

# AN OVERVIEW OF MAJOR LAW FIRM MOVEMENTS IN CHINA (2025)

S|S|Q



Legal Market, Legal Talent



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*SSQ has collected and analyzed key movement data across different types of law firms operating in China in 2025, including major lateral partner moves, office openings and closures, and law firm merger and alliance activity.*

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## SUMMARY

In 2025, after two-year adjustment following the COVID-19 pandemic, China's legal market entered a phase of stable sentiment but with increased differentiation. In areas such as individual partner moves, law firm geographic coverage, and institutional consolidation, the market exhibited more rational allocation of existing resources and cautious growth in investment; the previously prolonged contraction trend slowed significantly.

At the individual partner level, the overall scale of partner movement declined compared to the previous year, but the lateral destinations and talent structure remained stable. Partner mobility was still primarily driven by lateral moves among Chinese law firms. The dispute resolution practice continued to attract the most talent in mainland China. The Hong Kong stock market has been highly active in the year, directly impacting talent allocation in this area and leading to a rebound in capital markets partner movements; it also spurred investment and talent turnover in related transaction areas.

In terms of law firm geographic coverage, the pace for foreign law firms in China slowed significantly compared to 2024, with a decrease in the number of office closures. Simultaneously, the number of new offices set up by foreign law firms rebounded, and the number of Sino-foreign joint operations officially approved in China also increased again. Chinese law firms continue expanding both domestically and internationally, steadily deepening their international networks, particularly around key local jurisdictions in Asia.

Inter-firm consolidation in the Greater China region fully reflects the current structural trend in the global legal arena, with landmark pan-Asia splits and tie-ups. Cooperations and alliances between Chinese and foreign law firms remain active and deepening: Chinese firms are committed to building cross-border abilities, while foreign firms continue their localization efforts to enhance market influence and service capability among local clients.

Looking ahead to 2026, market adjustments will become more rational and stable. Changes in individuals, institutions, and cooperation models will aim for better collaboration and efficiency, moving towards more sustainable development.

## CONTACT SSQ

If you would like to discuss on this report, please contact one of the following SSQ consultants, or your usual SSQ liaison.



**Cherry Zhang**

cherry.zhang@ssq.com  
+86 134 3654 4822



**Betty Chen**

betty.chen@ssq.com  
+86 138 1086 7220



**Shawn Chen**

shawn.chen@ssq.com  
+852 9886 0819

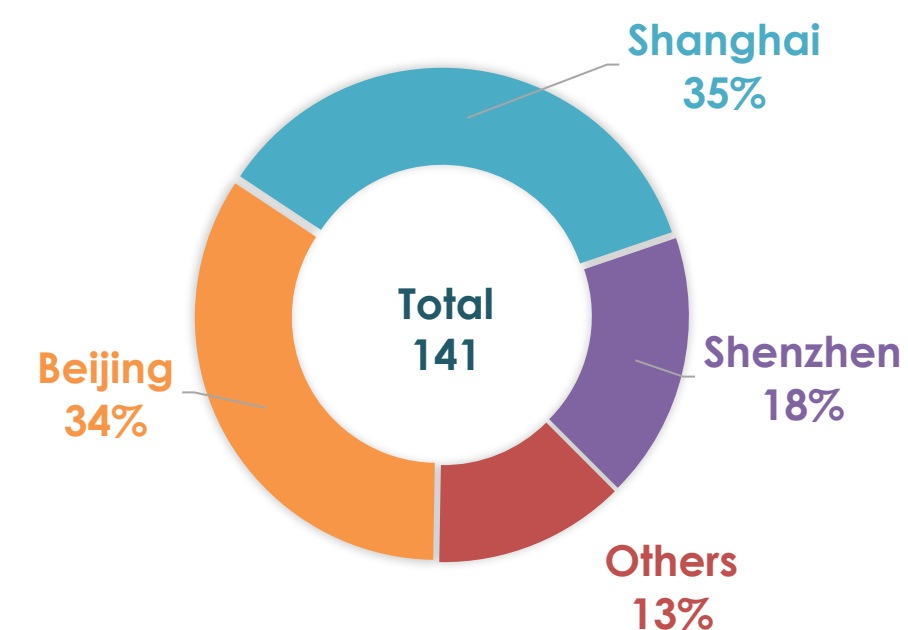


## LATERAL MOVES

### *Number of Moves and Location*

In 2025, SSQ recorded 141 lateral partner moves in mainland China, with activity distributed across cities as set out below.

