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Australia's Chinese lesson:

The nation's urgent need to engage with international students from China

Lynne Lin came to Australia because she wants to prove to her relatives in China that it's not a waste of money for girls to get degrees. Garry Wang studied business, science and IT, he's gone back to Beijing and opened two multi-function gyms with his wife. Yifeng Hwang* has a master's in business and accounting, and a child — Australia is more family-friendly than China so he wants to stay, but the points-threshold for skilled permanent visas just got steeper. Feifei Liao says that to connect with Australians she had to learn how to use Facebook and Messenger and train herself to drink. Eric Chen* is working on a PhD in management — he'll go back to China because it's hard for him to fit in here, the linguistic and cultural barriers are too great: "You say Woolies, I say Woolworths, and that says it all." Lydia Liu forces herself to talk to Australians — every time she talks to an Australian, says the mushroom seller at Vic Market, she marks the "social effort" on her calendar.

Profiles of Chinese international students.

(Obtained from interviews with the narrator, Australian Global Alumni video series ***Australian by Degree***, produced by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and ABC TV, and the 2018 City of Melbourne documentary, ***Act of Translation***.)
The profiles in this narrative come from interviews with the narrator unless stated otherwise.

*Indicates names have been changed at the interviewee's request.

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Introduction

This narrative for the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute draws on research and commentary from universities, think tanks and journalists, along with interviews conducted by the author, to explore the rapidly-shifting context in which students from the People's Republic of China (PRC) come to Australia. What emerges is a near-unanimous and increasingly urgent case that it is in Australia's political, economic and social interests to be better hosts to Chinese international students than it has been to date.

These students form the lifeblood of university revenue streams, and the backbone of Australia's third-largest export industry, contributing an estimated $34 billion to the economy in 2018. They have transformed the look and feel of inner-city Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Sydney. Once lonely neighbourhoods around suburban campuses now pulse with new apartment blocks and dumpling bars.

But while they are ubiquitous, students from mainland China — whose enrolments in our universities number about 153,000 — are largely unknown to domestic peers and mainstream society.

Although many PRC students pay at least $100,000 for a degree, studies and anecdotal evidence show it is not uncommon for them to have virtually no contact with Australians for the duration of their stay. In broad terms, PRC students and their domestic counterparts, live, work and study apart, speak different languages, use different social media platforms and read different news sources. The result, for many Chinese students, is loneliness, and disappointment with their stay in Australia.

So separate are most of these students from mainstream Australian life that few citizens are likely to have given them much thought — until, perhaps, August 2019, when political tensions from the civil unrest in Hong Kong spilled over onto several Australian university campuses. In small but highly publicised incidents, pro-Beijing students, mostly from mainland China, rallied aggressively in favour of authorities at home. The worst incident was at the University of Queensland, where China supporters played the Chinese national anthem at high volume to drown out pro-Hong Kong protestors and ripped posters from their hands; the scuffles were filmed

and circulated on social media. China's consul-general in Brisbane, Xu Jie, praised the students for their "spontaneous patriotic behaviour."

The ardent nationalists were so few in number that arguably the episode underscored how little the large numbers of students from mainland China in Australia's universities care about politics; like their domestic counterparts, they're focused on getting their degrees and securing their futures.

Yet the clashes received heightened attention because Australia is immersed in a complex and fraught debate about the extent of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) influence in the country — a debate set against the rise of what former Prime Minister John Howard describes as a "more authoritarian" China under leader Xi Jinping.

Until now, the isolation of Chinese international students from the mainstream has mainly been dispiriting in a human sense, a missed opportunity not only for PRC students, whose families have invested heavily to give their children an overseas degree, but also for Australians, whose prosperity for the foreseeable future hinges on maintaining close economic links with China, by far our largest trading partner.

But profound geopolitical changes during the past decade, even during the past five years, mean that the de-facto segregation between PRC students and Australia is no longer simply depressing. It is also dangerous.

