



2ND  
DECEMBER  
2022

# CONFERENCE REPORT

2022

## BUILDING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

Celebrating 50 Years of China-Australia Relations

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Asialink

30  
YEARS OF INSIGHTS  
CAPABILITIES  
& CONNECTIONS



Asialink is Australia's leading centre for creative engagement with Asia. They develop insights, capabilities and connections through our programs in the Arts, Business, Diplomacy and Education. Uniquely Australian, Asialink works with diverse communities in Australia and Asia to build a strong, shared future for all.



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

Chancellery International leads the University of Melbourne's international engagement, global networks and international strategy. The University aspires to become a hub of knowledge and research for the Asia Pacific region, to lead on grand challenges where we can make a significant contribution to the world, and develop centres of excellence that are global in reach, ambition and impact



The Centre for Contemporary Chinese Studies was established in the Asia Institute in the Faculty of Arts in 2013, with a focus on research and engagement. The Centre plays a vital role in shaping an Australian approach to the study of China and serves as a significant source of research-based information on China, Chinese societies and Chinese economies in the 21st century.



## Building the Future Together

To mark the occasion of 50 years of Australia-China diplomatic relations, Asialink, the Centre for Contemporary Chinese Studies, and Chancellery International at the University of Melbourne partnered to host a highly successful forum titled “Building the Future Together.” 50 years on, we looked back at a relationship that, despite its tensions, has helped bring prosperity to both countries.

The event was held at University House at Woodward on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December, 2022, and was preceded by a welcome dinner and business panel on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December. In total, 56 people attended the event.

The forum brought together twenty-four expert panellists across six subject areas: business, the environment, health, the arts, Southeast Asia and the wider region, and Chinese diaspora in Australia. Together, they looked to the coming era of Australia-China relations – as we move beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and with a new Australian government – and explored the many avenues for collaboration, innovation, and deeper understanding between our nations.

We’d like to thank all those who attended for sharing their time and profound knowledge with us. In particular, we’d like to thank our keynote speakers; Kevin Hobgood-Brown, Vice Chancellor Professor Duncan Maskell, Professor Michael Wesley, Assistant Foreign Minister Tim Watts, and Chinese Ambassador to Australia Xiao Qian.

### Key Takeaways

Although the panellists’ experiences of the Australia-China relationship were in vastly different fields, there were nevertheless common themes throughout their insights.

First of all, each panel emphasised that the people-to-people links between Australia and China are already incredibly strong. Australia and China constantly co-operate in the academic and commercial space. The Chinese diaspora in Australia and Australian expats in China perform a key role in building each nations’ perception of one-another. Despite geopolitical tensions, and even despite the barriers presented by COVID, the personal relationships between Australian and Chinese people are as warm as ever.

Participants constantly reiterated the importance of youth and education. Many people told stories of how experiences in their youth shaped their desire to engage in the bilateral relationship; learning from Australian teachers in China, travelling to Australia to study, sharing a sister-school partnership with a Chinese school, or collaborating through youth associations. Young people have the drive, curiosity, and desire to be active participants in Australia-China dialogue

However, it was consistently acknowledged that the language barrier remains a major obstacle to the relationship. Systemic and cultural factors act to discourage Australians from learning Asian languages. Building intercultural connection through art and people-to-people links can encourage more language learning – but there is also a need to review how languages are taught and marked in Australian high schools.

Finally, the public narrative on China in Australia is persistently negative. There is a deep need to engage media to challenge this narrative – while also explaining to China the importance of free media in Australia.

# Australia-China Business Collaboration

## Recommendations

- Encourage businesses to engage with government and civil society resources designed to empower them to engage with China, and ensure these resources are adequately supported.
- Incentivise technological development that addresses future issues China and the world are likely to face, such as automation and sustainable material production.
- Engage the media and the public to address the disproportionately negative narratives on China.



