Chinese preferred another platform on which to communicate rather than email. This was WeChat, the largest social network in China, and one of the main ways people communicate in China. Therefore, European partners adopted this platform, although email was still used. This certainly improved communication within the project and proved an excellent tool to engage with consumers. The China National Centre for Food Safety Risk Assessment (CFSA) launched the first test-based WeChat mini-program "Whether you are suitable to use the kitchen" in China in May 2018, with the theme of Five Keys to Safer Food. This was a huge success. In addition to using this platform for more effective communications, the EU-China-Safe bilingual website, [www.euchinasafe.eu](http://www.euchinasafe.eu), was set-up and regularly maintained and updated with the information about progress in the project activities. Specific pages on individual WPs progress reports were designed to show case how the project was progressing every 6 months. The intranet tool was regularly maintained to serve as a repository of documents and data sharing for the project partners. Other useful apps employed to show case the project were Weibo (similar to Twitter) and Youku (similar to YouTube).



YOUKU 优酷

### 3.2. GREETINGS AND MEETINGS

At the onset of the project, when meeting the Chinese participants, it was important, as with all new collaborators/partners to use formal greeting and handshakes and be punctual. People were greeted using their formal titles. It was also important to follow the etiquette with regard to business cards as these are



considered key in initial introductions and an important symbol. Business cards should be offered and accepted with both hands and with the text facing the recipient. They should not be written on or placed in pockets during the meeting, but rather arranged on the table. Having some basic knowledge of Chinese history and the political, economic, and social challenges that the country faces is helpful when building rapport as is asking about family and other matters. Moreover, meetings over coffee or lunch greatly help in strengthening working relationships.

For conferences or workshop flyers, if photographs of keynote and other speakers are to be included only colour photographs should be used. The Chinese use black and white to memorise the dead.

Consortium meetings provided the opportunity to share east-west culture and strengthen working relationships within and between work packages.

### **Kick-off meeting held at Teagasc, Dublin, Ireland, 27-29 September 2017**



### **EU-China-Safe 2nd Annual Consortium Meeting & ASSET 2018, 31 May - 1 June 2018, Belfast, UK**

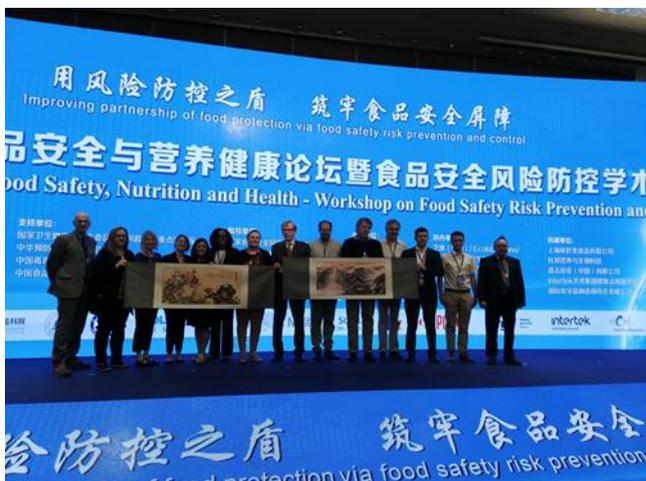




**EU-China-Safe 3rd Annual Consortium Meeting, 21-22 May 2019 Beijing, China**



**First International Forum on Food Safety and Nutrition - Risk Prevention and Control in Food Chain, 23 May 2019, Jinan, Shangdong, China**





Review Meeting, 20 June 2019, Brussels, Belgium



## EU-China-Safe Open Day at RAFA 2019, 6-7 November 2019, Prague, Czechia



Artists capturing presentations/discussions in real-time during workshops or conferences was used by our Chinese colleagues at Global Understanding of Food Fraud: Towards Global Action for Prevention and Mitigation of Food Fraud, October 30-31, 2017, Hilton hotel, Chaoyang, Beijing. Although this event was not organised by the EU-China-Safe consortium, many of its members attended and gave keynote speeches. The art is a unique way to record the key messages, recommendations and conclusions.



### 3.3. SOCIAL GATHERINGS

Increased interactions during the project through consortium meetings held in Europe and China, teleconferences and email/WeChat, all enhanced and strengthened an understanding of Chinese culture. However, the most successful way to build relationships is through socialising and entertainment including dinners, golf, drinks and social excursions.

During the lifetime of the project, the consortium attended many dinners together. Dinner etiquette includes being punctual, hierarchy extends to the dinner table in that, the most senior person is served first and will generally eat first. Most banquet dinners are served as a series of shared dishes. Chopsticks should not be tapped on the table, when taking a break they should be laid on the chopstick holder rather than resting on or sticking out of the bowl. They should never be left stuck in the food as this is considered rude and should never be crossed to form a X shape as this has connotations around death. As a sign of respect, it is important to try a little of each dish, demonstrate that you are enjoying the food and do not eat too much rice when it is served at the end of the meal as this would be construed that the meal was not satisfactory. Also, if you have had enough to eat, leave a small portion of food in the dish, otherwise the Chinese will keep filling the dish. This is because in China, an empty plate signals unsatisfied hunger and indicates that the host did not prepare enough food.

