

Language matters: it's the CPC, not the CCP

by **Ciara Morris**

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The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the name often given by Western politicians, academics, and commentators to refer to the party which governs the People's Republic of China (PRC).

It is a misnomer. In English, the party calls itself the Communist Party of China (CPC).

Last Thursday, July 1, marked the 100-year anniversary of the CPC. It is about time we got this very important term right.

Language shapes how we understand the world. To call the Communist Party of China the Chinese Communist Party conflates the party with the nation of China, the people of China, and what it means to be Chinese.

China has over 3000 years of recorded history. The CPC has existed for only 100 of those years, and the PRC government for only 72 years.

The CPC and the PRC government are not universally synonymous with China, or with being Chinese. In Chinese, the word "China" (Zhonghua) can refer to the culture, the civilisation, the country, the people, and/or the language.

In a time when anti-China sentiment is dangerously fuelling anti-Chinese racism both [at home in Australia](#) and [around the world](#) - and where [creeping McCarthyism](#) threatens nuanced discussion about regional security - clarity of language in political debate about our neighbourhood superpower is essential.

McCarthyism refers to the actions of American senator Joseph McCarthy during the 1950s, when he made aggressive, unfair, and baseless accusations of treason and disloyalty against American citizens, in a campaign to spread fear about communist influence in American institutions.

Australians should be openly and analytically critical of the CPC and the PRC government. We should ask questions about the PRC's foreign interference attempts, military ambitions in the South China Sea, human rights in Xinjiang, eroding freedoms in Hong Kong, the future of Taiwan, the list goes on.

But when we are critical of these issues, we should never let robust and analytical discussion dissolve into "China-bashing", anti-Chinese racism, or McCarthyite loyalty testing of anyone with connections to the PRC. We should refrain from painting the whole country with the same brush, but rather use PRC and CPC when we mean the state and/or the party instead of the all-encompassing term "China".

In democracies where governments and leaders come and go with election cycles - and sometimes more frequently than that - it seems somewhat easier to distinguish between a government and a people.

During the Trump era, Australians didn't assume every Australian with American heritage was a MAGA-hat-wearing xenophobe. Yet according to [a new poll](#) by the Australia-China Relations Institute, an alarming 39 per cent of Australians think Australians of Chinese heritage can be mobilised by the PRC government to undermine Australia's social cohesion.

It is impossible that 1.2 million Australians of Chinese heritage - from vastly different geographic, social, and economic circumstances, across multiple waves of immigration - could hold the same political beliefs, let alone the 1.3 billion people in a country as large as the PRC. Try as the CPC might to influence them. And they do try.

Writing for [The Diplomat](#), Shannon Tiezzi provides snapshots of how members of the PRC's urban, educated middle class have reacted to allegations of human rights abuses in Xinjiang. Many people interviewed for the piece were inclined to believe the CPC version of events: that allegations about Xinjiang were just the latest in a long line of overly anti-China Western media stories.

We could put this down to a situation of the "boy who cried wolf", in which PRC citizens may perceive Western media as relentlessly crusading against the PRC and therefore not believe it, even when a genuine story of human rights abuses emerges. But it is more alarmingly an example of how the CPC itself strategically conflates the nation of "China" and the people of "China" with the Communist Party and its policies. The purpose, [as Peter Hartcher has outlined](#), is "to make the party inseparable from patriotic pride".

So, when Western politicians, academics, and commentators conflate their criticism of CPC policies with a disdain for "China", they knowingly or unknowingly play into the CPC's strategy, and increase the CPC's monopoly hold on what it means to be Chinese and patriotic.

Simply being mindful of the language we use when discussing PRC politics is not going to end anti-Chinese racism - or make any tangible difference to the situation in Xinjiang, or stop a revival of McCarthyism in Australia.

But it is an important start.

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