

Boosting Australia's China knowledge capability

Speakers: Professor Louise Edwards, Adjunct Professor, UTS:ACRI; Emeritus Professor of Chinese History, UNSW
Ms Ciara Morris, Editor, China Policy

Dr Yu Tao, Senior lecturer in Chinese studies, University of Western Australia

Moderator: Professor Anne McLaren, Professor in Chinese Studies, Asia Institute, University of Melbourne

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Ms Amy Ma:

Good afternoon members of the audience and special guests. Before we begin the proceedings, and on behalf of all those present, I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation upon whose ancestral lands our city campus now stands. I would also like to pay respects to the Elders, both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for this land. This session will now be recorded. We will record audio, screen share, and our presenters. We will not be recording any video input or audio from you.

Welcome to all UTS students, staff, and all friends of ACRI and UTS. My name is Amy Ma and I am the Events and Communications Officer at the Australia-China Relations Institute (ACRI) at the University of Technology Sydney. UTS:ACRI is an independent, non-partisan research institute established in 2014 by UTS. Chinese studies centers exist in other Australian universities. UTS:ACRI, however, is Australia's first and only research institute devoted to studying the relationship of these countries. UTS:ACRI seeks to inform Australia's engagement with China through research, analysis and dialogue grounded in scholarly rigour. If you wanted to know more about the Australia-China relationship, more details are available on our website at australiachinarelations.org.

Today, we are here to discuss Australia's core China knowledge capabilities and how universities might better support their development. The current state and future needs of Australia's China knowledge and research ecology have been recently examined in *Australia's China Knowledge Capability*, a report by the Australian Academy of Humanities, funded by the National Foundation for Australia-China Relations. Joining us on the panel is Professor Louise Edwards, UTS:ACRI Adjunct Professor and a member of the report's Advisory Group; Ciara Morris, report co-author; and Dr Yu Tao, senior lecturer in Chinese Studies at the University of Western Australia. The discussion will be moderated by Professor Anne McLaren, Professor in Chinese Studies at the Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. Audience questions are welcome at the end. Please submit your questions by the Q&A tab at the bottom of your screen.

Now, a little bit about the speakers. Louise Edwards is Emeritus Professor of Chinese History at UNSW's School of Humanities and Languages, an Honorary Professor at the University of Hong Kong's School of Modern Languages and Cultures. Ciara Morris has experience with the Sydney-based policy institute, China Matters, and is currently editor for the Beijing-based monitoring and analysis company China Policy. She will soon be commencing a PhD in International Affairs at the City University of Hong Kong. Dr Yu Tao teaches Contemporary Chinese Society and Language and coordinates the Chinese Studies major at the University of Western Australia. He was trained as a political sociologist in Peking, Cambridge, and Oxford. Professor Anne McLaren has been teaching Chinese Language and Culture for several decades in Australian higher education, most recently at the University of Melbourne, and she was also on the advisory panel for the *Australia's China Knowledge Capability* report. Now, I'd like to welcome her to give an outline of the report's key findings.

Professor Anne McLaren:

Thank you very much, Amy.

Welcome, everyone. I speak to you from the land of the Wurundjeri and the Kulin Nation that is from Melbourne, and I pay respects to the Elders, past, present, and emerging.

Today's topic is the important new report, *Australia's China Knowledge Capability: University teaching, research, and future needs*. I've been asked to briefly address the key findings of the report and then to invite our speakers to speak to key issues in the report. There will be an opportunity, as Amy pointed out, for Q&A, so please take advantage of that. We'd love to hear from you. Please write in questions in the chat box, and in the final half we'll be able to get round to that.

First of all, I'd just like to thank the Australia-China Relations Institute for running a webinar on this really significant topic: how Australians view China – Australia's knowledge of China is really a topic of great relevance too – how we engage with China.

I'd like to say just a few more words about speakers. Louise, of course, we know as an eminent historian. She's also a council member of the Australian Academy of Humanities, which wrote the report, and she's been on the Advisory Board for a while ago, so she's really seen it from inception all the way through, so have I as well, but not quite so strongly as Louise.

Ciara is a very interesting young person to have and I'll be drawing on her expertise. I'd just like to point out that she graduated with the BA in First Class Honours in Government, International Relations and Chinese Studies, so she's a Chinese learner from the University of Sydney. She also has, and this is very interesting, a Master of Public Administration from the School of Government at Peking University. I don't often meet people like you, Ciara. That is wonderful. I'm going to be asking her to draw on her own perspective as a younger generation Australian with recent experience of China studies in Australian higher education, but also elsewhere, China and Taiwan as well.

Yu Tao is a great person to have on the panel. He's at the coalface. He's actually teaching Australians Chinese and Chinese people as well here. He has also taught in England. He's taught in Lancashire. He's got that international perspective and he's got the Chinese diasporic perspective as someone who was brought up in Peking, but he's also studied in Cambridge and Oxford, so we're very lucky to have him so he can bring that dual knowledge and background of Chinese diasporic and international knowledge.

