

Chinese Australians Or Australian Chinese

By Jocelyn Chey

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Link: <https://johnmenadue.com/jocelyn-chey-chinese-australians-or-australian-chinese/#more-21007>

The Chinese Australian community has been hijacked in the current public debate about the extent of Chinese influence in Australia. Far-right elements are fanning anti-Asian feelings and there is an upsurge in racism in major cities. Government leaders now more than ever should affirm the many contributions of the Chinese Australian community. It is an asset in our relationship with the People's Republic of China.

ABC Radio National all last week focussed on China and China-Australia relations, including a sell-out public forum on 30 September entitled Australia-China a complicated friendship. A podcast is available at http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/rn/podcast/2018/09/bia_20180903.mp3

Forum speakers included Lowy Institute Fellow Richard McGregor, whose study of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is widely admired, Chinese community leader Jason Yat-Sen Li, Clive Hamilton, author of the 2017 best seller *The Silent Invasion*, and myself. Hamilton claims that the CCP through its United Front Department targets the Chinese Australian community in its aim of subverting the Australian political system. The Forum discussion was valuable but failed to cover the whole spectrum of the bilateral relationship, including political, economic, cultural, scientific, strategic and people-to-people ties, concentrating overmuch instead on the role of Chinese Australians.

China looms large in our international consciousness and as it exerts more economic and political influence in the region, it will be ever more important. Its rise has been so rapid that the Australian public is perhaps unprepared for the implications that will be felt in many aspects of our lives. It is important for Canberra to develop a coherent narrative to explain China's significance, and Chinese Party and government organs should also be aware of the need to be sensitive and avoid excessive demonstrations of nationalism.

While maintaining our national security and defending our national values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, we must find ways of improving our relationship with China, promote scientific and cultural cooperation and

identify common interests where we can work together to solve local and regional problems such as climate change. China's *Belt and Road Initiative* should be evaluated in a positive light. Canberra's "Quad" should be defined as a working-level dialogue and not an anti-China strategic alliance. To keep sea-lanes open through the South China Sea, we should work with regional countries such as Indonesia and Vietnam rather than with the United States.

The 2016 National Census identified 1.2 million people in Australia as having Chinese ancestry. This group however comprises people whose direct or ancestral ties may be in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam or elsewhere in South East Asia, and whose families may have been resident here for several generations, or who have arrived only in the last decade or two. Within each of these subcategories also there are people of very different political persuasions. It is misleading to lump them all together and label them "Chinese." Unfortunately, Clive Hamilton's book uses racial profiling and his assertions feed into the anti-Asian propaganda of anti-immigration lobby groups. This week the inner Sydney suburb of Lilyfield was plastered with posters saying Asians were not welcome and similar signs have appeared this year in other suburbs, in Melbourne and in Canberra.

This is a coordinated campaign as evidenced by the widespread use of a poster, featured here in an SBS story from May this year <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/no-place-for-racism-mayor-fights-back-over-anti-asian-poster-blitz>

The *Challenging Racism* project at Western Sydney University <https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/challengingracism/> in a national survey has identified a marked increase in racist incidents over the last eighteen months.

In this situation, the government needs to condemn racist attacks and take a firm stand against discrimination. Former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull made a positive contribution in his 7 August speech at the University of New South Wales. It is now incumbent on his replacement Scott Morrison to endorse these views. At the present time it seems that Chinese investments in Australia are subjected to extra layers of scrutiny and that applications from Chinese to migrate here are more likely to be rejected than from European, American or South Asians.

Australia is a multicultural society. Geographically situated in the Indo-Pacific, it is natural that we should have increasing trade, diplomatic and people-to-people ties with our neighbours. It is not appropriate for us to emphasise our European heritage and rank it as superior to other cultures, which is the agenda of the

proposed Ramsay Centre, currently under discussion at the University of Sydney. Chinese Australians have been here as long as European settlers and have contributed greatly to our national development over the last two hundred years. We need them now more than ever.

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