Total number of Partner moves in 2025	Beijing	Shanghai	Shenzhen	Others
141	48	50	25	18



The total number of partner moves in 2025 decreased slightly compared to 2024 (from 171 to 141), but the market did not show a significant cooling. Partner turnover in 2025 did not experience a concentrated surge, with an average monthly turnover of approximately 12 individuals, evenly distributed throughout the year. Notably, partner movement exhibited a stronger rational characteristic - shifting from the previous “rapid switching” driven by short-term opportunities to a more deliberate selection based on platform fit, client structure, and long-term development path.



## LATERAL MOVES

### *Institution Types and Lateral Hire Destinations*

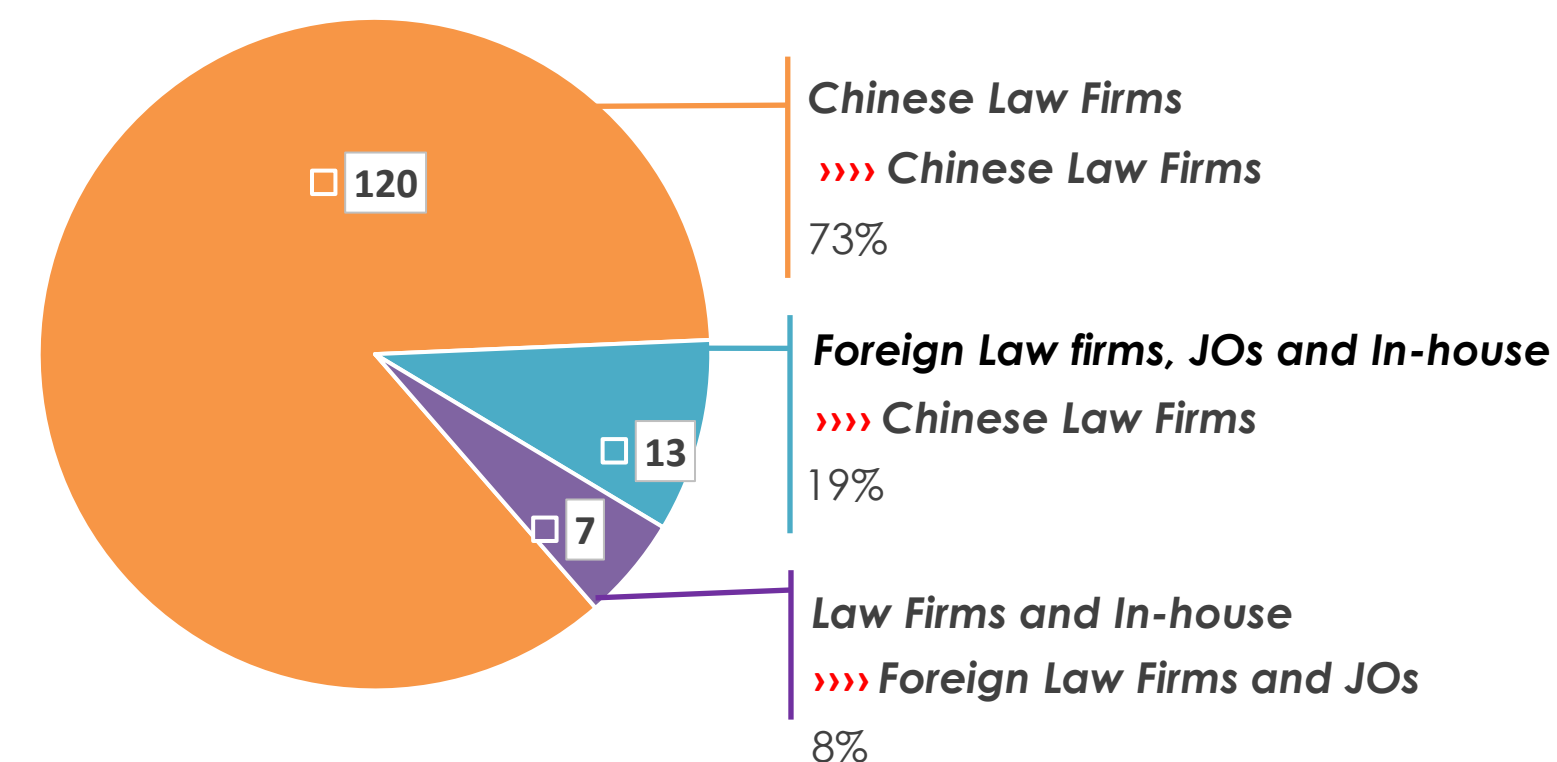
From a destination perspective, partner movement in China's legal market in 2025 displayed a clear and stable pattern. Chinese law firms continued to be the primary recipients of partner movement, while international law firms and Sino-foreign joint operations ('JOs') accounted for only a limited share.