You've heard about me, so I don't need to point anything more out. I'll move on now to the key findings of the report. The goal, the intention, was to map Australia's knowledge of and engagement with China with regard to two things, teaching and research in Australian higher education. This is very important. Obviously, it does

leave out other areas where we have knowledge of China through business and industry. It did leave that out, but it does capture a snapshot of a very crucial part of our China knowledge sector.

I'd like to point out this is the first report on Australia's knowledge capability of any country, so we don't have any on any other country. It's possibly the only report of its type globally because we scaled around looking for similar reports and we can't find one from the US or from England or other countries, so it is a significant report. While the focus is, of course, on China, the findings might very well hold true for other Asian countries, Japan, Indonesia. If so, this is indeed sobering as we'll go on to say. In other words, the report really deserves to be widely read and its findings need to be taken very seriously.

Okay, method. The main method was interviews with over 100 academics, business leaders, China professionals, Commonwealth officials, think tanks and so on, a desktop gathering of data on enrollments and so on. I'll be asking Ciara about how very difficult this was. It was very hard to get the data. It took years. It took a really long time.

Argument. The report argues that Australia has an, I quote, 'distinctive interests with regard to China,' and for this reason, there is a need for what they term, and I quote here, 'a sovereign China knowledge capability.' Now, you might find, 'Okay, sovereign, what on earth does that mean?', but I think this could be interpreted to mean that we need a certain number of Australians in various walks of life and forms of employment who are knowledgeable about China and able to bring perspectives that help inform us generally about strategies to best engage with China. The assumption is made that having this core group of people will serve the Australian national interest.

Findings. I'd just like to cite the exact report of one section, which is: 'there are serious questions around our ability to generate core capability for stakeholders, direct knowledge of China, informed by world-class understanding of how China operates, and engage with Australia's national interests.' I think that's a very important statement. There is serious questions around our ability to have this sort of knowledge.

Now, specific gaps and deficits are pointed out. The most striking for me as someone who's been teaching Chinese language for quite some time is the program known as Honours in Chinese, which is offered at the fourth year level of an undergraduate program in approximately six Australian universities is in sharp decline. In the five years from 2017 to '21, our universities graduated only 17 students with this qualification. Basically, there were five in 2017 and 2019, three in 2018. In 2021, we graduated one student across the nation in Chinese Honours. One. Just to cite the report again, vanishingly small numbers learn advanced Chinese in the scholarly traditions that produce independent critical China expertise.

Now, there are, of course, other ways to gain China knowledge, and Ciara exemplifies many of these. You go to China, of course. All you can do, perhaps, are masters by coursework, and we have lots of masters by coursework in international relations and media communications and so on, but it turns out we don't have a single one in the country focused on Chinese language and Chinese studies.

Now, we do have specialist translation courses in a number of universities, and these are mostly taken by international students who mostly come from China. They still offer advanced language, but they don't offer to study of China as such Chinese politics, society and so on. The aim is to produce people who can translate, and that's wonderful, but it's not exactly what we need, or at least it's not all that we need.

Turning now to the report's findings on research, the outlook is better. It's now quite common for Australia-based researchers to engage with scholars, researchers from China or from Asia, and produce joint publications. This is particularly true for the STEM [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] disciplines and this is an achievement here, so science and technology, and we fare particularly well in health sciences, geology, biological sciences, for example. In the social sciences, we also fare pretty well particularly

with business and economics, and media. Australia can hold up its head, I think, with research in these fields. We're actually punching higher than our weight, I would say, in those areas.

However, there are certain deficits, and they are important. The deficits are important too. There are deficits in geopolitics, history, society, culture, literature, the things that help us understand how the Chinese people think. We just don't produce enough people in these areas, enough scholars and specialists in these areas.

Now, turning to another finding which, I think, is really important, we're a multicultural country. We have many China-capable Australians. They may speak Mandarin or another Chinese language as their mother tongue, but they're not necessarily learning Chinese literacy, they're not necessarily keeping their China knowledge current, and they're not necessarily finding employment where those skills can be used, so it's a latent resource which hasn't been brought to fruition, you could say. Okay, so what do the report offers want? They call for a sense of, I quote them here, 'shared responsibility for generating and retaining China knowledge on the part of governments, universities, and China skills practitioners,' and they say there is a need for coordinated action at national level. Now, the report doesn't spell out what this could be, but we can talk about that further.

Then finally, the most important question perhaps raised in the report is: how can we motivate more Australians, including Chinese heritage Australians, to pursue advanced Chinese studies with language? Okay, so I've given you my take on the report, mainly from the summary. I'm now going to turn to our first speaker, Ciara.

Ciara, I guess we can start off with the definition of what knowledge it was divided into core and specialist and foundational. You might like to tell us about this definition of advanced China knowledge capability, but also how do you think – you've had recent experience with Australian higher education, including honors. Was this beneficial? What role did you play? Then you also went to Peking and you did a further qualification. If you could tell us more about what you gained from these experiences, it might give us an insight into what needs to be done. Ciara, over to you.

Ms Ciara Morris:

Thank you, Anne. Thank you to ACRI for the invitation to participate today.

I'm calling in from Singapore, a place that holds a lot of significance for Chinese diaspora communities and Aussie expats, so I feel it's an appropriate place to be discussing the report. I'll start by explaining how we evidenced our findings for the report.