**Chair:** **Jene Liu**, Director, Commonwealth Private

**Speakers:** **Professor On Kit Tam**, RMIT University, **Virginia Birrell**, CEO, Australia China Business Council, Melbourne and Tasmania, **Kevin Hobgood-Brown**, Managing Director, HHK Advisory Pty Ltd

## Summary

Australia's and China's economies have become deeply interlinked over the past 50 years. The panellists noted that in 1999, a prediction from an ACBC report that two-way trade between Australia and China would triple over the next 10 years seemed unlikely – in fact, two-way trade grew by a factor of 9 in that time. This growth was primarily driven by the highly complementary economies of Australia and China, enabled by market-oriented reforms which have eliminated protectionist trade barriers. The complementary nature of our economies is unlikely to change in the near future.

However, the panellists noted that difficult narratives have inhibited the relationship. Almost all media articles of China present a negative picture, and some participants note that previous governments have taken a failed approach of public insults towards China. This negative narrative snowballs, encouraging further negative coverage – panellists noted that individuals and businesses are often scared to adopt China-positive stances in public. The panellists emphasised the importance of civil society in reconstructing the narrative, of moving beyond a ‘Fear and Greed’ relationship with China, and of communicating to China the importance of free press to Australia and the inability to control media narratives. The panellists saw the emergence of high-level dialogues between the two countries’ governments as an overwhelmingly positive step.

The panellists highlighted the importance of individual and institutional resources in enabling businesses to conduct business between the two nations such as Global Vic, ACBC, or the Melbourne Office Tianjin. It was noted that there is a lack of investment in China literacy, and that it is imperative that Australia build a self-sustaining cohort of China experts.

Many questions directed at the panellists asked about future trends in Australia-China relations. One such question related to China’s ageing population. Responses to this issue included the problematically low retirement age in China (60 for men, 50-55 for women), which China has begun to make efforts to raise; the importance of automation as a solution, and the opportunities for Australian technology in this space; the weak superannuation/pension system in China, to which Australia’s superannuation system may provide an alternative model; the future strain on health and retirement care, and the economic demands/opportunities that presents; and the prospect of India achieving an ageing demography in 30 years, with the possibility of China and India one day embracing immigrant populations. Another question to the panellists was on the possibility of the US Dollar being replaced by the Renminbi as the global reserve currency, to which the general response was that the Dollar was too big to be replaced. Finally, when asked about how climate change may alter the equation, the panellists mentioned the importance of finding the right combination of technology and market incentives to battle climate change. This includes the potential of Australia leveraging its competitive advantage in hydrogen fuel, and the potential use of this technology to produce greener steel in Australia.



# Environment, Water and Cooperation

## Recommendations

- Foster academic and commercial relationships, including at the student level, to enable fruitful exchange of ideas.
- Promote Australian experience in water management as a solution to water management issues in China and the wider region.
- Open new channels of communication and improve frameworks for collaborative delivery of disaster relief and development aid.



**Chair:** Dr Sarah Rogers, The University of Melbourne

**Speakers:** Professor Brett Bryan, Deakin University, Professor Q J Wang, The University of Melbourne, Associate Professor Jennifer Day, The University of Melbourne

## Summary

China has had agriculture for over 8,000 years, but the rapid and widespread industrialisation of the country has led to a massive decline in land quality, in what one panellist labelled a ‘sustainability emergency’. This included significant soil degradation, deforestation, and pollution – which is associated with negative health outcomes, such as around a million deaths a year due to poor air quality. China also faces many issues in common with Australia in regard to water management, including unpredictable floods, sustained droughts, and complicated cross-jurisdictional river management. Both nations share the problem of overallocation of water for consumptive use.

China has not been inactive, and has established far-reaching programs (e.g., ‘Grain for Green’ and ‘Three-North Selterbelt’ programs) and legislation (e.g., the

Forest Law, the Grassland Law, and the Environmental Protection Law) to tackle these issues. Through these programs, China has invested \$378.5 billion in environmental protection – in comparison, Australia has invested approximately \$20-\$30 billion over the same period. These programs, which consider social outcomes, food security, and rural policy, have had profound ecological effects. Forest cover has recovered from 12% to 23%, and soil erosion has decreased by nearly 13% nationwide, including a 60% reduction in the Yangtze River basin, and 27% in the Yellow River basin. This has included restoring and modernising old farmland to increase agricultural efficiency, allowing more land to be freed for reforestation. An unintended consequence of this reforestation has been a significant increase in water use by forested areas, leaving less water available for agriculture.

