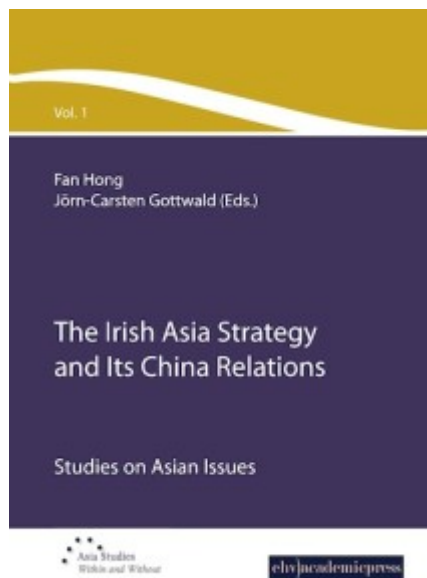


Sha Hailin - Foreword ~ The Irish Asia Strategy and Its China Relations 1999-2009



This book is a product of a conference held in University College Cork in June 2007 on *China in the 21st Century: Culture, Politics, Business* organised by Irish Institute of Chinese Studies and its Director, Prof. Fan Hong.

It was a great honour and pleasure for me to speak at the conference and I felt very happy and excited to be back in Ireland, my second home that I miss so much since I returned to Shanghai in 2005. My sincere thanks go to University College Cork and Cork City Council for their kind invitation and hospitality. Both organisations have made many constructive efforts to promote bilateral relations between China and Ireland and for this I am extremely grateful. Serving as the Ambassador of China to Ireland for over three years (2002-2005), I was proud to witness and promote personally the development of friendly links between the two countries. The conclusion of the *Sister City Agreement* between Shanghai and Cork was a particular highlight of my time in Ireland.

Since I have returned to China, I still pay close attention to Sino-Ireland relations. I was glad to see my initiative, the agreement on Mutual Recognition of Academic Degrees between China and Ireland, signed in 2006. In 2007, I originated the Irish week and St. Patrick's Day parade in Shanghai, which was the first ever held in China and continues to this day.

As well as speaking at the conference, I led a delegation from Shanghai. The conference was interesting as it not only explored China in the context of Ireland

and the European Union, but was itself a manifestation of the welcome increased focus on the People's Republic of China (and on Asia) in Ireland over the past decade. This was initiated with the Irish Government's Asia Strategy in the 1990s and strengthened by high level delegations to each country. These are mirrored by increasing contacts at all levels and none more so than in Cork, through its Sister City relationship with Shanghai. Since then, these relationships have grown, helped by initiatives such as the establishment of the Irish Institute of Chinese Studies by University College Cork in 2006 and the establishment of the Confucius Institute in UCC in 2007 in partnership with Shanghai University and the Chinese Government.

This book illuminates the context within which these initiatives have developed and provides a platform for further inquiry and, most importantly action, in order to bring about more positive developments for both China and Ireland as their relationship develops.

I congratulate Prof. Fan Hong and her team on both a stimulating conference and on this very fine publication.

Dr. Sha Hailin

Former Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Ireland (Dr. Sha Hailin is now the Deputy Secretary General of Shanghai Municipal Government)