We analysed existing publicly available data on research and teaching maintained by the Commonwealth's Department of Education. However, there were limitations. As Anne said, it was a tricky process. It's not possible to disaggregate these data to identify China-focused study areas. To supplement the data, we also conducted surveys and interviews with over a hundred experts across academia, industry and government. The project team for the report, Dr Kylie Brass, Dr Jon Lane, Dr Christina Parolin and myself – we drafted a definition of China knowledge capability following our consultations with these experts.

Australia's China capability, it's not just the sum of what we know about China, it's our ability to deploy our knowledge to achieve Australian objectives. As Anne said, there are three types of China knowledge capability generated in our universities. The first is foundational knowledge capability, the second is specialised knowledge capability, and the third is core knowledge capability. I'll break those down.

Foundational China knowledge is a basic understanding of China, Chinese politics and government, and China's place in regional and global dynamics in security, trade, culture, human rights, et cetera. It's the kind

of knowledge that you develop an undergraduate course of China studies. Foundational knowledge can raise the bar for Australian debate and politics, and it can ready Australians for opportunities at home and abroad. Almost one in five people on the planet live at the People's Republic of China, so we need to understand this monolith. Foundational knowledge need not involve learning Chinese language, but a basic or better level of Chinese language ability will enhance that foundational capacity.

Then we have specialised China knowledge, which is expertise on China within a specific field of knowledge such as economics, art, media communications, health and medicine, law or international relations, which is where I'm specialising. A sovereign Australian foreign policy in dealing with China requires us to have Australians with this specialised training. We can't rely on other countries for that knowledge. We need to have our own specialists too.

Then that brings us to core China knowledge capability, which includes the knowledge content, but also more broadly includes experience, relations, and attitudes that exist between the various players in Australia's relations with China. It's the ability to join the dots, so to speak, and translate knowledge held in Australia's universities held by researchers and academics, and communicate that through to the Australian policy makers and into industry as well. One example of a great vessel of that ability to translate knowledge of China from academia to the outside world is ACRI, what we're doing today.

There we have our definition of China knowledge capability broken into those three categories. I went through the system, as Anne said, and did my undergraduate at Sydney University, and I looked at China studies, government, international relations and developed some foundational knowledge of China. Then when I decided I wanted to specialise in that knowledge in international relations and Australia-China relations, I looked around for an advanced course that I could do. Unfortunately, as Anne said, it's quite difficult in Australia to find an advanced masters level course that has both Chinese language built into it and an understanding of China from an Australian perspective in China studies. You can do one or the other but you can't do both in Australia, so I looked abroad and I went to China and studied at Peking University, and then I came back to Australia and worked in the Australian workforce with that knowledge that I developed overseas. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but we do also need to have the opportunity for Australian students to stay in Australia and learn that knowledge as well.

We hope it'll be useful for people and institutions when they sit down to think about how they generate knowledge about China to have this report and have this blueprint almost of what China knowledge capability is and should be. The definition can be used as a yardstick for what Australia needs moving forward, and it's really what we need to fill the gap that Anne spoke about that currently exists in Australia's readiness to engage with China now, but importantly, into the future as well. I'll just end by saying Frances Adamson wrote the foreword for the report and we consulted with her in depth for the body of the report as well. There's a great quote of hers I'll say now. She said, 'We need a complex set of capabilities to match a complex set of issues, an endeavor that has many points of entry, broad appeal, and relevance that's as broad as our needs and opportunities,' and so that's what the project team has really tried to embody in our definition of China knowledge capability.

Thank you for asking, Anne.

Professor Anne McLaren:

Thank you, Ciara.

I'll just follow through with a couple of other issues, if you don't mind. You basically had to leave Australia to get the knowledge that you needed. I think that really speaks volumes for the issues, doesn't it? They must have met a lot of young Australians who were discouraged from doing that. Would you like to talk in more general

about other young Australians, the problems they face today in acquiring the Chinese knowledge, language skills, and knowledge about China? You must have met lots of people who got discouraged along the way.

Ms Ciara Morris:

Absolutely.

In our report, students, young professionals, emerging and mid-career researchers, they did make up a significant portion of the experts that we consulted, so I can speak to this both from what we gathered in the report and from a personal perspective as one of those individuals.

Australian students, they're largely unsure of what career opportunities lie ahead of a China studies major, but even more important than the career opportunities, according to the young people who have recently graduated with China studies, myself included, has been the negative public debate, the rise in the China risk, both real and perceived within Australia and the PRC because essentially the quality of our national debate on China has a direct impact on our China capability, our China conversation. It directs the flow of ideas and information and it influences student choice and career prospects.

You're right, a lot of Australian students were being dissuaded from collecting knowledge and experience on China for fear that that will negatively impact their careers because of this negative public debate and rise in China risk. Some young professionals told us in contrast to earlier decades because of the state of the national China debate, they assessed it was currently better for their careers to conceal any existing China knowledge, not just a matter of keeping their opinions to themselves, but of actually disowning their interest in a knowledge about China. Another thing to mention here that's very important, I can't personally speak to the impact of the racism that exists here in Australia against Chinese-Australians and the Chinese diaspora communities, but that too has been felt by young people, and contributed some self-censorship and a reluctance to own up or use China relevant skills in the Australian workforce or contribute to the public discussion on China.