Water management, however, has long been an area of Australia-China collaboration, and both countries demonstrate innovative solutions to water management issues. The benefits of China's South-North Water Transfer megaproject are now being seen, as groundwater levels and river flows in Beijing are showing recovery. China's new 'River Chief' system has also led to a rapid improvement in water quality – although participants noted this system will need to become more legislated. Similarly, Australia's Murray-Darling Basin Plan has led to a clearer system of water rights. Many systems used in Australia, such as Total Channel Control Systems developed by Rubicon Water, have been tested through research projects in China. The University of Melbourne and Tsinghua University run a collaborative water management class every year – which until COVID also featured an international trip alternating between Australia and China. The class has been very warmly received by students. It was noted as well that Chinese Paramount Leader Hu Jintao, and Governor of Guangdong Wang Weizhong, were both hydraulic engineering graduates from Tsinghua University.

These environmental projects have resulted in a number of social outcomes, both positive and negative. China has met its 'red line' for food security of 400kg of wheat, maize and rice for human consumption. China's Southern Shaanxi and Ningxia Hui migration programs have lifted millions from poverty and degraded land by relocating them to newly urbanising areas – creating cultural upheaval as traditionally nomadic peoples are constrained to sedentary lifestyles. The widespread urbanisation of China's Northern Plain has reduced land available for agriculture.

There was also some discussion about tendencies in China's international environmental engagement. As one participant stated, 'rivers are hideously political,' and prompting discussion about China's shared river management with Southeast Asian nations. The panellists noted that while there has been a move towards regional management, particularly with new data sharing programs, China views rivers as a matter of national security, and as such there are limits to their willingness to collaborate. Participants identified the complex interaction of Australian and Chinese economic and development engagement in the South Pacific, and how a shared lack of understanding of indigenous concepts of land ownership has led both nations to investor-state disputes. However, cheap Chinese manufacturing, often based off Australian brands, has been readily taken up by young Pacific Islanders.

# Health, Biotech, and Innovation

## Recommendations

- Build policy frameworks that conceive of Australia as both an innovation exporter, and a nation capable of benefitting from innovation in Asian countries.
- Reduce barriers put in place by ‘data sovereignty’ legislation to allow sharing of anonymised data, allowing professionals to develop better health technologies through AI.
- Develop better linkages for students and young professionals from Australia and China to exchange knowledge, such as establishing prestigious scholarships study in China.



**Chair:** Associate Professor David Anderson, Deputy Director (Partnerships), Burnet Institute

**Speakers:** Professor Irene Blackberry, La Trobe University, Jason Sun FCHSM GAICD, CEO, Australia China Health Accelerator, Dr Charis Teh, Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research

## Summary

The panel acknowledged that ageing demographics is a major structural issue facing China, as well as many nations from around the world. This engenders a need to address the care industry cohesively, from cradle to grave. In China, access to care remains an issue, particularly in rural communities. Many elderly Chinese people struggle with both physical and geographic mobility, presenting a major barrier to accessing proper care. There is also a much stronger focus on family responsibility in China, meaning no aged care system comparable to Australia's exists. There needs to be a focus on connectivity with the elderly in remote



communities, making physical environments more aged friendly, and preparing China's healthcare system for the demands which will be placed on it in the future.

Emerging technologies, such as 'big data' driven AI, may be able to mitigate the struggles of the healthcare trilemma between quality, cost, and accessibility. In this sense, China presents a unique opportunity; its large and relatively well-connected population is able to generate the sample sizes needed for future improvement in health technologies. However, the 'data sovereignty' approaches taken by both Australia and China limit access to information that could be useful to health innovators. Future agreements between Australia and China could create approaches.

