2020 Henry Chan Lecture

MULTICULTURAL CITIZENSHIP RE-IMAGINED: ENGAGING MIGRANTS FROM CHINA

Professor Wanning Sun

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Australia-China Relations Institute
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Foreword

Professor James Laurenceson

Director, Australia-China Relations Institute,
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The Henry Chan lecture series, presented by the Chinese Australian Historical Society (CAHS), is an annual public lecture by a scholar of Chinese heritage researching an aspect of Australian history or society.

The Australia-China Relations Institute at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS:ACRI) is pleased to publish the 2020 Henry Chan lecture, 'Multicultural citizenship re-imagined: Engaging migrants from China', delivered by Wanning Sun, a UTS:ACRI Advisory Board member and Research Associate, and Professor of Media and Communication Studies at UTS. The lecture features an introduction by Dr Stephen FitzGerald AO, Australia's first Ambassador to the People's Republic of China (1973-1976).

Professor Sun focuses on three major areas in her lecture: recent changes in migration from the PRC to Australia; the key issues and challenges facing first-generation PRC migrants; and, finally, practical ways in which to re-imagine multicultural citizenship in light of shifting geopolitical circumstances, focusing on engagement and human rights.

The subject matter Professor Sun tackles is a longstanding issue that only continues to gain in importance. A Scanlon Foundation survey, which was released in February this year, tested Australian attitudes towards specific national groups. It showed, worryingly, that 47 percent of respondents held negative views towards Chinese-Australians. The need, therefore, to progress discussions on strategies for the improvement of social cohesion becomes all the more urgent. Professor Sun lays out the issues and proposed solutions sensitively and adroitly.

Introduction

Dr Stephen Fitzgerald AO

Australia's first Ambassador to the PRC (1973-1976)

On this question of the settlement of newcomers into Australia, I think it's pretty evident that we've lost the plot.

What was the plot?

The plot, when large-scale immigration from Europe began after the Second World War, was that government accepted that you can't just shovel large numbers of people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds into your society and expect this to... just work. To make it work, government itself has to have programs to ease the transition - for migrants, and for the people into whose communities they are moving – and it has to support this with sustained and positive messages about immigration and immigrants.

There was of course, no philosophy of multiculturalism at that time, and the policy governments chose was assimilation. Migrants were expected to become indistinguishable from the Australian-born, and the Australian-born were expected to facilitate this process. Many programs were put in place to make this happen.

Assimilation was not particularly benign, humane or culturally informed. But the important point for today's discussion is that Australian governments recognised that you had to have a settlement policy, and fund it, and actively promote it to the public as good for Australia.

When the policy of assimilation was replaced by a more culturally sensitive and inclusive policy called integration in the early 1960s, it was grounded in the same principles.

And when multiculturalism overtook integration in 1973, ushering in much more complex ideas about the nature of Australian identity and citizenship, the government accepted that there was even greater necessity for an active settlement policy.

But what happened with multiculturalism in the 1980s, which saw the successful beginning of substantial immigration from Asia, is instructive. When I was asked in 1987 to chair a review of our immigration policies, what we found was that multiculturalism was 'on the nose'. There was widespread scepticism, great misunderstanding of what it entailed, and a view that it was being forced on the community, discriminated in favour of migrants, and was a kind of social engineering aimed at forcing change in the Australian identity itself.

The lesson was that the government had neglected the basic principle that in a large-scale immigration program, now from very non-European countries, you had to work, not just at making migrants feel good, but at bringing the populace along with you.

Multiculturalism, and the institutions and services to support it, have since the mid-90s undergone almost constant fluctuation and changes of course, with no sustained articulation of a philosophy to carry it. The one clear line until very recently has been that we need to maintain large-scale immigration because it's good for the economy.

Now, over the last 20 to 30 years this economic argument can be counted a success, and it has brought to Australia large numbers of people of very different cultural backgrounds including, manifestly, the [People's Republic of China (PRC)], and different religions, including Muslims. But we have been shovelling them in with great regard for the economic benefit, and scant regard for the imperatives of successful settlement policy and social cohesion.

If we don't make the effort, what happens?

A good settlement policy sees that immigrants have the linguistic and other skills to survive and flourish, but we now see almost daily reports of immigrants without these skills, and missing out, marginalised, exploited, and even, in times of disaster and pandemic, endangered.

If a good settlement policy champions inclusion, we now see encouragement to division – through silence when there should be thundering condemnation, through the time-tested dog whistle which gives a green light to those who demonise the immigrant and through the direct stigmatising and scapegoating of immigrant communities from many quarters, without restraint.