The Lowy Institute has actually today launched their annual report, *Being Chinese in Australia*, so I encourage everyone to give that a read because that is a really helpful explanation of what that feels like, but the report argues that, yes, all those at the stake in Australia's relationship with China should work to reaffirm students and potential students that their China knowledge is useful and actually necessary to national capability in and outside of a national security perspective.

Professor Anne McLaren:

Look, thank you, Ciara. That's a very sobering point.

Just to summarise what you're saying basically is that to incentivise young Australians, especially [those with] a Chinese background, we need to shape creatively the national discourse towards a sense of positivity. We need less stridency, less fearmongering. Would you agree with that?

Ms Ciara Morris:

Yeah, not even necessarily positivity, but just more nuance.

Professor Anne McLaren:

Which sectors would you address that to? To the Commonwealth government, to the media?

Ms Ciara Morris:

All sectors. All of the above, Anne.

Our report really did try to speak to as many people as we could, academia, industry, government, because we heard from all of those stakeholder groups and we heard very similar things from all stakeholder groups, which is that we need more Australians with China knowledge capability. Then even we spoke to senior officials within the Australian public service and they told us that as well, so that should hopefully be a kind reassurance for students that there are jobs out there, and hopefully, the tide is shifting in terms of national debate.

Professor Anne McLaren:

This is really where we need the Commonwealth government and the state governments as well to lead by example. That would help enormously.

Just a further question before I let you go for the time being, what do students want from universities in terms of building up China capability? Are our current offerings adequate?

Ms Ciara Morris:

Yeah, great question.

The first thing I'll speak to is time in China. Australian universities are actually really well positioned to support a wide range of Australians to obtain the experience in China that we've seen from this work in the report is an essential part of China capability. When we say I had to leave the country to obtain the advanced China knowledge, I needed to be a specialist and go to Peking University, it's not necessarily a bad thing to go overseas to China. In fact, that's also essential. It doesn't have to be a whole degree, but it's essential that we send students to China. A lot of universities have developed successful partnerships for education and exchange. Now, the COVID-19 pandemic obviously had a major impact on the ability for students to go overseas, but now that the borders are open, the challenge will be for universities to honour their partnerships and their programs which we're serving students well pre-COVID.

The other thing is that developing and maintaining a network with friends and colleagues in China after returning to Australia is often challenging for students. That's why organisations that facilitate cross-cultural communication and keep the China network in touch is so important. I'm talking here about the Australia China Youth Association, the Australia China Young Professionals Initiative, and the Australia China Youth Dialogue. What's essential in keeping these organisations going and doing the good work they do is the institutional funding provided by the Australian government, corporate sponsors, and university support. Particularly, for the Australia China Youth Association, which mainly caters to tertiary students, it relies on the support of student unions to exist on campuses around Australia. Students want that support to continue to exist and increase.

The second half of the equation is learning about China in the classroom of Australian universities, of course. As you said, Anne, our report shows the number of Australian universities providing this training and degree pathways in China studies is declining. Students want choices. We want to know that China studies is an option and that we can receive foundational knowledge from undergraduate courses and specialised knowledge for advanced postgraduate courses here in country if we want it and we need it. While the study of China for its own sake has never really attracted large number of students, our research shows that it's struggled to survive at all since the universities turned to the market. We're not saying every Australian needs

to have specialised China knowledge, of course not, but we do need some Aussies with those skills, so it is really important that we don't let it die.

I'll end it there. Please, come back to me if you want more. I'm cautious I'm the only one talking so far. I don't want to take a lot.

Professor Anne McLaren:

So much in what you said, Ciara, thanks so much.

Yu Tao, you're next. Okay. Now, here you are teaching a mixed classroom perhaps of Australian background, Chinese background, and so on. From your perspective, what challenges are you facing, and are there particular either structural constraints or administrative constraints? I'm talking here of the university that you're working in. Tell us about the kind of challenges that you face every day in teaching Chinese.

Dr Yu Tao:

Yeah, thank you very much, Anne, and thank you for the opportunity to basically elaborate on some of these things that I've been forced to reflect on a daily basis.

I suppose talking about the challenges here, I can perceive there's three major challenges. I will start from two more technical aspects, and then I'd go through the bigger things. I will say that lots of these things will echo what Ciara just said from the students' perspective. In terms of the technical challenges, I think there are two major specs.

One is the student market, if I may use that word; I really don't like that, market, but university nowadays do sometimes function like a business. Now, for Chinese studies in our university and our friends in many Australian universities, I think we are doing particularly well in two areas. One is the very basic language there. People come in and then they learn a little bit Chinese just enough to get by.

If you look at the first year Chinese language, the very beginner's Chinese language, it's not small, it's a decent size. On the other hand, we do cater for Chinese international students, and I need to get it clear that this is not to give these students an easy ride. When we teach Chinese international students in Chinese about China, that's no difference than, for example, those Chinese students in Peking University that they learn China. They also need to learn China by the Chinese language. These two areas, we are doing pretty successfully. However, what is missing there, and often the challenge, is the courses that will allow our students to pursue the core China knowledge. As Ciara said, that's with middle to advanced Chinese language on the one hand, and then an in-depth understanding on the China literacy. On Chinese culture, politics, and society, that middle bit is something challenging there.