Of the 141 partner moves in 2025, 133 partners joined Chinese law firms, compared with 6 joining international law firms and 1 joining a joint operation firm. Partners moving to PRC law firms were absorbed by different types of Chinese platforms, including leading elite firms, large full-service firms, and specialized boutiques, underscoring the continued ability of domestic firms to attract partner talent across different market segments.

Deprived Firm Type \ Hiring Firm Type	Chinese law firms	Foreign law firms	Joint Operations	In-house	Total number of moves (in)
Chinese law firms	120	7	2	4	133
Foreign law firms	0	6	0	0	6
China-foreign JOs	0	1	0	0	1
In-house	0	1	0	0	1
<b>Total number of moves (out)</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>141</b>

From a source perspective, most partners moving into Chinese law firms came from other Chinese firms, with only a small number originating from international firms, China-foreign alliances, or in-house, government, and judicial roles. This confirms that the dominant pattern of partner movement in 2025 remained lateral re-allocation within the Chinese law firm circle, while cross-type moves played a more supplementary role.

Overall, both the destination and source profile of partner movement in 2025 remained highly stable. The data points to increasingly planned and rational decision-making, focused on platform fit, business coordination, and long-term certainty, rather than any structural shift in the lateral directions.

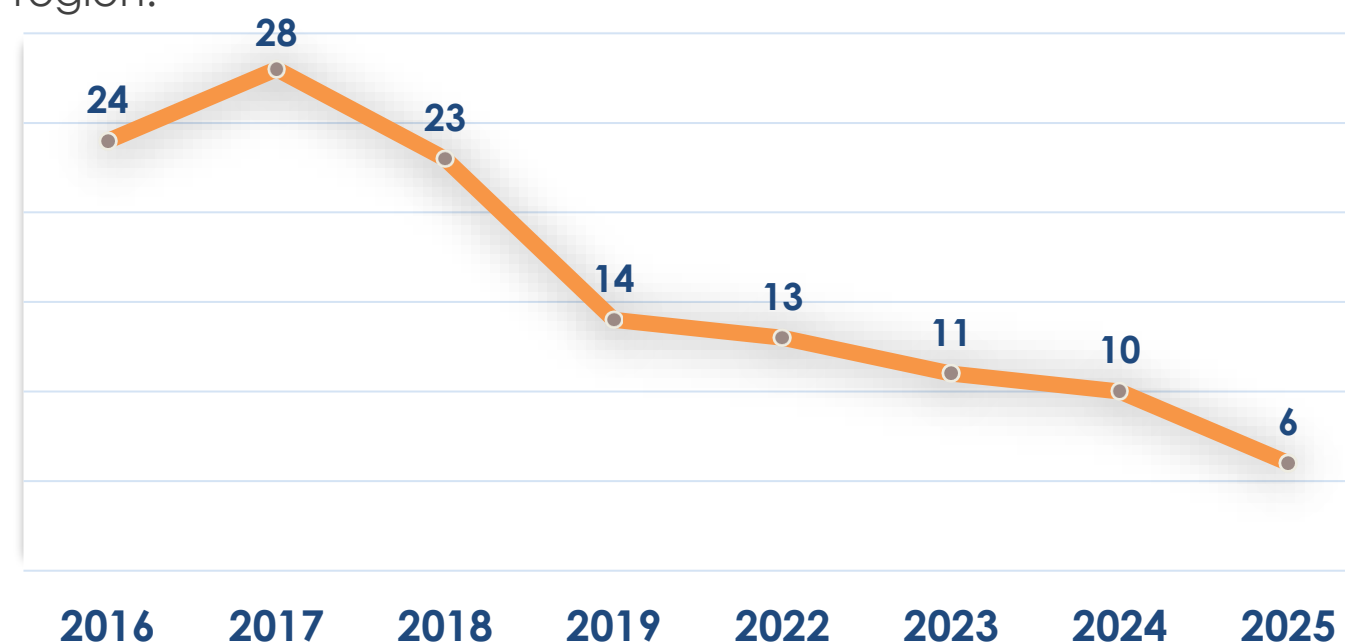


## LATERAL MOVES

### *Foreign Law Firms in Mainland and Hong Kong*

Based on SSQ's historical data, the number of partners hired by international law firms in mainland China continued to decline in 2025.

From a time-series perspective, foreign firms' partner hiring has followed a sustained downward trend in China, falling from peak levels in 2016-2018 (around 20-30 hires/year) to just 6 hires in 2025. This change reflects the gradual adjustment of foreign law firms' regional focus and layout within the Greater China region.



At the same time, lateral hires by international law firms in Hong Kong remained very active, particularly in capital markets, cross-border transactions, and international arbitration areas. Overall, international law firms appear to be rebalancing their Greater China strategies through a more streamlined mainland presence supported by a stable Hong Kong-based team.

Year	Number of partner hires by foreign law firms in mainland China	Number of partner hires by foreign law firms in Hong Kong
2025	6	44
2024	10	41
2023	11	55



## LATERAL MOVES

### *Chinese Law Firms in Hong Kong*

Chinese law firms stepped up partner hiring in Hong Kong in 2025. During the year, 10 Chinese firms hired a total of 28 partners in Hong Kong, a sharp increase from 8 hires in 2024 and 6 in 2023, both in the number of firms recruiting and the overall volume of hires.