There are many reasons that Australia and China have enormous potential for collaboration in health. While Australia is known as an 'innovation exporter,' and China's quickly growing middle class provides vast opportunities for Australian health technologies, we must also look to China for future advancements. China's large population is increasingly well-educated and well-connected, providing a breeding ground for innovation. Australia provided a good testing ground for Asian health technology companies seeking to move into Western markets, due to available resources, R&D tax incentives, and a relatively forgiving consumer environment. Partnerships between Australia and China in this field will likely be increasingly symmetrical.

Obstacles to cooperation still remain. One is a simple lack of cultural understanding – particularly language barriers and differences in doing business. Business relationships in China are based much more on trust, rather than on legal documents, a fact that is not always obvious to Australians in the region. Similarly, it is often difficult to convince Chinese investors to put money in to non-profits – Chinese organisations are generally either state-owned, or private and for-profit, and it is difficult to convince people to invest in things they do not understand. Finally, difficult narratives about China scare people from business. In particular, panellists identified perceived fear of IP being stolen, despite strong patent protections in the Australia-China Free Trade Agreements.

In addressing these issues, the importance of strong people-to-people links was emphasised. In particular, the panellists highlighted the importance of engaging university students and young professionals to build cross-border connections early in their lives, when experiences have the most potential to shape the paths of future careers. To this end, the panellists highlighted the important work of programs like WEHI's InSPIRE program, the necessity of stronger Asian language education in Australia, and the potential of creating new academic programs in Asia with the prestige of Rhodes or Fulbright scholarships. The panellists also expressed a strong desire for the resumption of regular travel post-COVID, to allow face-to-face relationship building.

# VICTORIA-CHINA BUSINESS FACTSHEET



## TRADING PARTNERS

Mainland China remains Victoria's largest trading partner

- \$5.9 billion in exports (21-22 FY)
- \$31.5 billion of imports (21-22 FY)
- 18% growth (21-22 FY over 20-21 FY)

## COVID RECOVERY

Goods imports have rebounded

- Grew 23% over 12 months
- Only 6% below pre-pandemic levels of \$6.7 Billion

Tourism still struggling

- Remains 10x lower than pre-Pandemic



## VICTORIA IN CHINA

Five Trade and Investment offices in China

- Shanghai
- Beijing
- Hong Kong
- Nanjing
- Chengdu

High cost and low availability of flights still a limiting factor

- South China Airlines makes up 35-38% of the market share of China-Australia-Flights
- Chinese and Australian airlines have both been dramatically negatively affected by tourism downturn.





## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Chinese students are essential to the Victorian economy

- In 2022, the largest cohort of students in Victoria (35,600) were from mainland China
- 68% (24,100) were studying onshore
- VicGov supported international students through FoodBank, welfare support, legal advice, and emergency hardship payments

## Agricultural exports very strong

- Dairy exports doubled over 5 years (\$595 million)
- Wheat increased by \$400 million to \$486 million
- Wool has remained steady at \$1.3 billion



## Vic House in Shanghai

- Permanent trade show of Victorian food and beverage products

## Study Melbourne Hub

- A space for Chinese students studying remotely at Victorian Unis to engage with their coursework and one another



# Creativity, Connection, and Cultural Diplomacy

## Recommendations

- Promote Chinese art and artists in Australia to engender cultural understanding.
- Rethink LOTE education in Australian schools to incentivise language acquisition and retention, by addressing the mechanisms through which language subjects are marked and encouraging cultural exchange.
- Make an effort to market Australian art and culture through platforms where the Chinese diaspora in Australia is able to engage with it.