That leads to my second technical aspects [which] is the resource case. Now, you might be thinking that if we are doing fairly successful with the foundational language teaching and the advanced Chinese knowledge to Chinese international students, then we generate lots of revenues for the university, which probably is the case. Chinese international students or any international students pay four times the fees in comparison with our local students for identical content they get from our class. However, of course, Chinese departments or Chinese disciplines, I suppose, in UWA or across country, very few autonomous type units with university, we are part of Asian studies or bigger school, we don't have budgetary powers or anything like that. Anything generated will be redistributed on the school or university level.

Now, whether or not the school or university would be willing to subsidise, use some of the revenue we generate to subsidise the middle range, smaller class, that's sometimes a challenge, I think, for us on the

frontier to teach them, but I think fundamentally, beyond those two technical aspects is whether or not the country can really appreciate the importance of our core Chinese capacities here. I say we need to do more to articulate on why this kind of core China knowledge is important for the country.

Firstly, I think, as you and Ciara already mentioned a little bit, of course, we can rely on lots of actual resources both in teaching and research about China, but sometimes, having this salvage expertise is quite important. Why is that? Because I'm recently reading one of the books recently published by one of my old teachers in Oxford, Professor Henrietta Harrison, and she's a historian, so you might be thinking that her book's not directly right into our discussion today, but it's very relevant. Her latest book talks about the Macartney Embassy in Beijing in the 18th century. She highlights how important the interpreters [are], their roles there. The interpreters not only translate the language between the two parties, but they shape agendas and they have their direct impacts on how the two parties can communicate to each other, and they directly contribute to the success or failure of bilateral relations. I can only think that if a country has a salvage for China knowledge, that it can be more successful in this area, but even beyond those things, if all of these are very utilitarian in the day, I think we need to realise better that the China knowledge, China capacity speak to the core of our multiculturalism, which defined Australians' not only national interests but also its national identity. I think all of other things about utilitarianism, they're subject to changes and then lots of calculations there, but if we can realise how important this core China knowledge to multiculturalism is, I think from the government to the university, to the business sector, I think people would have been more willing to contribute to this challenge and then to the building of core China capacities. Then as from frontier practitioners, our challenges probably will be easier to get addressed.

Professor Anne McLaren:

Thank you, Yu Tao. That was just wonderful.

China core knowledge speaks to our multicultural identity and our national identity. Very good point. We need people with core knowledge capability to be like – the Macartney Embassy of the 18th century, people who can interpret but have an understanding more than the technical knowledge, an understanding of the whole culture and society of both sides, and who can therefore make a very important contribution, even setting the agenda. How many people do we have like that in Australia? Very good question. Are we training people towards that? Well, that's a moot point.

Then finally, you mentioned the paradox. Chinese programs like yours generate huge amount of fees. The international students pay four times those of other students, you're saying to us. Couldn't some of that money go towards safeguarding enrollments at honors level, advanced programs for Australian students, both of Chinese heritage and not a Chinese heritage, so they can reach the kind of standards that's required?

I think you're telling me the answer is that basically, no, the market orientation means it's not efficient to run these programs so that money is diverted elsewhere. Now, of course, universities do have the right to spend funds as they please. This is the way it goes. The funds generated by Chinese programs go to help languages of minor enrollments, and other programs in some universities helps English and linguistics and everything else, but it would be great to see some of that funding go towards the sustainment of small enrollment programs at high levels so that our students could reach these goals and could move from the beginner and the intermediate foundational stage onto the more advanced stage and not have to leave the country to get those skills. A set of fantastic points there, Yu Tao.

Okay, Louise. Now, you've been with the report from start to finish, and I'm calling on you to tell us from your vantage point, what do you see personally as a strength and weakness in research? Because that was another aspect we haven't touched on yet in China studies. How can we best meet any deficits in that?

Professor Louise Edwards:

Okay, well, the research data was better than the publicly available data that Ciara outlined, but it was also pretty depressing. You mentioned that we only graduated one honor student in Chinese in 2021. Well, the PhD situation and the PhD pipeline is also similarly problematic. We peaked in 2007 with 367 PhD students, and it's declined steadily since then to the point where 2021, we only had 110 students graduating with PhDs related to China. We also know that the funding mechanisms, the funding provided to China projects has been really quite dismal, so it's only been one percent of ARC budget has been dedicated to China projects since 2002. That also peaked in 2010, but it's been declining very steadily in the last 12 years. Now, despite these things, China has overtaken the United Kingdom as Australia's second-largest research co-publisher.

The report shows that 14 percent of Australian outputs on China listed Chinese collaborators. Now, what's important about this is that most of this research was funded from China, from Chinese research agencies, and many of these publications were in the STEM area rather than the core China knowledge of society, culture, politics, economics. Basically, we're losing control of the topics we are researching if we and the ARC doesn't fund them. In fact, we've got additional problem in Australia in that we're censoring our own research on China via the liberal national ministerial vetoes that we've experienced over the last few years, which a large proportion of the grants that were vetoed were related to China. This has a chilling effect on Australian academics and PhD students who are choosing topics for their own careers. They don't want to be stymied by a failure in a grant or a censoring of their grant applications, so people shift their research to other less problematic areas. You're making that career choice or research topic choice to minimise risk.