We’ve not only lost the plot. We’re in danger of losing the values we like to pride ourselves on, and losing social cohesion.

I now invite Professor Sun, who is one of the best-qualified people in Australia to talk about these issues, to present the 2020 Henry Chan Lecture.

2020 Henry Chan Lecture

Multicultural citizenship re-imagined: engaging migrants from China

Professor Wanning Sun
November 25 2020
Metcalfe Auditorium, State Library of New South Wales

A recording is available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wghOI6bw-D0
E&OE | Check against delivery

The topic of my presentation is ‘Multicultural citizenship re-imagined: engaging migrants from China’.

Sounds fairly abstract, so let me start with a tiny detail to get us started.

When a Qantas plane carrying 240 Chinese-Australian citizens from Wuhan touched down on Christmas Island in early February 2020, a woman who had just disembarked from the plane was asked by a journalist to say a few words. She said, ‘When we landed, the captain said ‘welcome home''. She then started to sob uncontrollably, and was choking on her words.

I’ve had a lot of time to think about why this casual, even routine, remark from the Qantas pilot had moved her so much. And I came to the conclusion that, apart from being really relieved to be finally home after a long flight from China, she might have felt included as an Australian by the captain’s welcome home message.

Australia is a multicultural society, which people from all over the world with different cultures and religions call home, and the captain, as a ‘true blue Aussie’, nicely if not consciously reinforced this message of Australia as a home for people from different cultures and religions.

Of course, it is possible I have read too much into this comment. But I see her tears not just as tears of gratitude for being flown out of China on a charter flight, but also for being recognised as an Australian despite her being Chinese, and despite having an ongoing connection to her motherland.

Unfortunately, public moments such as this have become increasingly few and far between. More often than not, we hear comments that end up making Chinese-Australians feel excluded rather than included. For instance, in late August, our acting Immigration Minister Alan Tudge observed with regret that some communities are still seen by their former countries as ‘*their* diaspora’. He did not explicitly mention China, but we all know he was referring to China.

So Mr Tudge’s remark suggests that people have to choose – either you’re staying on as part of ‘their diaspora’, or you’re trying to become a ‘proud Australian’. But in order to qualify as a ‘proud Australian’, there can be no tension, no ambiguity, no ambivalence, no internal struggle for the individual about who they are and which country they want to identify with.

Tudge’s remarks signal to me, as an academic, a profound and worrying shift, if you like, from previous ways of imagining citizenship in multicultural Australia, whereby a connection to your own country of origin as well as your country of residence, was not only tolerated but also celebrated. Tudge’s remarks, together with statements made by many other commentaries, force this question on all of us: what does citizenship mean in a multicultural nation such as Australia? What should we aspire to if we want to ensure that *all* citizens feel able to make claims, to fulfil their responsibilities and exercise their rights as citizens?

Today in this talk, I want to share with you some of my own thinking on this question. I want to do this by taking on three tasks:

First. I want to review some recent changes in Chinese migration to Australia;

Second. I’d like to outline some of the main issues and challenges facing first-generation Mandarin-speaking migrants from the People's Republic of China (PRC) such as myself;

Finally. I’d like to discuss some possible ways of re-imagining multicultural Australia in the geopolitical circumstances that we find ourself in today.

What I'm going to say here is based on my own analysis. I’m fairly confident that the opinions I express are securely grounded in my observations and in my own evidence-based research. But I cannot of course claim that I speak on behalf of the entire first-generation migrant Mandarin speaking community, and that is a point I want to stress.

Let's begin with a brief review of the recent history of Chinese migration, particularly for the benefit of people who are very young.

We need to wind back a few decades to the late 1970s, the end of the White Australia policy, the beginning of the end of the Cold War, the start of China's economic reforms and its open-door policy. It was then Australia resumed immigration from the Chinese mainland starting from the 1980s and starting to accelerate in the 1990s, after a few decades' of virtually no arrivals at all from China. To differentiate this cohort from the older-generation Cantonese and southern dialect-speaking migrants, these PRC migrants are often referred to as the xin yimin (new migrants).

