

A new China narrative for Australia

Submission by Jocelyn Chey

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I find this draft compelling and timely and congratulate China Matters for developing it. I hope that policy makers in Canberra will find it useful and adopt its major recommendations. I believe it should be taken as a package and not viewed as independent modules that can be lifted from the whole. Australia's bilateral relationship with China is complex and ever-evolving and its many facets must be acknowledged and their interplay and connectedness be borne in mind at all times. Political and trade relationships do not go alongside defence and security concerns but are interwoven with them.

Having said that, this Narrative should be expanded to include a vision of Australia's changing national identity. We ceased to be a monocultural country decades ago. In the light of the Christchurch alt-right terrorist attack, I believe it is imperative to state this and restate it at every possible opportunity. We are a multicultural nation. We should acknowledge that in the past we have adopted anti-Asian policies, which framed our federation and were typified by the White Australia policy, but that we are now an inclusive and tolerant society. Our culture embraces our Indigenous past and the contributions of immigrants from around the world. Chinese culture is a treasury of resources and Australia is developing its unique take in areas as diverse as music, theatre, art, medical science and health practice. We should look to this future with excitement and determination.

I also find this Narrative lacking in two important respects.

First, it nowhere mentions Taiwan and its relations with Mainland China. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations with the PRC in December 1972, Australia has maintained a One China policy. Recently the PRC government has put Taiwan on notice that it "must and will be reunified." It is not likely that Taiwan will accept this. If conflict arises, what position will Australia take? Will we still maintain strategic ambiguity? A new Narrative ought to refer to the principles on which a decision would be made.

Second, the Narrative fails to mention Hong Kong. This is a major trade partner and a member of APEC in its own right. There is a large Australian community there and many Australian companies have regional representation in the special administrative region (SAR). Hong Kong was returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 and is presently governed under the One Country Two Systems policy formulated before the handover but this provides for continuation of the SAR's special status only for 50 years, and up to this point Hong Kong has not seen progress towards full democracy as promised by the PRC. The steady erosion of the political rights of the people of Hong Kong, including the resident Australians, should be on the agenda for

discussion between Canberra and Beijing, and assurances should be given to Hong Kong that we will strenuously defend these rights.

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