There have also been, as we shown in the report, no special programs in the ARC world that have been dedicated to China, and there's very limited research infrastructure funding dedicated to China or Asian studies, generally. You outlined the areas that we were under threat in terms of the core knowledge capability, and some of the new areas that have developed over the past two decades that I might just highlight are law international relations, our China's connections with Pacific is also a particularly new area of strength for Australia, translation, Chinese linguistics, media, macroeconomics, and Australian-Chinese history has also been – those are also areas that have developed really quite quickly in terms of research capability in Australia, but what can we do about this pipeline problem of expertise coming through?

Honours is really crucial because this is the main pathway that domestic Australian students take to move into a PhD program. We don't have a tradition of going to a master's degree and then a PhD. We have a tradition of BA, Honours, PhD, and so if we don't get the students into the Honours program, we are not getting domestic students into our PhD programs. Instead, what we are graduating are a whole lot of international students who are coming with probably international master's degrees in our PhD programs. That's great for knowledge circulation and the vibrancy of Australian universities, but it isn't doing what we need in terms of producing sovereign China knowledge capability, and so I think those are areas, we really need to focus on. Did you ask me about what we should do about that?

Professor Anne McLaren:

I did, yes.

Professor Louise Edwards:

Okay. Well, one of the things that we need to do, we need to plug gaps in existing programs. Basically, we need more than a three to five-year electoral cycle view on this. We need a long-term strategy. Many other countries have long-term strategies. They don't think in an election cycle, they'll think in the 20 to 30-year plan. We know China need to have a 20 to 30-year plan to develop Australia's China knowledge capability. We've got to break down the barriers between business, universities, and government. Universities are in a very good position to do this if we got our act together, I think, and collaborated really vigorously with the

business sector. We've got to provide incentive for students to take these courses. We've got to talk to our business sector and encourage them to put a premium on Chinese graduates because at the moment, what our business interviewees said was that business is not putting a premium on language capacity and Chinese knowledge. They want the students with it, but then they're not really making that a feature of their hiring processes.

We also need some of the barriers that Ciara mentioned to be broken down in terms of career progression for Chinese Australians within the APS [Australian Public Service]. We've got to enable and create a culture in which people don't hide their China expertise for fear of career risk. What else have we got to do? We've got to encourage business and universities and APS to work together in moving between each other, so inviting business people into the universities, inviting students into businesses, inviting the APS into universities, and the universities into the APS with that circulating China knowledge on a more fluid basis. At the moment, there is too much siloing, and I'm hoping that the new university's accord process will help us break down some of those barriers. That might mean co-designing courses. Maybe the masters area that we are missing, the honors area we are missing, we could work with business to design courses that will equip graduates with the skills they want to see in people that we produce in universities. Is that enough?

Professor Anne McLaren:

Oh, thank you, Louise. That's wonderful. Well, it's not wonderful, it's very sobering, particularly we're so few people doing honors, it's now very difficult for us to have Australian students who will go on and do doctorates in China related studies.

What I'm going to do now is open it out to Q&A. The first question is from Ian Lee. Thank you. 'How could corporate Australia do better in this area?' Who'd like to respond to that?

Ms Ciara Morris:

I could jump in and – Oh.

Professor Louise Edwards:

Yeah, I think I was going to say someone else do [it] because I've done my bit on it, I think. Yeah.

Professor Anne McLaren:

Ciara, do you have any idea because you've been speaking to people in this area?

Ms Ciara Morris:

I'll follow on with what Louise was saying just then.

What we found in the report is that a representative Australia's China-facing businesses said that currently, there's no great premium in business for a university degree with Chinese language for a China studies major student. They're looking at business students, but as Louise said, they still want the business student to have some foundational China knowledge. I think this is a really important issue for the university sector to grapple with in collaboration with industry. Again, as Louise said, this breaking down of the silos, of bringing groups together because we need to consider here credited internships, work integrated learning, and experiences in China outside of the classroom, all together building a China capable student who can then go into the Australian workforce and into industry. Also, industry can connect with alumni networks, partly affiliated with universities and some non-affiliated with universities, because these are great initiatives that arm young professionals across any industry area with the skills to succeed in the Australia-China space.

I see some questions there as well on how to deal with this China risk and the negative public debate for young professionals. Well, these networks, these associations are fantastic ways for young professionals and students to rely on their peers through periods of difficulty. I know that over the last five or so years of instability in the Australia–China relationship, in my career and in my studies, I’ve relied a lot on my peers through those associations to know that you’re not alone out there as a person who might have an interest in China and want to work in the Australian workforce and contribute, but not be seen as a spy. Just to put it in absolute plain English there, industry can connect more with universities and alumni associations.

Professor Anne McLaren:

Thanks, Ciara.

The next, there’s a comment here from Wilfred Schafhauser: ‘In the light of polarisation in the West, we should greatly foster people to people contact.’ I think this one speaks to what Ciara mentioned as the quality of our national debate. If it were less strident and more nuanced, she said this would definitely help people’s attitudes, so thank you, Wilfred, for your comment.