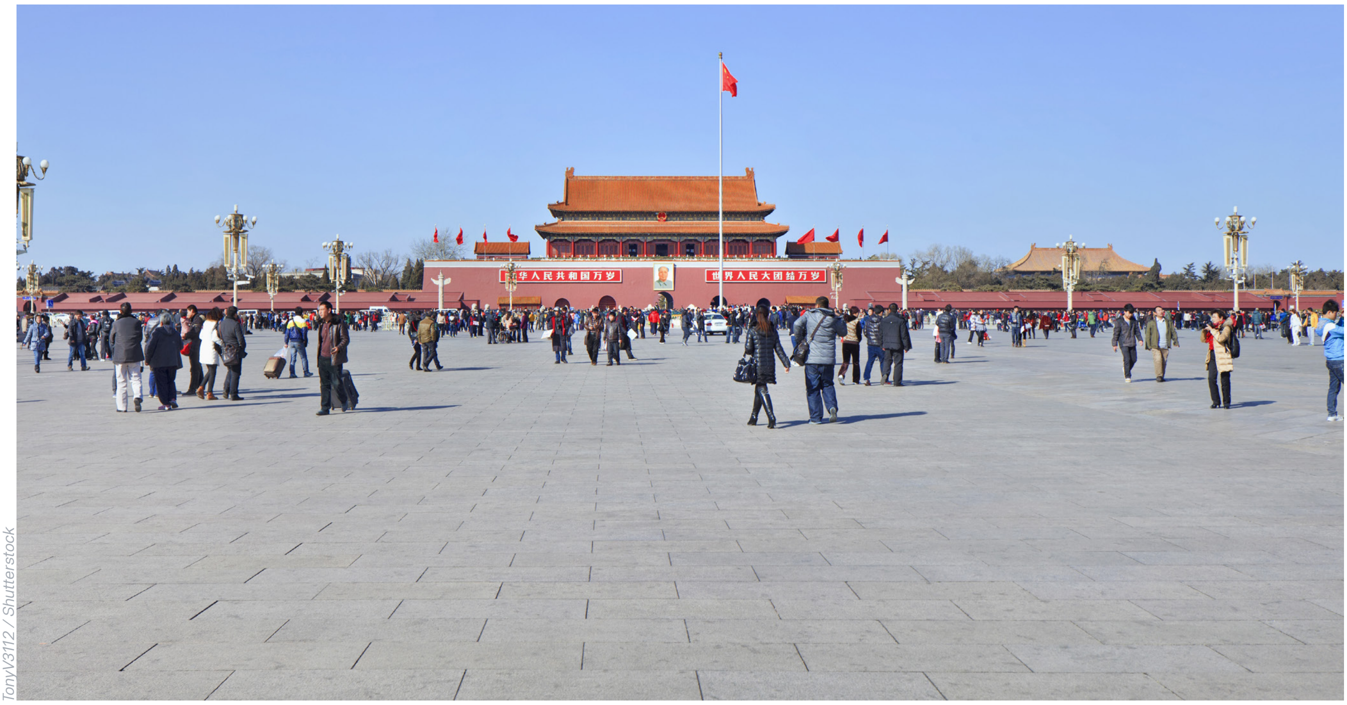
Among the earliest xi yimin and earliest arrivals in this wave were the 45,000 Chinese nationals who came around the time of Tiananmen – for those who are old enough to remember, that is – and they were allowed to settle in Australia permanently. This is the generation that was later on referred to as 'Hawke's children'. Professor Gao Jia from Melbourne University actually has written a couple of books particularly on the experience.

The decision on the part of the Hawke government to allow these individuals to migrate signalled the beginning of a major demographic shift within the Chinese community in Australia. Today in Australia, the majority of Chinese migrants speak Mandarin rather than Cantonese, use WeChat rather than WhatsApp as their preferred social media platform and write simplified Chinese characters rather than using traditional classical Chinese characters.

As for the Australian public, what they have seen is a gradual change in the restaurant menu: in addition to the Cantonese-style sweet and sour pork, Mongolian lamb and honey prawns – we all have had them – we now also have Chairman Mao's pork, northern hand-made noodles and Shanghai pan-fried dumplings.

Many of those who arrived in the 80s and 90s – they are mostly now in their 50s and 60s – they were allowed to stay initially on compassionate grounds, while the more recent arrivals after them (that is, the people who arrived in the 90s and early 2000s) came on skilled visas. And especially in the last decade or so, many international students have arrived, some with intentions to migrate. And now, these are the ones we call 'new-new migrants' (xin xin yimin). As a result, even within the PRC migrant cohort, the inter-generational differences in social values, political views, cultural sensibilities and consumption habits can be very, very pronounced.

These new migrants have also challenged many old assumptions about Chinese migrant communities. For instance, they no longer live in 'ghettos' or ethnic enclaves. They don't fit the stereotypes of the Chinese migrants as being



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One China for Ever

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mostly restaurant owners, laundromat owners, or vegetable gardeners.

In fact, a recent report has uncovered a large number of very successful businesspeople that started as being born in China, educated in Australian universities and started companies in Australia.