**Chair:** Professor Claire Roberts, The University of Melbourne

**Speakers:** Zhou Xiaoping, Artist, Yashian Schauble, Founder, Australia China Art Foundation, Wenona Lok, Co-Founder, Imagikai

## Summary

The panellists highlighted the useful role art plays as a mechanism to cultivate intercultural understanding. For instance, it was noted that Indigenous Australians' relationship with land can seem esoteric and is difficult to understand for those from other cultures. Art is able to reveal these perspectives in a way that is more intuitive to understand, and in a way that is often emotionally rewarding, engendering passion to learn more. Art is also fundamentally important to narrative building and sharing stories about our nations that might otherwise be ignored.

There is increasing historic evidence of historical trade between the Makassar people of Indonesia and Indigenous Australians as early as the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, often for sea cucumbers which were sold to China. Stories like these can allow us to develop a richer narration of Australia-China relations that is viewed through a longer-term historical perspective, which may be more conducive to communication and exchange.

Several barriers remain to experiencing intercultural art. For example, many Asian immigrants in Australia struggle to engage with Australian art and music – mostly due to a lack of awareness. Participants relayed stories of students flying home to Singapore to view popular musicians, unaware that they were touring in Australia. Furthermore, many Asians in Australia lack understanding of the major event ticketing platforms or find them difficult to navigate in English. The panellists advocated for reaching out to Asian immigrants on the social media platforms they are most likely to use, such as Weibo.

Of course, language abilities remain one of the chief barriers to experiencing art from across the region. The panellists discussed how this was a structural issue: languages are frequently poorly graded for Australian high school students, negatively impacting students' willingness to learn. However, participants reflected on their own experiences that had encouraged them to engage in language early on in life. Some Australians had taken compulsory Chinese classes in high school in the 1970s. Others reflected on how sister school programs, and in particular through music programs such as shared orchestral performances, had given them a passion for engaging with Chinese culture. Many participants reflected that art had been a fundamental driver of their passion for language learning. As such, making Asian art accessible to Australian audiences is key to impassioning people and increasing intercultural understanding.



# Australia, China, ASEAN and Regional Partnerships

## Recommendations

- Remain a strong advocate for ASEAN centrality, and ensure the bloc is at the forefront of regional policy for both China and our partners such as the United States.
- Engage with ASEAN in any non-military field, particularly through development aid, infrastructure spending, and disaster relief.
- Empower Track 1.5, Track 2, and Track 3 diplomacy within the Indo-Pacific to ensure Australia is included in robust international and intercultural networks.



**Chair:** Colin Heseltine, Asialink

**Speakers:** Kuncoro Giri Waseso, Consul-General of the Republic of Indonesia in Victoria, Michelle Lam, Co-CEO ASEAN-Australia Strategic Youth Partnership, Dr Diane Hu, Centre for Contemporary Chinese Studies.

## Summary

At the core of the discussion of this panel was a recognition of the fundamental importance of ‘ASEAN Centrality’ to the stability and prosperity of the region, an ideal shared by both Australia and China. Both Australia and China have a long history of collaboration with ASEAN; Australia became ASEAN’s first Dialogue Partner in 1974, with China following in 1996. Today, Australia, China, and the United States are the only three nations which have a ‘Comprehensive Strategic Partnership’ (CSP) with ASEAN. Participants acknowledged that Australia’s decisions

in the region need to be ‘ASEAN-led,’ and the panellists identified that it was heartening to hear Foreign Minister Penny Wong say as much in her trip to Singapore in July of 2022. However, we need to pay more than lip-service to ASEAN Centrality – as some participants suggested the United States does. Without ASEAN, the power vacuum in the region would heighten China-US competition, challenging Australia’s security environment.

The ability of ASEAN to create a stable and prosperous regional environment has been demonstrated by recent history, with a significant reduction in interstate war and an average of 5% annual GDP growth, driven by collaboration in development. The vast majority of regional dialogue takes place through ASEAN, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the ASEAN+3, as well as through forums such as the G20. Such conferences are productive venues for Australia-China dialogue, as well as for engagement with the rest of the region. Despite global tensions threatening stability, ASEAN’s position remains one of neutrality, and it strives to limit security competition in the region. For instance, when participants asked about the South China Sea dispute, the panellists emphasised that resolution would come through a peaceful settlement built on conflict management and trust building. Indonesia has created a working group with claimant countries that is striving to manage and resolve the dispute. The panellists also acknowledged that public international law is about more than legalistic treaties, and relies as much on a shared understanding of customary rules.