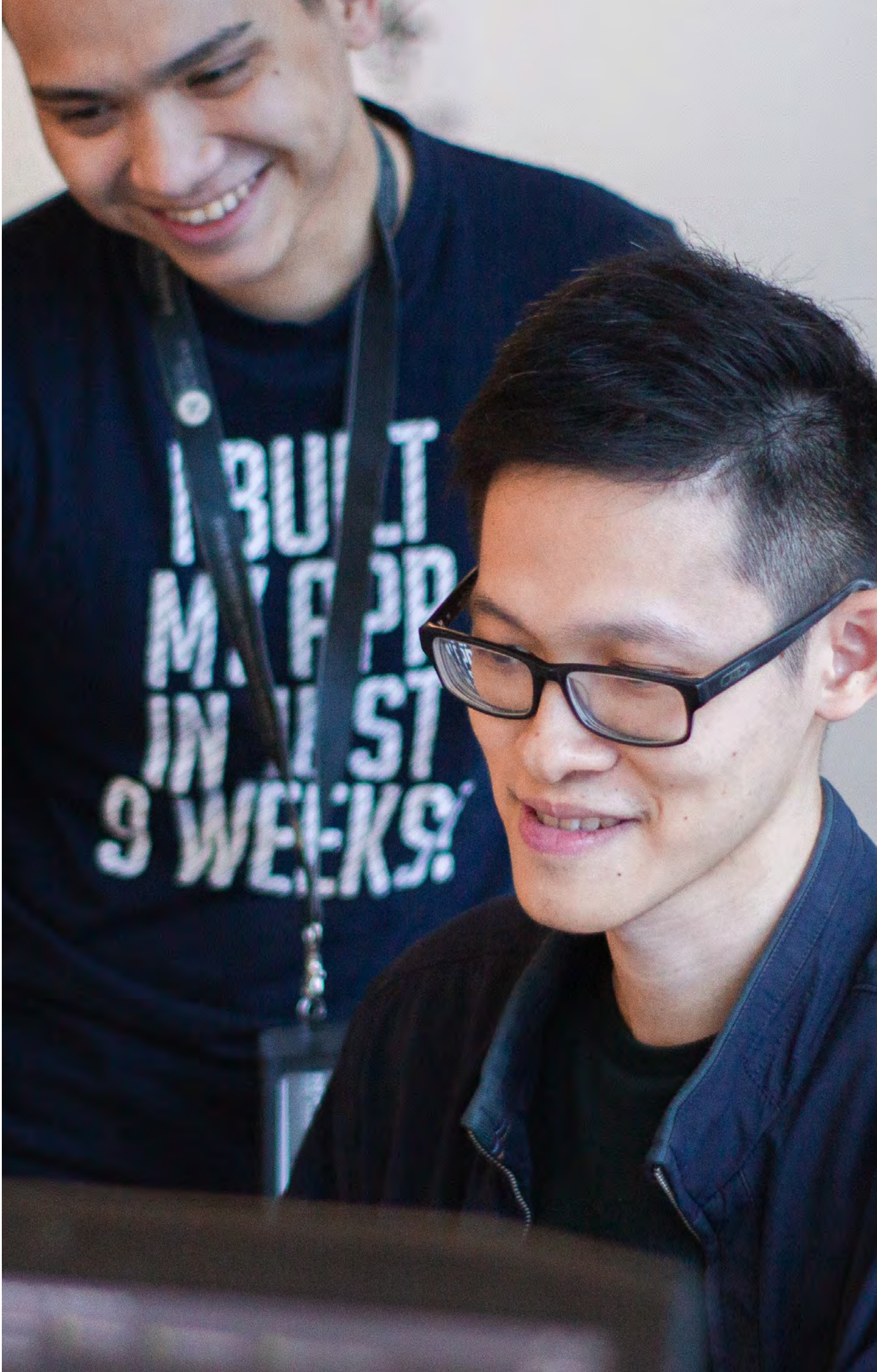
After many years in which very few Australians other than diplomats, academic specialists and some business people thought about Australia's long-term relationship with China, the nation is now embarking on a much broader deliberation about how it will manage its future in a region increasingly dominated by the great power to the north.

That "China debate" is turning a spotlight on the PRC students at Australian universities, who risk getting caught in the crossfire between an increasingly assertive CCP, which views them as a soft power resource, and an increasingly anxious Australia, whose pushback against CCP meddling plays into a history of racism haunted by tropes about the threat from the "yellow peril." In short: the divide between the large number of Chinese international students and Australia exacerbates the broader political tensions arising from the "China debate," and poses a threat to social cohesion on campus, and even beyond, in a nation where China is the third most common country of birth among migrants.

This narrative discusses the history of both Chinese and other international students in Australia, including perspectives from PRC students themselves, to gain insights into where to go from here. It proposes ideas for bridging the divide between Chinese international students and Australians, for their mutual benefit — and before it's too late.