Their businesses can be found in all industry sectors across Australia, and they bring very important economic benefits to the nation. They bring diverse thinking, innovation and growth to the Australian business landscape, and they offer an important bridge between Australia and China.

Another interesting thing about this new migrant cohort is their styles of organisation. This is a sociological kind of perspective, if you like. Unlike the older Chinese community associations, which are usually based on traditional leadership hierarchies, organisational structures and channels of communication, the new cohort usually organises and communicates online and via social media.

What does this mean?

It means their spaces of association are often virtual – and sometimes more virtual than physical. There is also much less hierarchy in the way they organise, and the emergence of leadership in this community is more organic rather than formally elected. Connections and associations among them also tend to be more ephemeral and fluid than old structure.

What is often forgotten is that this new cohort is marked by diversity in terms of place of origin, history of migration and sometimes big differences in politics, religion and ethnicity.

Too often, it is the minority on each end of the spectrum that gets most air time; that gets attention from media. At one end, you hear the extremely active, sometimes quite belligerent anti-Chinese Communist Party (CCP) activists and agitators. You hear a lot from them. And at the other end, all this scrutiny is on the hunt for ‘spies’ and agents of the United Front.

What is most important to remember is that between these two extremes lie the silent majority, and it is this silent majority which really interests me. Their political views come into what I call 50 shades of grey. These 50 shades of grey are not only in relation to each individual’s level of attachment to, identification with and support for China or even the CCP. They are also in relation to a wide range of issues in Australia, including indigenous issues, environmental issues, economics, gender and sexuality, religion and human rights.

This may not be newsworthy, and is very hard for journalists to sensationalise, but my research suggests that most Chinese-Australians prefer not to be represented by, or associated with, the so-called ‘pro-China’ camp or ‘anti-China’ camp. They simply want to get on with their lives.

This internal diversity, in itself, is not surprising. Nor should it be a problem. But what does become problematic is that, despite the obvious plurality of views and values, many commentators continue to assume that the new Chinese-Australians are a monolithic group. In other words, they're all the same.

Clearly, such diversity also poses a challenge to Australia's multicultural policy, as it's currently understood. As early as 2011, almost Ten years ago, my friend and colleague Professor Andrew Jakubowicz, a sociologist, observed that:

> [M]ulticultural political analysis tends to examine ethnic groups as a sub-set of interest group politics, and thereby constructs a view of Australian society that frames ethnic communities as interest groups with specific, usually first-generation, concerns.

Andrew also observed that the Chinese community don't really have enough in common to be thought of as a cohesive 'interest group'. For instance, the PRC may claim to be the custodian of some kind of Chinese identity, but refugees and individuals from Tibet and Uighurs from Xinjiang bring with them a long history of resistance and opposition.

So, this diversity poses a big problem for multiculturalism. Again, I quote Andrew. He said:

> The Chinese community…represents an emerging and unique constellation of factors that multiculturalism was never designed to accommodate or manage.

That was as early as 2011. Andrew already foresaw that Australia's multiculturalism was in trouble, because it had to reckon with what he called the 'Chinese question'.

The second focus of my talk today is the range of key issues and major challenges facing the Chinese community.

10 years on from Andrew's article, Australia now is confronted with a much more polarised geopolitical dynamics involving China and the US, with Australia caught in the middle. But are we getting any closer to solving the 'Chinese question'?

You probably agree with me here that the answer, for me, is no. In fact, if you look at how some politicians and media commentators talk about Chinese-Australians, you could be forgiven for thinking that we actually have gone backwards.

In recent years, as China-Australia relations started to sour, many Chinese-Australians I have talked to feel increasingly alienated from the place they now call home. To their growing bemusement and often anguish, they find themselves often targeted as objects of suspicion and distrust.

This ranges from really subtle insinuation to blatant finger-pointing. We have seen the whole spectrum. At the tabloid end of the media spectrum, you have people such as Andrew Bolt from *The Daily Telegraph* who write articles saying '[a] million Chinese here may not all be on our side', and describing 'Australians with Chinese ancestry' as a 'security risk'.

Meanwhile, at the so-called quality journalism end of the spectrum, you also have commentators such as Peter Hartcher, for instance, who call for a change of immigration policy that favours Hong Kong and Taiwan migrants rather than mainlanders, because he believes that the former have values that are more compatible with Australian values.

So it seems to me that there is a blind spot in this narrative of the 'untrustworthy PRC diaspora'. Why do I say this is a blind spot? Because modern China has never experienced anything else other than one-party rule. Migrants from this era, from this country – not to mention those who remain in China – did not choose to live in a Communist country. They were born into that system. It's not that there's the CCP and there's a range of other parties, and these people have decided to side with the CCP.