The firm types they hired from also shifted. Of the 28 partners hired in 2025, 22 came from international law firms, with the remainder drawn from Hong Kong firms, Chinese firms, in-house roles, and China-foreign JOs. By contrast, partner hiring in Hong Kong by Chinese firms in 2024 was largely limited to lateral moves within the Chinese law firm circle, while overall hiring activity by PRC firms in Hong Kong in 2023 remained modest (6 recorded only).

Taken together, the data suggests that Hong Kong is playing a more central role in Chinese law firms' talent strategies, particularly as these firms look to strengthen cross-border capabilities and international-facing platforms.

Number of Partner Hires by Chinese Law Firms in Hong Kong						
Deprived Firm Type (No of Firms)Year	Chinese Law Firm	Foreign Law Firm	In-house	China-foreign JOs	Hong Kong Law Firm	Total
(10) 2025	1	22	1	1	3	28
(4) 2024	5	0	1	1	1	8
(5) 2023	1	4	1	0	0	6

## LATERAL MOVES

### *Practice Areas*

A breakdown of the 141 lateral partner hires in mainland China by main practice areas is as follows:

Practice Areas	Number of Partner Moves in 2025
Dispute Resolution	45
Corporate / M&A	21
Capital Markets	13
IP	12
Banking Finance	12
Regulatory / Compliance	9
Tax / Private Wealth	6
Bankrupt / Restructuring	6
Criminal	6
Real Estate / Property	4
Anti-trust / Competition	4
Projects / Infrastructure	1
Data	1
Life Sciences	1

By practice area, partner movements in mainland China in 2025 showed more clearly differentiated patterns against the backdrop of an overall decline in activity. While some practice areas became more active, others entered a period of adjustment.

Dispute resolution remained the most concentrated area for partner hires, with 45 moves recorded in 2025. Although this represented a decline from 2024, it continued to lead all practice areas by a clear margin. This is closely related to factors such as the obvious increase in the number of dispute resolution cases in recent years and the high dependence of the business on personal branding.

In the capital markets area, partner moves increased from 9 in 2024 to 13 in 2025, making it one of the few practices to record growth amid overall slowdown in large-ticket transactions. This trend was directly linked to the continuously booming capital market in Hong Kong. With the increasing number and faster pace of IPOs, refinancing, and related compliance projects, the differences between law firms in areas such as cross-border collaboration, team support and execution capabilities have become more pronounced. This has prompted some partners to reconsider their career choices based on the capacity and long-term suitability of different law firm platforms.