The next one is a fairly long comment from Bruce Tao who’s from China: ‘The challenges of having more Chinese students studying Chinese related majors are career opportunities and chances for getting Australian permanent residency. Who’s talking about the motivations of people coming from the PRC? Most Chinese students study business or engineering because they can offer better opportunities to find jobs and stay in Australia, so why would you study China studies in Australia when you can do business and engineering, and get permanent residency?’ ‘Take myself,’ he says, ‘I’m now a PhD candidate at UC. It was a research topic of Chinese diaspora’, so that’s an interesting guy, ‘but when I came to Australia 10 years ago, I studied accounting because it was more relevant. It enabled me to get PR [permanent residency]. After receiving my PR, I worked as an accountant for these three years, and then I went back to university.’

This is a real issue, isn’t it? We favor accountancy rather than China studies. Would anyone like to comment on that?

Dr Yu Tao:

Yeah, if I may.

I think, Bruce, you raised a very important point here, but I suppose the answer, if I may, is beyond the scope of just Chinese international students here. Now, my view is there’s nothing wrong for Chinese international students to come here, study engineering and accounting, and they are, at the end of the day, the skill set that this country need anyway, but I suppose what we can do there is even use their own language or use English to help them to better understand China because even for Chinese international students or Chinese students, as I said, even for them to understand China in Chinese universities, they still need a specific training. I got my first degree from Peking University and there was where I learned how to critically analyse the Chinese society by critically analysing, I mean not necessarily criticise that, but understand what’s the factors that may contribute to the mechanisms there. I learned that in Chinese language.

I suppose, as educators in the China field here in Australia, that’s one area we could contribute to help our Chinese international students, even who are starting accounting or engineering, to develop a better China knowledge. If later, they become Australian permanent residents or citizens, I have no doubt that they can contribute to this country’s interests in a great capacity. I want to use your question as a safe way to address something really sometimes concerns me is how Australia engage in Chinese diaspora community here and how to better utilise the resource here, but also how to create a fair environment for our Chinese heritage members. Now, I think you said in your PhD, you do the topic about Chinese diaspora. You probably have been talking with the community very often and you probably understand that lots of people with or people

of Chinese heritage, they actually are discouraged to study Chinese in the university because of some of the institutional designs that we have in our language pathways.

Now, if you are of Chinese heritage and then your parents are from China, even though you've never lived in China or you speak English at home, maybe your parents from Chinese-speaking places which do not speak Mandarin, maybe Cantonese, you'll still be denied the chance to study Chinese as a second language because the Department of Education, which are in the state level and they might fear that you have an unfair advantage over other people, but that's a little bit racist, if I may. I think you can't just look into how people look like and assume that they just can master the Chinese language and China knowledge. I suppose that's something for our government and university to carefully think about how to create a fair pathway. It won't necessarily give them any favour, but fair pathway to allow our people with Chinese heritage to start a Chinese thing.

Professor Anne McLaren:

Yes. Issue of fairness really comes into play here. We need to be fairer to people of Chinese heritage who often struggle to find a suitable course and might meet with suspicion when they do.

This point comes from Alexandra Gray, and she says, 'Are there enough students arriving at universities with medium high Chinese as a second language? Do they have to start right from the beginning, but they may not have the language prerequisites to enroll in Chinese study subjects? In short, do we need to see change in primary and secondary education?' I think she's calling for broader education in primary and secondary education. What do you think about that?

Dr Yu Tao:

I suppose, Alexandra, that's great questions.

I suppose there are two layers there. On a technical layer, it's very easy. There's no problem for us to cater to people come here and really learn that. In high school, what we do is that we do a placement test on the first day of their university and they climb to the right level. If you have already say passed AHA, or even if you haven't passed AHA, you speak fair amount of Chinese, we wouldn't place you into the beginner's class, and that's unfair for other students, anybody, and unfair to you. That's no problem or technical.

However, I suppose I'm not going to repeat myself. I know there's no questions. I suppose questions need to be asked and answered on a broader level regarding how we cater better especially the secondary education for them to value language education, not only Chinese, all language education there, and eventually create a better pathway for students to go to university so they feel incentivised of learning a foreign language in the second school. To be honest, I think I've been into many countries, I think almost every country in the world or many countries in the world have compulsory second language learning, and Australia probably one of the exceptions where it's not compulsory for students to learn second language.

Professor Louise Edwards:

Can I dive in as well?

Dr Yu Tao:

Yeah.

Professor Louise Edwards:

On this point, I think it's a really good one.

The importance of supporting community language schools as well. These are very poorly funded. Not only they're amazing resource and they generate a lot of diasporic language capacity across all of Australia's different community groups, be it Italian, Greek, or Arabic, and these are areas that could really help plug the gap that, I think, Alexandra is speaking about.

Ms Ciara Morris:

I'll jump in as well, we'll go three for three, and just say that the report did exclusively focus on the Australian tertiary sector, so we didn't look at primary or secondary education. You have to have a limit somewhere to research, otherwise you'd be there forever, but I will do a shout-out to a report that came out in 2016, so it's a little old now, but I think it's still very valuable, from UTS:ACRI called *Building Chinese Language Capacity in Australia*. That report looked at the number of students learning Chinese and Australian schools. If anyone's interested in that, I would point them in that direction.

