



Rethinking China with Yun Jiang

In China Matters' monthly lecture series: 'Rethinking China', speakers with diverse expertise and background are asked to describe how they see the People's Republic of China, why they see it that way, and on that basis share their thoughts on what kind of China strategy Australia should pursue in the medium to long term. Our seventh lecturer was Ms Yun Jiang together in conversation with Mr Stan Grant.

Below are some of Yun's key observations:

In China, the wild movement of up and down, the high stakes involved in winning and losing the political the political game transform the attitudes of generations of people, especially towards politics.

There's currently an increasing tendency in Australia to cast people in a binary black and white way, reminiscent of the black and red categories during the cultural revolution. For example, some politicians and media commentators like to cast everyone who joined or is even remotely connected to the Chinese military or the Chinese communist party as evil or morally suspect.

Quite often, the people who are most critical of the Chinese Communist Party are the party members themselves.

It is highly problematic if we say to someone from China unless you publicly and repeatedly criticise the Chinese Communist Party the way we want you to your views and illegitimate and should not be heard.

There is a strong in-group and out-group element [in China]. Some Chinese people are okay with Chinese people criticising the government but get very defensive when foreigners criticise the government.

There's a long way to go for Australia to be as China-literate as we are US-literate. It also means that we as a country tend to empathise more with people in the US than people in China. We can understand and share their struggles, whether at a country level or an individual level.

My biggest fear is not that China will be a different power but that it will be the same power as other great powers.

What we sorely need is to understand more what's happening inside China and to hear different voices and perspectives from the country. This includes voices from small towns or rural China, from migrant workers and delivery drivers, from LGBT people, from high schoolers and from non-Han people.

On an individual or state level we need more empathy and see things from their perspective to understand why they act and think the way they do. This does not necessarily mean agreeing with them.