

A new China narrative for Australia

Submission by Andrew Simon

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The desire by China Matters to craft a narrative that might provide coherence to Australian policies and action is an admirable one. In my view, any narrative must be reflective of and enabled by a broader leadership stance.

Our relationship with China needs a fundamental rethink and new skills for better ways of relating. We need to be better able to work with China while maintaining our own ways of living and being, and working together to address planetary challenges that impact on all humanity.

The severe complexity of our global environment, the changing relationship reflecting a changing Australia with a continuously changing China, and the fact that much of our material wellbeing is contingent on China demands that we also recast the kinds of leadership that we will need. Such leadership would need to be different to the kinds of leadership (or perhaps even the absence of leadership) that we have seen over the recent period.

Wisdom, courage, statecraft, adaptability yet consistency of principle, the ability to build trust and being able to take the long view in a world motivated by short-termism are all essential capabilities required in such complexity.

These capabilities are not only relevant to leaders dealing with geopolitical matters. They are capabilities that leaders across all sectors require if we are to find our way forward in a world that is increasingly being shaped by a superpower that we don't fully understand or always see eye to eye with, yet need to work with if we are to cultivate continued prosperity and to address global challenges.

The need to develop a narrative about Australia's relationship with China must come with a serious recasting of the way in which we lead ourselves in Australia. In our relationship with China and indeed in so many other areas of economic, political, social and environmental life, we deserve to be better led.

Any narrative should in my view therefore be underpinned and enabled by a different model of leadership.

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