By contrast, corporate and M&A as well as IP practices experienced a noticeable cooling in 2025, likely reflecting a digestion phase following earlier periods of more active adjustment. Banking and finance, regulatory and compliance, tax and private wealth areas remained relatively stable, pointing to stronger client continuity and platform resilience.

Overall, partner lateral moves by practice areas in 2025 reflected a rational reallocation shaped by market cycles, levels of business activity and differences among law firm platforms.



## OPENINGS AND CLOSURES

### *Foreign Law Firms and Joint Operations*

Institution Names	Opening Location
Appleby	Shenzhen
Pinsent Masons	Shenzhen
Taylor Wessing	Shenzhen
Clifford Chance Heping Joint Operation	Shanghai
Freshfields Ruimin Joint Operation	Shanghai
Norton Rose Fullbright SPL Joint Operation	Shanghai

In 2025, the number of new set-ups by international law firms in mainland China increased markedly compared with the previous year. A total of 6 new entities opened doors during the year, doubling the number recorded in 2024, with 3 established through China-foreign joint operation arrangements.

These newly established entities have shown a clearer strategy in terms of both set-up location and legal routes: they are mainly concentrated in cities such as Shanghai and Shenzhen where cross-border business and capital market activities are more active; meaning while, they pay more attention to localization.

Overall, the contraction of foreign law firms in China slowed significantly in 2025, with some seeking to expand within specific areas. This shift indicates that foreign law firms have not diminished their involvement in the China market but rather are continuously optimizing their organizational structure and resource allocation there.

In 2025, 9 foreign law firms closed 9 offices in mainland China (one office closed per firm), a significant drop from the record high of 12 firms closing a total of 16 offices in 2024.

Compared to the previous year, the number of office closures in China in 2025 no longer represents a new abnormal peak. This indicates that after a period of rapid decision-making, the management teams of many international law firms have gradually completed their phased assessment of the China market and Asia operations, formulating and implementing a new development strategy for the region.

Institution Names	Closing Location
Fenwick & West	Shanghai
Morgan, Lewis & Bockius	Shenzhen
Cleary Gottlieb	Beijing
Wilson Sonsini	Beijing
Winston & Strawn	Shanghai
Seyfarth Shaw	Shanghai
Taylor Wessing	Beijing
Cuatrecasas	Beijing
K&L Gates	Beijing

## OPENINGS AND CLOSURES

### *Chinese Law Firms – Domestic Openings*

Institution Names	Opening Location
JunHe	Chongqing
Global Law Office	Suzhou
AllBright Law Offices	Harbin
Commerce & Finance	Chongqing
Tahota Law Firm	Qingdao and Suzhou
JunZeJun Law Firm	Guiyang
T&C Law Firm	Wuhan
DeHeng Law Offices	Hohhot
China Commercial Law Firm	Jining
Hylands Law Firm	Shijiazhuang

In 2025, Chinese law firms accelerated the pace of domestic office expansion. Multiple firms opened new offices across a broad range of regional and provincial hub cities, including Chongqing, Wuhan, Suzhou, Qingdao, Fuzhou, Tianjin, Guiyang, Shijiazhuang, Urumqi, and Harbin. Several firms also pursued multi-city expansion strategies within the same year.

Compared with 2024 when new offices were largely concentrated in second- and third-tier cities, the 2025 expansion reflected greater diversity in city selection. While the move toward deeper regional coverage continued, firms also increasingly targeted cities with stronger economic activity and higher levels of industry concentration.

These developments suggest that against a more rational market backdrop, Chinese law firms are continuing to pursue selective expansions that are aligned with their client demand and practice synergy.

Institution Names	Opening Location
Starrise Law Firm	Wuhan
ETR Law Firm	Urumqi
V&T Law Firm	Taiyuan
Grandway Law Offices	Suzhou
Jotai Law Firm	Chongqing
Yenlex Partners	Shenzhen
TsingLaw Partners	Tianjin
Hiways Law Firm	Fuzhou
Zhong Wen Law Firm	Shijiazhuang and Urumqi
Joint-win Partners	Chongqing
King & Win Law Firm	Shanghai



## OPENINGS AND CLOSURES

### *Chinese Law Firms – Overseas Openings*

In 2025, Chinese law firms continued to advance their overseas expansion. Multiple firms established new offices across key jurisdictions in Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia, Europe, Oceania and the Americas, indicating that their pace of globalization has remained steady.