So it's both unfair and illogical to assume that PRC citizens and migrants are loyal to the CCP simply because they live – or have lived – in a nation that happens to be ruled by that party.

At the same time, just because many people in China's diaspora communities do not support the CCP does not necessarily mean that everyone wants to be a card-carrying dissident, or want to cut their professional or business ties with China. Left or right, many politicians, the media and public commentators do not seem to recognise the internal struggles facing this group, in terms of what positions they should take, especially on issues where Australia and China are at loggerheads.
When I say internal struggles, I mean both the struggles within the individual self, and the clashes of views within the group.

Politicians and public commentators also need to realise that the great majority of migrants from China are individuals with complex agency, who have the capacity to live with tensions and internal conflicts. Although some may be

Chris Phutully / Wikimedia Commons

quite nationalistic about China, they are not necessarily doing the bidding of the CCP.

While a small minority may feel that they need the Australian government to protect them from what they fear the Chinese government may do to them, most of them simply want to stop being pawns between the two countries. They don't want to be put in either the 'pro-China' or the 'anti-China' camp. They just want to get on with their work and lives.

Political integration is never an easy process for new migrants, we all know that. Despite their success in business and their professions, many first-generation migrants do lack social capital and do lack social networks, English not being their first language and it's a very difficult barrier to overcome. Coming from a country with one-party rule, they do not arrive already fully equipped with the political knowledge, competence and skills that are required to become fully functional in a liberal-democratic system. And despite their growing numbers, we see very few leadership figures emerging from this cohort, whether it's in the corporate sector, the public sector or various levels of politics.

As if these obstacles were not difficult enough, what is also happening is a growing level of what I call political disenfranchising. While my own research has unearthed a very high level of interest among Chinese-Australians in participating in Australian politics, the current political climate has made it all but impossible for them to enter politics. Anyone with a mainland background runs the risk of being suspected of, or insinuated as 'having links' to or being 'associated with' the CCP.

But my current research on how first-generation Mandarin-speaking migrants use social media suggests two things.

First, members of this community love Australia and feel lucky to be living here. They are active promoters of public diplomacy for both Australia and China, and they don't feel that these two things have to be mutually exclusive.

Second, there is a high level of ambivalence on the part of many individuals in this group about their identity, their sense of belonging, and as a result they experience considerable what I call cognitive dissonance. But they live out this tension, struggle and dissonance on a daily basis.

This may manifest itself in where they stand on big issues such as the South China Sea or Huawei. It may also manifest itself in daily, mundane circumstances. For instance, in 2020, the Mid-Autumn Festival also happened to be on the same day as China's National Day (a CCP-designated national holiday).

Many festival greetings that were circulated on WeChat and other Chinese social media played on the theme of 'two festivals, one celebration'. I noticed in some discussions in my WeChat group somebody's remark caught my attention. He said, of course with a touch of sarcasm: 'Oh, national holiday and lunar holiday, all in one. One is official, the other is lunar. So do we need to clear with ASIO [the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation] before we celebrate it?' Of course sarcastic, but this is the kind of reality we're living with.

Another issue facing this community has been anti-Chinese racism, which has been on the rise for several years now due to the 'China influence' discourse, and now has been brought to the fore by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In some of the WeChat groups I follow, people share their experiences of encountering racism, and give each other moral support, sometimes offering advice about how to respond when they encounter random racism – subtle or blatant, verbal or physical, direct or indirect – in the streets, in shops, or on public transport.

I see the sense of anguish, the anger and sometimes a sense of helplessness that follow these ephemeral incidents, that cannot easily be documented but nevertheless have long-lasting and profound impact. Individuals may see little point in reporting that somebody's just shouted 'Go back to China' at them. But this does not necessarily mean that they are not mentally and emotionally affected by it.

Turning to my final topic of how we might re-imagine multicultural citizenship, I want to return to the challenge posed by Professor Andrew Jakubowicz: how to use the 'Chinese question' to 'modernise' Australia's multiculturalism. My answer – I'm just going to put it there for you, feel free to disagree – is two-fold. The first aspect is *engagement*. The second aspect is *human rights*.

Let's deal with engagement first. Migration studies and multicultural studies scholars tend to contrast *assimilation* with *integration* – as Stephen FitzGerald just mentioned, there's two options and obviously the current consensus being that integration is preferable to assimilation. And Australia's multiculturalism has certainly been practised on the assumption that integration of new migrants into Australia's political, economic, cultural and social life is essential to achieving social cohesion.