Professor Anne McLaren:

Thank you very much.

Look, we've virtually come to an end. We've got a couple of points from Harry Harding and Fion Lim and Yalin Hao and Alexandra Gray, but I don't know whether we quite have – I think I'm missing one of them. Yes, one's already left.

Okay. What about the issue of businesses wanting but not rewarding language work? I've had actually a couple of comments about, 'I'm highly qualified and I've got these skills, but people don't seem to really want me in employment. It's not something which seems to be valued.' How can we create a culture where these things are valued? I don't know if we have time to answer that.

Professor Louise Edwards:

Can I dive in on that?

I think it's part of a general weakness in Australian community generally that doesn't see language as anything more than a technical skill. What we know with AI [artificial intelligence] is that the technical translation or the technical linguistic stuff is going to be very quick and fast to do. It's the deep cultural knowledge that comes with the language skills. We are forgetting that when we say, and I think a lot of businesses tend to think, 'Oh, I've got a person who can speak X, therefore they can do the technical side of this,' actually, no, they can do the cultural side of it and that's where you get the real benefit. I think business and universities and the APS could actually see language as more than just a technical skill. It is a huge cultural benefit. It just brings all of that deep knowledge that you can't do really good international relations or cross-cultural communication without that kind of deep knowledge, so language is the key to so many more things than just translating one word to another word.

Dr Yu Tao:

Yeah, and can I just add on Louise's very great point, but also reflect on some of the conversation I had?

This call is from other disciplines. I think one challenge for us in the university is that not every university got this so-called scale of economy, so some of the departments are really small and others are bigger. If we can have a national collaboration on how to better document the skillset that our graduates have, that might help them to the ones in their career. What Louise was saying both to my mind was that I know that my archeology colleagues, for example, they have this archeology passport that documents older industrial skillsets they graduate have there. It's developed by the Australian Archeology Society or Association. I think maybe Chinese Studies Association for Australia can explore something there, and that also can address sometimes the lack of so-called scale economy in certain universities. If we have a national approach, I think that will help our students, that will help our programs, and at the end of the day, that will help Australia.

Ms Ciara Morris:

I'll jump in here as well and just say that in the report towards the end, in an appendix, we've compiled a table of all China centers we could locate in Australia, both affiliated and not affiliated with universities, but we've also put together a table of, I guess you could say platforms for transmitting China knowledge in the policy space, so companies like China Matters, China Policy, that put together resources that real humans have sat down with Chinese language skills and knowledge, and understanding, and added nuance to English translations of Chinese policy documents, for example. By no means, [is that] all that's out there [in our] table, but we do hope that it provides a helpful tool for students or anyone looking to broaden their China knowledge and understand how important that human analysis is and translating as opposed to just using a Google translating or an AI tool, which any language learner will tell you is often absolutely appalling. Hopefully, that's useful for some people.

Professor Anne McLaren:

Thank you, Ciara.

Look, we might have time just to mention this comment or question from Fion Lim. She talks about the politics in Australia: 'The settings set by the politicians has a huge impact on the study research of China. What is your view of you as the best representative to advocate to the government that we have a need to understand China better beyond the international education market?'

Professor Louise Edwards:

One of the comments that came up early on was that China's too important to be left just to the spooks and the soldiers. It's impacting every single aspect of everybody's lives from you walk to the shops, it's China that's there, it's the lights that go on. You cannot leave China to be some sort of niche specialist area. We need knowledge. I think Frances Adamson's preface really captured a whole lot of that. She said, I was interested Ciara picked out a quote from, and I had a different quote from the same preface, which I thought was really good: 'Deep knowledge reduces the risk of strategic miscalculation, the importance of listening to experts, including young experts.'

We can't have people who know stuff about China hiding away because they're either in fear or they feel it won't be valued, and we need to have these voices heard and welcomed. China's just way too important. We can't keep importing our knowledge. We have to generate our own Australian perspectives. We should also be going out and looking at ASEAN perspectives on China. They've lived with China for a long time. They have a lot of expert knowledge. A lot of it's written in English, so there's no excuse for not looking at what's happening in Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia in relation to China. Those would be my pitch. Thanks for the opportunity to be on.

Professor Anne McLaren:

Thank you, Louise.

I'm now going to hand over to Amy Ma as we have to wrap up here. Thank you.

Ms Amy Ma:

Thank you, Professor McLaren, and thanks to our speakers today, Professor Louise Edwards, Ciara Morris and Dr Yu Tao.

Members of the audience, we'll be sending an email to everyone here asking for your thoughts on how this webinar went. If you could please fill out that feedback form, we'd really appreciate it, so that we can make future UTS:ACRI events a better experience for everyone involved.

If you want to know more about the Australia-China relationship and about our research, more details are available on our website at australiachinarelations.org. The discussion today will also be available there. Please follow us on Twitter for the latest news [@acri_uts](https://twitter.com/acri_uts).

Thanks again to our speakers and all of our attendees. Goodbye.