



### Third China Matters Young Professionals Debate

'Are Australian Universities ready for the rise of China?'

*in partnership with the University of Sydney Business School*

Wednesday 22 November 2017

The third China Matters Young Professional debate brought together the public and private sector in a lively debate format to discuss China related issues. Each debater was assigned their particular roles, and opinions expressed do not represent personal or professional opinions. Each team was composed of one young professional and one special guest. Our affirmative team had special guest Winnie Eley from the University of Newcastle and young professional Rebecca Yang from the City of Sydney. The negative team had special guest Professor Hans Hendrichske from the University of Sydney Business School, and young professional Jessica Wirawan from PwC. The debate was moderated by young professional Primrose Riordan from The Australian.

The affirmative team started off the debate by asking what evidence do we have that universities don't welcome China? They asked if there was any evidence to suggest our universities are not adequately preparing our students and further questioned what evidence do we have that universities are resisting China or have failed to be resilient in the rise of China. The team highlighted that 1 in 3 Australian universities offer a Chinese major and within the New Colombo Plan 1 in 5 students went to China, both of which are initiatives that "enable students and staff for the rise of China". While not perfect they argued that Australian universities are on the right trajectory and are continuing to improve their China studies offerings.

The affirmative also presented personal experience from the perspective of Chinese international students. They stressed that universities have always been very welcoming and friendly towards international students, and that Australia is "leading the world in international education." They assured the audience that even when there were cultural misunderstandings, the university was nothing but encouraging.

The negative team responded by first questioning whether universities are adequately preparing their international students for the workforce. They stressed the rise of China has already happened, describing China as a "sheer economic powerhouse". They argued universities are increasingly financially dependent on revenue from international students, which currently makes up one quarter of total university revenue. The team argued that in cases where universities have apologised for content that has offended Chinese international students, they are simply taking a very cautious approach and it was merely due to being concerned that their "dollar figure was at stake". The negative team highlighted that universities are not ready for potential incidents between China and Australia and stressed that Australian universities are also not ready for the competition from Asian universities that are increasing in quality. Furthermore, they argued universities repeatedly "underestimate the future influence of students", especially with regards to future political influence.



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The negative team expressed that universities must learn to cope with a dominant China. They argued against the claim that huge number of Chinese international students proves we are doing well. Instead, they specified the reason students come to Australia is because we have good rankings, and the reason we have good rankings is due to funds being invested into increasing rankings rather than being invested into the students. The team emphasised that it is imperative universities strive to diversify the student body and raised the point that many students come to Australia to create networks, but universities are not helping students to integrate into society or connect to businesses.

The debaters where asked whether universities are “cheating the students” by letting them enter university with inadequate English. The negative team raised that this is also a question of visa qualifications and that there is unsatisfactory infrastructure in the enrolment process. The affirmative was questioned on Education Minister Birmingham’s announcement to amend English language requirements in the university enrolment process. The affirmative team argued against the proposed amendments by stating that the Minister needs more understanding of universities, saying that with increasing government cuts to funding, the notion that universities have a “river of gold from international students” is unfair.

Our first audience question was about Australian students who do not get an education on China. The affirmative team stressed that universities are not turning a blind eye to the lack of China literacy and are making improvements. They also encouraged contextual understanding when it comes to isolated cases of international student incidents.

The debaters were questioned about Confucius institutes and other groups who are supervised by the Chinese government. The affirmative team rebutted that the media is not accurately representing these cases. They stated that the term ‘supervised’ was simply a matter of mistranslation and it is positive that student organisations are supported by the Chinese consulate. They went on to argue that all Asian consulates help their respective communities.

Another audience member probed the debaters about the public sentiment around the rise of China and the “fear of invasion”. The negative team replied that our “current environment breeds resentment” and “fear mongering”, and we seldom ask what is the value of our relationship with China.

In summary, the affirmative debates encouraged the audience to vote for the facts. They reiterated that Australia has over 1400 academic papers written about China or in conjunction with Chinese universities, demonstrating that we are already working affectively with China. The negative team stressed although Australia is ready for the short-term benefits, if the numbers were to increase Australia would be unable to cope. At the culmination of the event, the audience overwhelmingly voted the negative team, with Hans and Jessica, as the winners of the debate.

*Please note the views expressed by each team were put forward for the purposes of the debate only and do not represent personal or professional opinions.*



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