There is now a serious risk that the flow of students from China will slow or even stop — either as a consequence of China's substantial investment in its own universities or as political payback from Beijing, a scenario Australia's higher education chiefs see as remote but not impossible.

For decades, Australian leaders from many fields have urged their countryfolk to get to know Chinese people and culture better, yet we have ignored the large population of young Chinese people in our midst. Australia still has a small window of opportunity to invest in building a stronger relationship with Chinese students and helping them to feel more welcome in this country. For our nation's long-term benefit, that opportunity should not be missed.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Chinese international students: a snapshot and key trends

As a teenager, Elva Zhang, went on a two-week exchange from her native city of Hangzhou in China's east to a high school in Brisbane. She lived with the headmaster's family. The experience was so rewarding she wanted to return to Australia for university. Initially it was challenging for her parents especially her father, who didn't want his only daughter to be so far away from home. Almost twenty years later, Zhang, a permanent resident now, is still here – working as a corporate lawyer and running East-meets-West positivity workshops on the side. "I can't even say why I was so determined to go to another country. It comes from deep inside."

Globally, more and more people are crossing borders to get an education; China's young people are driving that trend. A report commissioned by research body, Project Atlas, found the number of globally mobile tertiary students doubled between 2001 and 2017, to 4.6 million. Over roughly the same period, in tandem with the exponential growth of its middle class, China's outbound tertiary students increased nearly six fold, to about 928,000, according to UNESCO data.

In any given year, the United States takes the highest number of PRC students, but Australia is consistently among the top five destinations.

The Federal Department of Education publishes monthly enrolment figures for international students, but its end-of-year summaries include more meaningful and complete data. Figures for December 2018, show Australia hosted 693,750 full-fee paying international students — that's across all education sectors. Of this figure, Chinese students accounted for about 200,000 (across universities, high schools and other courses).

This paper focuses only on Chinese students in Australia's higher education institutions. Precisely how many PRC students attend Australian universities is hard to track because the department counts enrolment figures rather than raw student numbers, and students can enrol in more than one course. And unlike universities in the UK and US, writes sociologist Salvatore Babones in, ***The China Student Boom and the Risks It Poses to Australian Universities***, a paper for The Centre for Independent Studies (CIS), Australian universities are not required to disclose detailed overseas student numbers by country of origin, level of study, and field of study.

We can only be sure that in 2018, university enrolments for Chinese international students reached almost 153,000 — more than double that of the next largest, if fastest-growing, group, students from India, and more than five times the third largest, Nepalese students.

It is also worth noting there are nearly 48,000 international enrolments from China in English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) — most of those students progress to further study in Australia — about 22,000 in institutions in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, about 19,000 in courses that do not award qualifications and nearly 14,000 in the schools sector.

At universities, Chinese students comprise nearly 40 per cent of international students and roughly 10 per cent of all students. Per capita, writes Babones, Australia educates more foreign university students than any major country, and the concentration of Chinese students in that cohort is also higher here than in any other comparable country.

While, statistically, every 10th student on an Australian university campus is from China, the actual spread of students is highly uneven. A 2018 report from a Federal Government advisory panel on international education refers to data analysis that shows more than 40 per cent of all Chinese higher education students in Australia study at just four universities: Monash, Melbourne, Sydney and NSW (UNSW).

About one in two Chinese enrolments are in commerce or management. Engineering and information technology are also popular, but little more than 10,000 PRC student enrolments are in courses broadly classified as "society and culture". Most Chinese students are pursuing master's or undergraduate degrees.

More than 60 per cent of PRC students come from Beijing, Shanghai, Shandong, Guangdong and Jiangsu — China's wealthier parts, which is not surprising given a degree from one of the Group of Eight (Go8) research-intensive universities can cost $40,000 annually in fees alone.

Studies have shown more than half of prospective students seek information from education consultants and agencies in China before settling on a study destination, and that the perceived status of the degree and institution is their chief consideration in making that choice.