While both Australia and China share CSP agreements with ASEAN, it would be incorrect to suggest that the relationships are symmetrical. ASEAN is more enmeshed with China than Australia, particularly economically. China is by far ASEAN’s largest trading partner, with a trade volume 8 times higher than Australia’s. Furthermore, in 2020, ASEAN became China’s largest trading partner, and by 2022 its trade volume has grown to be 57% larger than China’s second largest trading partner, the EU. China held joint maritime exercises with ASEAN in 2018 and 2019. Australia’s engagement in the region must be cognisant of the important role that China plays.

The panellists stated that any area of engagement -with the exception of military engagement - is productive for the region, with a particular focus on development aid, disaster relief, and infrastructure spending. Finally, the panellists stated that strong people-to-people and cultural links are essential to warm relations, including Track 2, Tack 1.5, youth, and entrepreneurial dialogues. Achieving this, the panellists emphasised the importance of programs such as the New Colombo Plan and the Australia-ASEAN strategic Youth Partnership, to give young people opportunities to engage with the region. They also highlighted the importance of multiculturalism in Australia, which enables people to identify with both Australia and their home countries or ancestries, and the importance of combatting negative narratives about China’s engagement with the developing world, such as the idea of ‘Debt-trap’ diplomacy.

# Diaspora Engagement, Identity, and Multiculturalism

## Recommendations

- Strengthen multiculturalism in Australia to ensure people feel comfortable identifying both with Australia and their Asian heritage.
- Empower Asian-Australians, particularly women, to take on leadership roles in politics and on boards.
- Find pathways to better utilise Chinese diaspora, and Australians who have firsthand experience in Asia, to enrich Australia's Asia literacy and capability.



**Chair:** Professor Jia Gao, The University of Melbourne

**Speakers:** Julia Gong, Director, Confucius Institute, Deborah Zhang, President, Australia China Youth Association, Councillor Philip Le Liu, Melbourne City Council

## Summary

The panel discussed the complex nature of overlapping identities that the Chinese diaspora in Australia must navigate. Participants labelled themselves in different ways, such as ‘Australian-born Chinese,’ or ‘1.5 Generation’ – having been born in China but moving at such a young age that the original cultural connection was lost. Diaspora identity is more complex than simply balancing Australian and Chinese nationalities, however. There are multiple languages, ethnicities, nations, artistic styles, and cuisines within the label ‘Chinese,’ all of which are collapsed together in an Australian context. For many participants, they went through a process of rediscovering this complexity later in life. The complexity of this process has left many Chinese Australians feeling like they are stuck between East and West, without a tangible personal identity. The problem is made difficult by racism



still targeted against Asians in Australia with many participants noting they have faced experiences of racism. For those born outside Australia, this often created a difficulty in integrating into Australian culture, while for those born in Australia or who immigrated early, it frequently pushed them to neglect their Chinese identity. This racism extends to both personal interactions and an unsavoury media environment.

The panel discussed the unique experience of Chinese-Australians in politics and in leadership positions. The existence of a tangible Chinese-Australian voting block with defined preferences entered public consciousness through the media coverage of the most recent federal election. However, the panellists said that politicians have come to care about this too late, and have failed to engage Chinese-Australians in Australian politics. There is also an absence of Asian-Australians running for elected office within major parties – when they choose to run, it is often with minor parties, limiting the prospects of diverse representation in parliament. Within major political parties, minority candidates are often given the unglamorous tasks of bringing in funds and votes from minorities, rather than engaging in more substantial policy work. Lack of representation in leadership extends throughout Australian society, particularly for Asian-Australian women. The panellists highlighted the importance of champions and allies in empowering diverse Australians. Panellists discussed approaches for addressing unequal representation in leadership, contrasting clear quotas with an approach of ‘merit-first, but favour diversity’ for hiring. Panellists highlighted how companies, and in particular company boards, are stronger with diverse perspectives, and are better prepared for cultural engagement.