Asia continued to be the primary focus, with new offices opened in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Dubai. This pattern reflects sustained demand driven by Chinese companies' outbound investment and regional trade activity.

At the same time, Chinese law firms maintained a presence in major global hubs for finance, technology, and cross-border investment, including London, Silicon Valley, Melbourne, and Panama.

Compared with 2024, overseas office openings in 2025 showed a more targeted and business-led approach. Firms continued to deepen their footprint in Asia and other emerging markets, while maintaining visibility in core cross-border jurisdictions, signaling a shift toward more business-focused and client-driven internationalization strategy.

Institution Names	Opening Location
Hui Zhong Law Firm	Singapore
Winteam500	Malaysia
DeHeng Law Offices	Melbourne
Han Kun Law Offices	Silicon Valley
Tiantai Law Firm	Malaysia
Tahota Law Firm	Pakistan and Kazakhstan
Anli Partners	Dubai
DHH Law Firm	Indonesia and London
Joint-win Partners	Indonesia
Landing Law Office	Kyrgyzstan
China Commercial Law Firm	Kazakhstan
Brighteous Law Firm	Thailand
Guantao Law Firm	Tashkent
Sundial Law Firm	Dubai
Lantai Partners	Panama

## MERGERS AND ALLIANCES

In 2025, consolidation among large international law firms continued globally. Soon after the HSF-Kramer merger officially completed, two more transatlantic combination news shook the business and legal worlds: Hogan Lovells and the long-established New York firm, Cadwalader, agreed on a merger plan at the year-end; just a month earlier, Ashurst (UK) and Perkins Coie (US) also announced their upcoming tie-up.

In Asia, 2025 witnessed a landmark breakup: King & Wood (China) and Mallesons (Australia) announced their formal separation; but almost simultaneously, international law firm Dentons announced a joint venture with Chinese firm Dacheng in Hong Kong – just 2 years after the two firms cut their formal ties in 2023. As the Chinese saying goes, what is united for a long time will divide, and what is divided for a long time will unite.

At the local level, law firm mergers and joint ventures in 2025 continued to be led by Chinese law firms, primarily serving their international development needs. These mergers and joint ventures mainly revolved around Hong Kong and other important Asian jurisdictions, taking the form of strategic cooperation and brand integration. This reflects the continued investment and long-term planning of Chinese law firms in building their cross-border service capabilities.

Overall, mergers and alliances among law firms in Asia and China in 2025 extend and deepen the structural reorganization taking place in the global legal market. Against this backdrop, Chinese law firms are steadily seeking international expansion through more flexible cooperation models.

Law Firm A	Law Firm B
King & Win Law Firm	Robinsons (Hong Kong)
DeHeng Law Offices	KHQ Lawyers (Australia)
Jincheng Tongda & Neal	Chen Peter Law Office (Hong Kong)
ETR Law Firm	Ling & Lawyers (Hong Kong)
Docvit Law Firm	LOONG & YEUNG (Hong Kong)
Zhong Yin Law Firm	Charles & Wilson (Hong Kong)
WeiHeng Law Firm	Tan Norizan & Associates (Malaysia)
Dacheng Law Offices	Dentons Hong Kong



## SSQ Asia Offices

**Beijing:** 28/F, China World Office 1, 1 Jianguomenwai Avenue, Beijing  
+86 10 5737 9898

**Shanghai:** 7/F, Tower 2, JingAn Kerry Centre, 1539 Nanjing Road (West), Shanghai  
+86 21 5117 5895

**Hong Kong:** 12/F, Two Chinachem Central, 26 Des Voeux Road Central, Hong Kong  
+852 3626 9155

**Singapore:** Level 19, Singapore Land Tower, 50 Raffles Place, Singapore 048623  
+65 6632 3576

**Email:** [ssq.china@ssq.com](mailto:ssq.china@ssq.com)

**Website:** [www.ssq.com](http://www.ssq.com)

[www.ssqAsia.com](http://www.ssqAsia.com)