



Shaping the National Foundation for Australia-China relations.

The Asian Studies Association of Australia is pleased to be able to contribute to shaping the National Foundation for Australia-China relations. The ASAA (est. 1976) is the peak body of university educators and experts on Asia in Australia. For over 4 decades the ASAA has promoted and supported the study of Asia in Australia. Our membership is drawn mainly from academics and research students but also includes industry and government Asia experts. We provide commentary to the broader public through our bulletin [Asian Currents](#) as well as specialist academic research papers through our journal [Asian Studies Review](#). Our biennial conferences provide forums for collaboration and knowledge dissemination—our 2018 conference hosted by the University of Sydney attracted nearly 1000 delegates.

The ASAA has sustained interest in (1) promoting Australian knowledge of China, (2) attracting top-quality scholars and students dedicated to understanding China to Australian universities from around the globe, (3) the delivery of top quality Chinese language courses throughout the Higher Education sector, (4) the production of world-leading research on China with an Australian perspective. ASAA members have been active participants in the Australia-China Council's past programs as grant recipients but also as members on ACC Board (vis. Professor John Fitzgerald, Professor Wang Gung-wu and Professor Kam Louie who have also served on the ASAA Executive).

We note **the National Foundation for Australia-China Relations' stated** aims to deepen relations with China in four key areas and hope that the ASAA, as well as Australian based researchers of China, will be at the centre of each of these efforts.

In the first targeted area of “promoting practical cooperation”, ACC grants and seed funding have previously provided opportunities for Australian based researchers of China for new research and collaborations thereby deepening Australian knowledge and understanding of China. In this regard the ASAA hopes that the **humanities, arts and cultural components** of the Australia-China bilateral relationship will be expanded in the National Foundation for Australia-China Relations. Chinese partners, be they business, government or technology oriented, appreciate knowing that Australians value and take time to invest in understanding China's rich culture and history. Nurturing Australian humanities and social science expertise on China is integral to building a mature and respectful relationship that goes beyond instrumentalist transactionalism.

In the second targeted area of “leadership exchange by convening major dialogues and events”, we believe that visiting fellowships both for China based scholars to come to Australia and Australian based scholars of China to go to China would be an excellent means of creating sustained dialogue and collaboration. We emphasise that intellectual freedom is also a core component of meaningful academic dialogue. Further to this academics from both countries should be better connected with journalists and policy makers. The existential challenge facing Australia as a result of the tensions between our strong ties to the USA and China's rising economic and strategic power requires the nurturing of a rich ecosystem of Australian experts on China's society and politics to inform our policy-makers. Currently, the sensational views from media commentators motivated by sales, clicks or views, impacts not

only the quality of our policy settings but also risks harming our bilateral relationship. A National Foundation program that **connects policy leaders directly with academic experts in contemporary China** would be beneficial.

In the third targeted area of “showcasing the best of Australia through a range of soft power tools, helping to present a positive image of Australia in China” we believe that showcasing a depth of knowledge about Chinese society is essential. This requires investment in language competency. Promoting **learning of Chinese languages** by Australian students in schools and universities and community groups is crucial to the strength of the bilateral relationship—monolingualism in the leadership of Australian government and business has limited our capacity to advance our national interests in the Asian region. As **multi-faceted intra-Asian ties grow with speed** unmediated by English, Australia risks being side-lined from important conversations in our region. To maintain our relevance as a relatively small population within this dynamic and interconnected region, we need to nurture a phalanx of multi-lingual Chinese-speaking Australians. Our goal as a nation should be to have “at least one Asian language” in key negotiating teams working in the Asian region.

The Australian university, VET and school systems all benefit the Australian economy through our provision of education services to large numbers of Chinese students. As the third largest export earner for Australia, education is central to our national well-being and China is, and will continue to be, the largest market well into the foreseeable future. Academics, teachers and administrators involved in the relationship with the **multi-faceted Chinese education market** can benefit further from access to expert Australia-oriented knowledge of China and Chinese languages in their work in international education course delivery, marketing and service provision. Many students from China study courses about China in Australian universities in order to learn about **the Australian perspective of their nation’s society, culture and history**. Nurturing Australia’s China expertise in the humanities and social sciences will simultaneously benefit this major export industry and advance Australia’s influence in China and the broader Asian region.

In the fourth targeted area of “positively engaging the Chinese-Australian community who are important advocates and stakeholders for the bilateral relationship through public programs, events and social media” we commend this outreach yet also think it is important to take into account the diversity of Chinese Australians. The mission statement of the Foundation should therefore reflect the fact that there is no single ‘Australian Chinese community’—rather, it should read ‘communities’. Chinese Australians do not all connect to the People’s Republic of China, nor do they all have identical political views or belief systems. Moreover, they speak multiple forms of Chinese, not necessarily privileging Mandarin Chinese. Engagement with Australians of Chinese ancestry would be most effective if the diversity of their migration experience is accounted for and their **familial, cultural and linguistic links to South East Asia** recognised explicitly. As major markets and cultural forces, Australia’s connections to the ASEAN nations could be enhanced through programs that show appreciation of the diversity of ‘Chineseness’.

On this note the ASAA hopes that the National Foundation will commit to including a **substantial number of Chinese Australians in its executive and advisory boards**. This will enhance the quality of the leadership exchanges that will emerge from the Foundation. It will also mitigate concerns still circulating in China that Australia has not been supportive of promoting non-white citizens to leadership positions. Inclusion of **Indigenous Australians** voices would also be important given the increasing interactions between China and Land Councils. Relationships with Australia’s domestic Chinese community will also be enhanced

if this new National Foundation reflects the diversity of our population within its leadership team.

The ASAA thanks the National Foundation for the opportunity to contribute to this important new initiative.

Prepared on behalf of the ASAA membership by the Council, June 28 2019