However, as far as this particular cohort I'm talking about is concerned, I believe that there is a long way to go before we could effectively talk about integration. What I mean is that, before integration, something else needs to happen. And that something else is engagement. In other words, engagement is the precursor, if you like, or pre-requisite, if you like, to integration, and at the moment, this engagement is not happening. We therefore need to go back to square one, and start from there.

Australia's *Public Diplomacy Strategy* document from [the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)] clearly states that:

> Diaspora communities not only play a key role in projecting contemporary Australia to the region, but also contribute to fostering a cohesive, harmonious and stable Australian society.

So it is clear that the intention is to engage.

However, what we now see is a clear tension between the government's public diplomacy agenda of engagement through the diaspora, on one hand, and the security institutions' agenda, on the other hand, which sees this community as a security risk. This is clearly alienating rather than engaging. One is pulling and the other is pushing. This is the push-and-pull dynamic within Australia.

And on top of this dynamic in Australia, there is another set of push-and-pull dynamics at work, with China's soft power through its diplomacy agenda being the pulling factor, and anti-Chinese forces within Australia being the pushing factor.

As far as I can see, this is a community that is living in the middle of this pushing and pulling. As far as I can see, a more 'modern' multicultural policy in relation to any group should adopt the following practices:

1. Stop expecting this community to choose one country over another;
2. Go beyond seeing this community solely through the lenses of security risks and threats;
3. Stop treating this community merely as potential voters, merely as partners in transactional relationships; and

4. Start treating this community as rights-bearing citizens, with human rights.

There really needs to be serious change – at the level of rhetoric, level of attitudes, policy, and practice. At the moment, we are not even ready to consider changing the rhetoric. That is why I say we still have a long way to go.

Now I'd like to address the second part of this modernisation process, modernisation of our multicultural policy, that is. The second aspect is human rights.

Recently on ABC Radio National's *Breakfast* program, Hamish MacDonald interviewed Jason Li, who is the President of the Australia-China Forum. Hamish MacDonald suggested that there *is* a real question about Chinese government and CCP influence in Australia, and:

> How do we address that without having it impact on the Chinese-Australian community that is here?

Jason Li's response was:

> I think the answer to that is that we have to proceed from the starting point of trusting our own citizens. So if you're an Australian citizen, you deserve that trust. Because, if we start distrusting our citizens, if that's our starting point, that goes against our values.

I think Jason is spot on.

And I also take Jason Li's point as a point about human rights. I hope that this will be the main message from my talk today, for the government, the politicians, the policy-makers and public commentators. That is, Australia's Mandarin-speaking first-generation migrants are now rights-bearing Australian citizens, and discrimination against them on the basis of where they come from and what they look like is not compatible with human rights values.

It's only when we respect the human rights of these new citizens that Australia as a country can sustain its own moral outrage and its own moral purchase of human rights discourses in its own criticism of China on human rights issues.

This human rights argument is not mine; I didn't come up with this. I actually borrowed it again from Andrew. Recently, Andrew Jakubowicz commented on what he called Sinophobia in times of COVID-19. And he wrote, I now quote:

> Identity within and attachment to Australia for ethnic immigrants depend on how well the system they enter protects their human rights from the omnipresent threats from racists and xenophobes. They will not release their grip on the old if the new emerges as threatening and potentially dangerous.

Education has a role to play in facilitating engagement. Since most first-generation migrants from the PRC come as adults, by default they miss primary and secondary education in Australia, which is where knowledge about Australian history is taught, where informal citizenship education happens and where political understanding is absorbed. You know, how does the Parliament work, how do we vote, all this kind of knowledge is taught not in tertiary education but in secondary and primary education, and they miss the boat. So we need to ask what our universities, adult migrant education centres, and other educational agencies are doing to fill this gaping hole.

Another problem, as far as I can see, is the lack of engagement between the first-generation PRC migrants and earlier, dialect-speaking Chinese communities. This again is due to a range of reasons – cultural, linguistic and historical. And the current political climate hasn't made it easy for the various Chinese communities to break down these barriers. In order to prove one's 'cleanliness' from Chinese influence, some people from the Chinese communities – especially from the ABCs (Australian-born Chinese) – feel that they need to go out of their way to identify themselves as non-mainlanders.

The disconnection between various Chinese communities is understandable, and has many reasons. For instance, the difference between the Cantonese and Mandarin is huge. It's so great that the two groups often have to talk to each other through English. I myself – I've been here for 30 years – and I'm still trying to learn Cantonese, and I'm still struggling: I still can't go beyond ha gao, ha chang and siu mai. Beyond the milieu of yum cha, my Cantonese vocabulary is virtually non-existent, I'm embarrassed to say.

