



UTS:ACRI address: China's Ambassador to Australia

Introductory remarks

Speakers: Professor James Laurenceson, Director, Australia-China Relations Institute, University of Technology Sydney

Professor Andrew Parfitt, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Technology Sydney

June 24 2022

Great Hall, University of Technology Sydney and online

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Professor James Laurenceson:

Let's make a start. Apologies for the delay. I would like to begin today by paying my respects to the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, on whose ancestral lands we meet. I would like to pay respect to their Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for this land. I think I speak for all the audience in saying how marvelous it was that immediately after winning last month's federal election, the Albanese government made clear it would deliver on a mandate to fulfill the promise of the Uluru Statement from the heart, including introducing an Indigenous voice to Parliament.

And given our foreign policy focus today, it was also surely significant that new Foreign Minister Penny Wong said that she would be delivering, and I quote: 'A First Nations foreign policy that weaves the voices and practices of the world's oldest continuing culture into the way we, Australia, talk to the world'. Distinguished audience, guests, both here in the Great Hall and hundreds more online. I saw there was 20-odd people joining us today from the United Kingdom. Now, if I'm doing my maths correctly, it is now 2:00 AM in the United Kingdom, so clearly Australia-China relations is a matter of more than just provincial concern.

My name is James Laurenceson. I'm the Director of the Australia-China Relations Institute here at the University of Technology Sydney, the host of today's event. When ACRI was established in 2014, the intent was not to establish another China studies centre. Rather, ACRI would be, and still is, Australia's only research institute focused on the relations between these two countries. Consistent with that purpose, the bilateral relationship is what we will be focusing on today.

The Australian public has complex and diverse views on the People's Republic of China and Australia's relations with China. We know that at ACRI because we've asked them. In May this year, my colleague, Elena Collinson, and my UTS Business School colleague, Professor Paul Burke, published the latest edition of the ACRI annual poll. Three-quarters of Australians expressed concern about Australia's relationship with China, and yet a majority, 60 percent, still supported the forging of stronger connections and closer ties. Just 17 percent disagreed with that general proposition, and these headline figures of course obscure a host of perspectives on a multitude of issues.

Today, amongst our audience in the room and online, that diversity is represented. And as a public university committed to serving the social good, that has freedom of expression and freedom of academic inquiry at the heart of our organisational culture, we welcome it. Indeed, that is why we are hosting a public event today rather than a closed door, invitation-only roundtable.

Let me quickly remind everyone of the format for today's event, laid out on the webpage that you would've used to register your attendance for this event, so I can keep this very brief. Shortly, our Vice-Chancellor will introduce our speaker today, the Ambassador for the People's Republic of China, His Excellency Mr Xiao Qian. The Ambassador will then deliver a short prepared address. Following that, he has agreed to join me in conversation, before then also responding to some pre-submitted questions from our audience today, which I will be putting to him.

Let me finish my introductory remarks by saying that today, we have an exciting opportunity for a rich discussion, a dialogue that will hopefully go beyond superficial talking points to matters of substance in the bilateral relationship. Such a dialogue will not always be easy listening. That's true for those of us on the stage and those of you in the audience. At one point or another, each of us is likely to be confronted with views that differ from our own. If and when that happens, take a deep breath, pause, listen, although not necessarily agree.

Cautious dialogue has resumed between the Australian government and Beijing. Last month, Australia's Defence Minister Richard Marles said this, and I quote: 'We want to go about our engagement with the countries of the world, including China, in a way that is respectful, professional, sober. We believe in diplomacy. We believe in dialogue'. And then added: 'When relationships are complex,' as he said the China relationship was, 'that is when dialogue matters the most'. Folks, I don't think we could have a better description of what we're setting out here to achieve today.

If, as ACRI's Director, I have one goal today, it is not that when we leave, we leave in furious agreement with each other. Rather, it is that we leave better informed. That is, after all, ACRI's mission. Not to lobby, but to inform Australia's engagement with China through research, analysis, and dialogue grounded in scholarly rigor.

Vice-Chancellor, I'll invite you to the stage to introduce our invited guest.

Professor Andrew Parfitt:

Thank you very much, James.

Your Excellency, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, thank you all for joining us at UTS for today's event.

Let me also acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, whose ancestral lands our city campus now stands on. I'd also like to pay respect to Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for this land and of the lands from which all of our online guests are joining us today as well.

I'd like to welcome our special guest for today, His Excellency Ambassador Xiao Qian with the People's Republic of China. We thank you for joining us today, and we thank you for sharing your thoughts on the future relationship between our two countries.

Today's event is hosted by ACRI, the Australia-China Relations Institute. And as James indicated earlier, ACRI is an independent, non-partisan research institute established by UTS in 2014 to inform the dialogue around the relationship between Australia and China. ACRI is Australia's first and only institute devoted to studying

the relationship between Australia and China. ACRI's mission is to inform Australia's engagement with China through research, analysis, dialogue grounded in scholarly rigor, and open debate.

The Australia-China relationship has traditionally been one of strong economic ties and common bilateral and regional interests. China and Australia hold memberships in numerous organisations, including the East Asia Summit, the G20, APEC. The relationship has grown over the years, with China as Australia's largest trading partner. And while the economic ties between the two countries remain strong, it is evident that in recent years, the relationship between the respective governments has deteriorated to probably its lowest point in some time.

However, through public events like this one that we are attending today, ACRI aims to continue to support an open and frank dialogue between the two countries, and I would again like to thank Ambassador Xiao for making the time to attend and share his thoughts.

Let me now introduce Ambassador Xiao Qian. Ambassador Xiao is the current ambassador to China and has been in office since January of this year. Previously, he served as Chinese Ambassador to Indonesia from 2017 to 2021, and prior to that, as Chinese Ambassador to Hungary from 2012 to 2015.

Please join me in welcoming Ambassador Xiao.

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