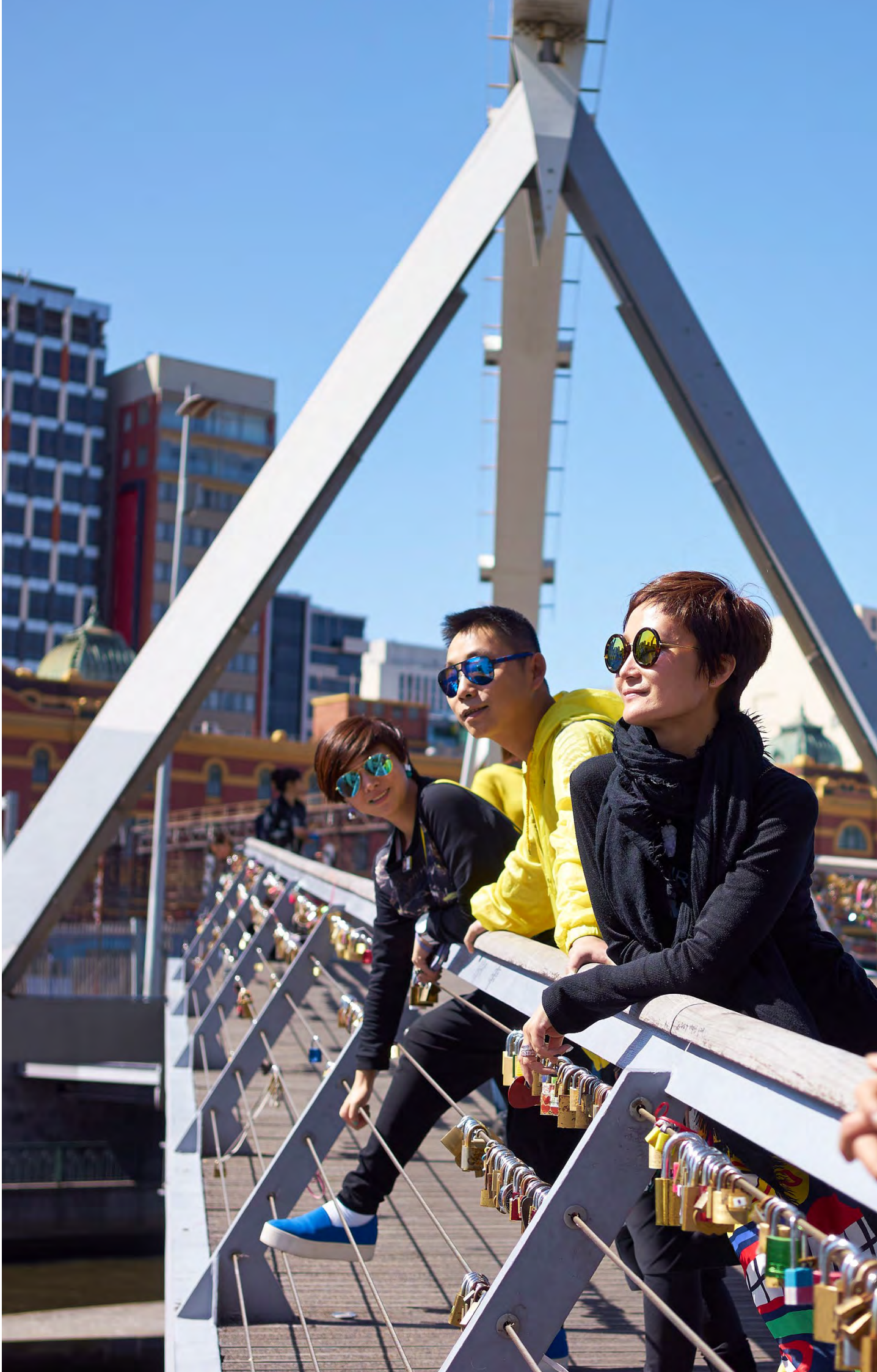
Australia has had the benefit of two decades of solid growth in its onshore China-led overseas student market, with numbers roughly tripling over that period. The only relatively weak year was 2011-12 when enrolments dipped because of visa changes, a historically high Australian dollar that made degrees more expensive and a perceived hike in crimes targeting international students.

China has proven to be the "easiest answer" to the budget pressures facing all Australian universities, said Peter Varghese, University of Queensland Chancellor and former Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in a speech in October 2018. In 1986, when universities were first allowed to offer fee-paying places to international students, more than 80 per cent of university funding came from the Federal Government. Since then, federal support as a proportion of total university budgets has halved.

But in a shift that's exercising minds in Canberra and throughout the international education sector, outbound Chinese student numbers are flatlining. In his paper, Babones cites UNESCO data showing China's number of outbound students to all countries grew by less than 0.4 per cent in 2017, the lowest level ever recorded. Babones attributes the softening demand for international education in China chiefly to macroeconomic factors, such as a slowing rate of economic growth in the country.