Panellists again emphasised the significance of people-to-people links and cultural literacy to building a warm relationship, and in particular the importance of engaging youth to build curiosity in cross-border cultural connection. Participants gave anecdotes of meeting Australians who had travelled to China as teachers, which built curiosity and later led them to travel to Australia to work, study, or teach. Other participants spoke about meeting New Colombo Scholars studying in China, engendering a similar level of interest in the bilateral relationship. To this end, the panel expressed the utility of the Australia-China Youth Association, and initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Youth Mobility Dialogue, which was set up in 2020. Giving young Australians and Chinese people avenues to talk with one another – particularly face-to-face and immersing themselves in one another’s culture – is essential to building long-lasting cultural literacy. The panel also expressed the importance of Australians expats who had returned from China as a source of knowledge and as potential ambassadors of cultural exchange. People in these Track 2 and Track 3 diplomatic environments remain optimistic about the relationship, despite global tensions.

Finally, the panel again discussed the difficulties faced by the language barrier. While there are good Chinese language programs in Australian high schools, it is difficult to get students to engage with them, or to retain their knowledge after high school without further study. Chinese language immersion programs, like those hosted by Confucius Institutes, were highlighted as a way to build passion and more robust, long-term Chinese literacy for students. It was also noted that Australian English presents a barrier for many native Chinese speakers who were taught with American or British dialects. It is important to create resources to prepare and acclimatise non-native English speakers for Australian English, and to make these resources readily available.

## ‘Australia-China: Back to Normal’

In his closing speech, Professor Mark Wang described a hope for the future, succinctly put as ‘Australia-China: Back to Normal.’ This vision captured the sentiments of many of the participants throughout the event. Following the travel disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, many present at the event longed for the ease-of-access that was present from before the pandemic. For many, there was a real desire to return to China, to see colleagues, collaborators, family, and friends. There was also a hope that the change in government might engender a fresh start in Australia-China relations; a hope which was emboldened by recent high-level dialogues.

There was also recognition of the fact that Australia-China relations are not as sour today as they might appear based off the media – in fact, many panellists expressed the view that the relationship is stronger today than at any point in the past 50 years. While there are clearly tensions, Australia and China trade now more than ever, exchange ideas as much as ever, and have greater grassroots connection than ever before. Australia and China understand one another more now than we did 50 years ago, and this understanding creates the potential to overcome obstacles in the relationship.

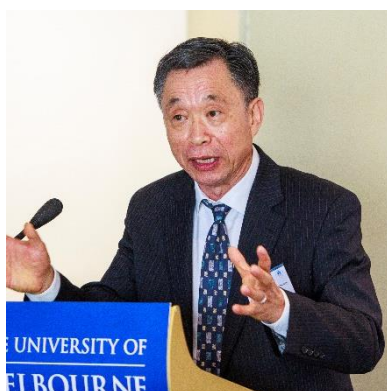
However, participants acknowledged that obstacles did exist, and have existed for a long time. More than ‘Back to Normal,’ Australia and China must push for a more profound relationship, with greater capacity and willingness for real dialogue. This means encouraging Asia Literacy in Australia, overcoming language barriers, and advocating for a more pragmatic and less sensationalist media narrative. It means creating opportunities for young Australian and Chinese people to interact, to communicate, and to learn from one another. And it means acknowledging that we have already achieved so much together.

The forum displayed just how much potential there is in the Australia-China relationship. As we look back on a prosperous 50 years, we hope that we can learn from our shared successes and shared mistakes, and build on that prosperity well into the future.

### Hosts



**Martine Letts**  
CEO, Asialink



**Professor Mark Wang**  
Director, Centre for  
Contemporary Chinese Studies



**Professor Sarah Biddulph**  
Assistant Deputy Vice  
Chancellor - China

2022

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