But more than ever, Chinese-Australians of various cohorts have to work together to fight anti-Chinese racism and take part in struggles for political rights. I'm not arguing for some kind of unity just because they happen to be Chinese. I don't buy that discourse. They all come in different shades of political persuasions, right, and they have different points of view. But there needs to be some kind of solidarity in the fight against racism and disconnection is not actually working to make that happen. After all, when Senator Eric Abetz recently questioned three Chinese-Australians, it was obviously on the basis of their race rather than their country of origin.

So when Osmond Chiu [one of the three Chinese-Australians questioned by Senator Abetz] wrote an article entitled 'I was born in Australia. Why do I need to renounce the Chinese Communist Party?' This is a very legitimate question. But this question shouldn't be taken to mean that anyone who *was* born in China should be a legitimate target for Senator Abetz. As another one of the three questioned by Abetz, Yun Jiang said in her statement:

> No Australian, regardless of ethnicity, should be subject to political loyalty tests. We are all Australians first and foremost.

Engagement is a two-way street, I'm aware of that, involving both the self who is willing to engage, and others who can imagine a way of engaging with others who are different from them. Therefore, I would like to say to my own fellow first-generation Chinese-Australians that if we want to develop a true sense of belonging here, and to start feeling really at home, we must be willing to engage.

By this, I mean showing more interest in the history of this nation and its multicultural formations, finding ways of talking to your neighbours, making connections with other Chinese communities, participating in activities and events in the neighbourhood, in your street, and developing connections and solidarity with other ethnic communities and of course with the so-called mainstream society on a wide range of social issues.

Engagement can be both mundane and organised. I'll give you an example of mundane engagement. Someone again in my WeChat group – I'll call him Mr Huang – he recently posted an image of a tree in his backyard, and said that his neighbour popped over one day, and said, 'You have to trim that tree, otherwise it's going to be a safety hazard; it's getting too big'. The neighbour also offered to lend him some tools from his own shed. Mr Huang already had the tools to cut the tree, but he took up the neighbour's offer to borrow some tools, simply because, as he put it:

WITHIN THE FOUR SEAS ALL MEN ARE BROTHERS
家 一 海 四

Chen Hualin / Wikimedia Commons

> I wanted to have an excuse to get to know my neighbour. So I popped over, went to his shed, and had a nice long chat with him and got to know my neighbour.

It’s clear to me that Mr Huang only wanted to connect with his neighbour. But that I think is multiculturalism at its very, very everyday, grassroots, mundane level – it's very important. Making connections may also take the form of collective organisation. For instance in 2020 year, *The West Australian* newspaper reported that the Chinese community in Perth had heard about some activists wanting to protest in support of Black Lives Matter, but they were worried about COVID-19 and didn't have enough masks. So within one fortnight, they used WeChat to organise themselves and donated 11,000 face masks to Perth’s Black Lives Matter protest, in a show of support.

You may say that's not a big deal, but you must remember that in today’s political climate, civic actions such as this, from this particular Chinese community, was very likely to be seen as either orchestrated by the CCP or trying to influence Australian politics in some way. This is the backdrop against which they took action. Nevertheless, they went ahead and did that. So it seem to me that with their own actions, these Chinese-Australian citizens made an eloquent point about their citizenship in multicultural Australia.

As I hope I have shown, the ‘Chinese question’ is a difficult one, but it’s a very urgent one. Never has Australia experienced a migration so massive and at the same time experienced China both as a market and as a source of migration. So the 'Chinese question' is an urgent one. It is at the very centre of the process of re-imaging multicultural citizenship in our contemporary society.

One of my favourite writers is E.M. Forster, and one of my favourite books written by him is *Howards End*. And the key message from his book is: ‘Only connect’.

My main message today is also to *connect* – to start engaging – so that instead of alienation, confusion and disengagement, this group might start to feel that they are included, that their rights are respected, and that they, too, are ‘true blue Aussies’.

I know, I know. Easy to say, and difficult to do, I know that. But if we’re willing to work towards this end, members of Chinese-Australian communities should find it easier to identify with and develop a sense of belonging to this country that they now call home.

ENDS

Biography

Wanning Sun

Professor Wanning Sun is a UTS:ACRI Advisory Board member and a Professor of Media and Communication in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at UTS.