"Slower economic growth means slower growth in the number of Chinese families who can afford to send their children to Australian universities," he writes.

As we'll see later in this narrative, the Chinese government is also encouraging more of its young people to study at local universities. And Chinese students overseas are being encouraged to return home after graduation. These are recent and significant trends.



For Australia, recent figures in 2018-19 suggest student flows from China are not only slowing but falling. At June 2019, according to figures from the Department of Home Affairs, there were nearly 3,000 fewer student visa applications for Australia lodged in China, a fall of 4.6 per cent from the previous year.

In other words, for virtually the first time since the China student boom began, fewer young people in China are planning to study in Australia.

We will explore this trend in more detail later. First, to understand how Australia and its universities arrived at this precarious situation with PRC students, we need to revisit key chapters in the history of international students in Australia.

The Colombo plan

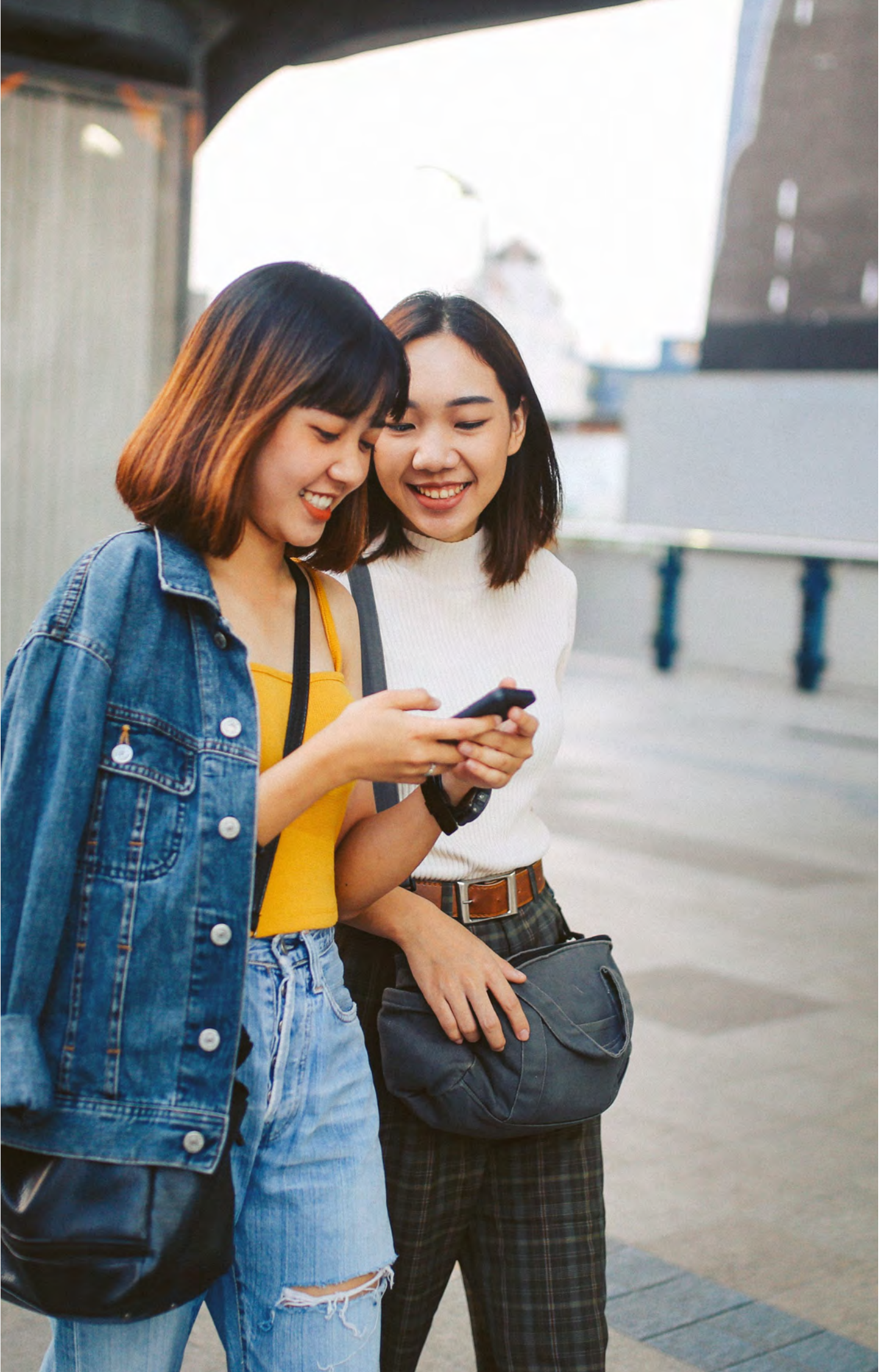
In November 1955, Indonesian student, Houw Tan, arrived in Melbourne and was immediately taken to Flemington to watch the Melbourne Cup – an exhilarating introduction, he would later say, to life in his host country. Tan came to Australia under the Colombo Plan, a Commonwealth aid and scholarship program that in its initial phase from 1951 to 1965 saw nearly 5,500 students from Asia and the Pacific welcomed into the country's universities and homes for reasons that had to do with politics – not profits.