#### Banquet at Beijing Grand Gongda Jianguo Hotel (Beijing, China)



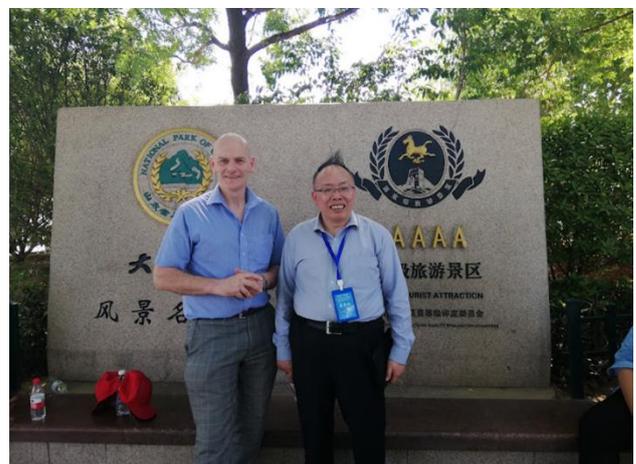
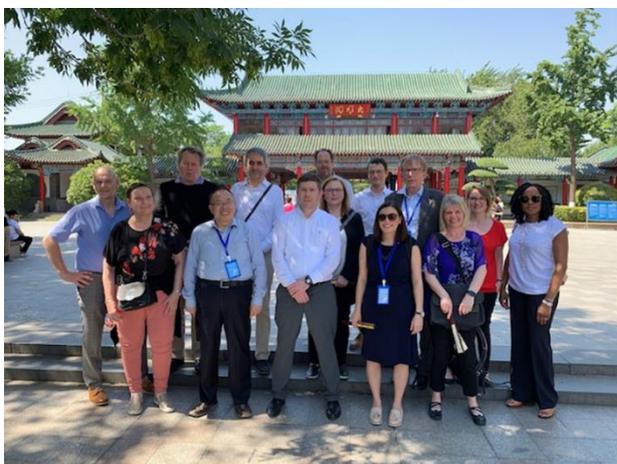
Drinking is an integral part of the culture that continues to thrive. Unlike the West's freestyle way of drinking, the Chinese's is more controlled, highly ritualised and purposeful. Successful collaborations are commonly accomplished with alcohol and social gatherings and regular dinners are not complete without rounds of drinks. For banquets and business dinners, the beverage of choice is Baijiu (sorghum wine), a fiery vodka-like liquor that can be as strong as 60% alcohol by volume.



Baijiu, commonly used for toasting at Chinese Dinners. Snake wine, made from venomous snakes and alcoholic rice wine. It is thought of as medicinal liquor and has been consumed since the Western Zhou dynasty (1046-771 BC).

When toasting, a general rule of thumb is to wait until the host offers the first toast and then reciprocate, but one should be prepared for a night of drinking, as it is considered rude to toast only one person and neglect others. Those unaccustomed to drinking may wish to declare at the outset of a banquet that they do not drink, as drinking too much can cause one to lose face. Gānbēi is the equivalent of saying cheers in English, however it is literally translated as “dry glass”, therefore it is expected that one finishes their drink after the toast. Whoever proposes a toast is expected to finish his/her glass and it extremely rude to refuse a drink after someone toasts you.

Once the Jinan conference had finished, our colleagues arranged a trip to Daming Lake. It is the largest lake in the city of Jinan, Shandong Province, China and one of city's main natural and cultural landmarks. Located to the north of the historical city centre, the lake is fed by the artesian karst springs of the area and hence retains a fairly constant water level through the entire year. The lake is surrounded by a park with an ensemble of historical buildings, some of which stand on the islands in the lake.





### 3.4. VISITS BY EXPERTS

Visits by experts between the EU and China to facilitate the transfer of methodologies also played a central role in supporting cultural awareness throughout the project. Dr Di Wu, Yangtze Delta Region Institute of Tsinghua University visited Queen's University Belfast from 3-15 December 2019 to transfer LC-MS quantification method for alpha-lactalbumin/Beta-lactoglobulin and Nitrogen-rich compound screening database for dairy products (WP3). Furthermore, Dr Di Wu has returned to Queen's University Belfast for two years on a prestigious Newton Scholarship. This is an international collaboration to develop a 2-tier system (spectrometry and spectroscopy) for tea authenticity, thereby continuing and strengthening research between the EU and China.



#### 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As described, during the project, many actions were taken to ensure EU-China cultural awareness. For the European partners there is a much greater understanding of how to build and maintaining fruitful working relationships with our Chinese partners. The most important aspects of Chinese culture that one should be aware of when trying to establish links in the country are that understanding relationships (Guanxi), hierarchy and face are essential and can have a significant impact (either positive or negative) on partnerships going forward. Chinese communication styles and values, such as outward humility and a sense of community need to be understood and through socialising and entertainment, deeper, stronger working relationships will be forged.