

A new China narrative for Australia

Submission by Jane Golley

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This is an excellent New Narrative for our most complex bilateral relationship, even if the devil will of course be in the details of practical implementation. I have just two comments, both of which are semantic but I believe important:

I don't think it is necessary or beneficial to use the word 'like minded' when referring to the Asian countries with whom we will cooperate. Does this include Brunei (with its new anti-gay laws, involving stoning), Cambodia (a 'liberal democracy?'), India (with its caste system) or Vietnam (a one-party state)? Which countries are in and which countries are out of our 'like-minded' team, and determined on what grounds? Surely we should cooperate with any countries when it is in our national interests to do so. If so, then the use of 'like minded' is a divisive tactic that will upset those who are not 'in' (including China), with no obvious benefits that I can see (unless upsetting some is the intention).

The term 'Indo-Pacific' is now being used (including in this Narrative) when referring broadly to the need to uphold rules or peace in our region, and yet the countries in that region are predominantly 'Asian', a term that is used less and less in political discourse unless we are stressing the economic benefits of engaging with them. For a country that has struggled for decades to have 'deep and forward looking' engagement with our nearest neighbours, I find the use of this new term an unwelcome distraction – not only because the vast majority of the Australian population have no idea what is meant by it, but also because The Future is Asian (as Parag Khanna's 2019 book depicts so vividly). It is not Indo-Pacific.

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