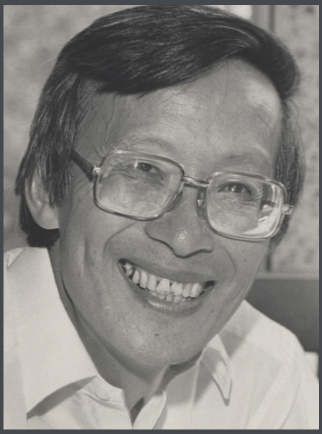
She is a specialist in a number of areas, including Chinese media and cultural studies; rural-to-urban migration and social change in contemporary China; and soft power, public diplomacy and diasporic Chinese media.

She is the author of three single-authored monographs: *Leaving China: Media, Migration, and Transnational Imagination* (2002); *Maid in China: Media, Morality, and the Cultural Politics of Boundaries* (2009); and *Subaltern China: Rural Migrants, Media, and Cultural Practices* (2014). Two of her edited volumes — *Media and the Chinese Diaspora: Community, Communication and Commerce* (2006) and *Media and Communication in the Chinese Diaspora: Rethinking Transnationalism* (2016) — document the history and development of Chinese language media in Australia, North America, Europe, Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia.

Stephen FitzGerald

Dr Stephen FitzGerald AO is the Adjunct Professor at the Australia-China Institute for Arts and Culture (ACIAC). He was China advisor to Gough Whitlam in opposition and as Prime Minister, Australia's first ambassador to the People's Republic of China, and later, at the beginning of China's opening to the outside world, established the first private consultancy for Australians dealing with China. He chaired the 1980s committee of the Asian Studies Association of Australia and later became the chair of the Asian Studies Council. He then founded the Asia-Australia Institute, dedicated to making Australia part of the Asian region. He chaired the government's Committee to Advise on Australia's Immigration Policies. He has been advisor to the Federal and Northern Territory governments, and the governments of Britain, Denmark and others on governance-related aid in China and Southeast Asia. He is the Distinguished Fellow of the Whitlam Institute at Western Sydney University, a Board Member of China Matters and Vice President of the organizing committee for Museum of Chinese in Australia.

The Henry Chan Lecture series



Who was Henry Chan?

Born in China in 1937, raised in New Zealand and living and working in Australia, Henry Chan was a passionate advocate of the need to learn more about Chinese Australian and New Zealand history with a particular focus on its China roots and ongoing connections. In 2000 Henry along with colleagues and friends in the Chinese Australian community, founded the Australian Chinese Historical Society. Until his death in 2008, Henry devoted almost all his time to encouraging projects, seminars and talks about Chinese contributions to Australian society.

The aim of the Henry Chan Lectures

Established in 2017 the purpose of the Henry Chan lectures is to present an annual public lecture by a Chinese scholar researching an aspect of Australia history or society. In doing so the Chinese Australian Historical Society aims to continue one aspect of Henry's vision by highlighting the Australia China connection in historical and social research, just as it carries on other aspects of his vision in its many other endeavours.

The series so far

Lecture 2017: The inaugural lecture was presented by Dr Selia Tan of Wuyi University, Guangdong who gave a history of the world heritage listed Kaiping diaolou (guntowers) and their connection with Australia.

Lecture 2018: Dr Chen Bing of Peking University, a translator of the works of George Earnest Morrison gave an account of this famous Australian from a Chinese perspective.

Lecture 2019: Li Jianjun of Beijing Foreign Studies University presented on the works and impact of many Australian writers who were published in China during the 1950s and 1960s.

Lecture 2020: Dr Stephen Fitzgerald and Professor Wanning Sun in conversation on Multicultural Citizenship Re-imagined: Engaging Migrants from China.

The Chinese Australian Historical Society

The CAHS was founded by Professor Henry Chan (University of Newcastle, NSW) in 2002 and has been prominent in advancing the study of the history of Chinese in Australia ever since. Numerous seminars, workshops, and conferences on topics such as Chinese Australian family histories; the home villages in southern China of early Chinese Australians; clan organisations in Sydney; Chinese stores in rural Australia; the trans-pacific Chinese; the history of the Chinese Women's Association of Australia; archival records and how to use them, etc. These activities have helped to promote public knowledge and understanding of the many contributions which Chinese people have made to Australia.

As an historical society the main focus of the organisation is naturally on the past, though this has included such modern roles as advocating for an helping secure the heritage listing of 82-84 Dixon Street and promoting the publication of a modern English translation of a 100 year old novel of the Australian gold rushes written in Classical Chinese – *The Poison of Polygamy*. The CAHS also recognises that perspectives of history are always being influenced by the present and that history of course begins now. With that in view the CAHS welcomes the topical and valuable contribution of Wanning Sun and Stephen Fitzgerald to the debate on citizenship in multicultural Australia and looks forward to viewing the impact on Australian history of this debate.

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