Scarred by the Japanese advance during World War II, and fearful of the spread of communism from China, Australia knew it had no choice but to secure its future in the region. If Asian countries were given the expertise to develop their own democratic institutions and economies, the Menzies Government's external affairs minister Percy Spender explained, they could better protect themselves against the "opportunists" and "subversive elements" who take advantage of poor living standards to agitate for change.

The Plan, devised in the former-Ceylonese capital, Colombo, was remarkable because this was during the time of the White Australia Policy restricting Asian, and in particular Chinese, immigration. "Those students, along with privately-funded Asian scholars, were among the first people from South and South-East Asia whom Australians encountered," writes Daniel Oakman in Facing Asia, A History of the Colombo Plan. "For those who taught, befriended, or provided board and lodgings for these students, the impact on their lives was personal, immediate and enduring."

The students came from 15 nations, three quarters from Malaya, Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Ceylon — by 1965, international scholars comprised 5 per cent of the student body. The most popular courses were science, engineering, health and education. Student numbers rose; universities came under pressure to take them in.

What can we learn from this time when Australia, in what Oakman describes as "a complex mix of self-interest, condescension and humanitarianism," consciously hosted overseas students?



Firstly, the government heavily promoted the Plan. It had bi-partisan support: for conservatives, the Plan was a welcome retreat from the UN-focused multilateralism that had animated Labor's External Affairs Minister, Doc Evatt; for Labor, an aid program chimed with its left-wing agenda. And because the students were required to return home after their studies, the Plan could not be framed as a threat to Australian jobs.

That's not to say politicians and bureaucrats were entirely transparent or consistent in their thinking about the Plan. Alongside its stated aim of containing communism, Oakman writes, the Plan encompassed a "more secretive agenda" to "modify any resentment" that might arise from the difference in living standards between Asians and Australians. In 1962, a bureaucrat from the External Affairs department told a parliamentary affairs committee that by bringing so many Asians to Australia the Plan would counter "accusations of racial prejudice, which are sometimes levelled against us."

Spender's more forward-thinking successor, Richard Casey, saw the Plan as a chance to change Australians' perceptions of their place in the world.

So much publicity attached to the students' presence that they received more holiday and hospitality invitations than they could accept. A shortage of accommodation led to appeals for private lodgers — as word got around, these offers also overflowed.

Oakman notes the government consistently advocated for the Plan despite government officials and the media often typecasting Asian students as "potential spies or vulnerable innocents, open to communist blandishments." ("Anthony" Ng Beh Tong assured the press that after six years of studying at Melbourne University, his fellow Malayan students were "completely absorbed" with their studies and "had no time for politics.")

The second feature that stands out is that being invested in the Plan's success, the government was attuned to the students' experience. Between 1950 and 51, three Asian students at the University of Western Australia committed suicide — social isolation was identified as the likely cause. Bad publicity about student housing threatened the program's maxim, "that the students' exposure to Australian culture should be a positive experience." The authorities opened International House in Melbourne in the late 1950s, and the International Friendship Centre in Sydney — and made sure Australians also lived there, alongside the students. After more rigorous

selection processes and compulsory English classes were introduced, the Colombo scholars' results surpassed those of local students. Bearing in mind, though, this was a different era; air travel was expensive, so students tended to stay in Australia during university holidays. The internet did not exist. The Colombo scholars could access an immersive experience that's harder to replicate with today's overseas students.

Thirdly, to create less haphazard integration, the department delegated administrative functions to other government bodies and shifted most responsibilities to community organisations. A crucial detail: the Rotary groups and Country Women's Association worked alongside student representatives.

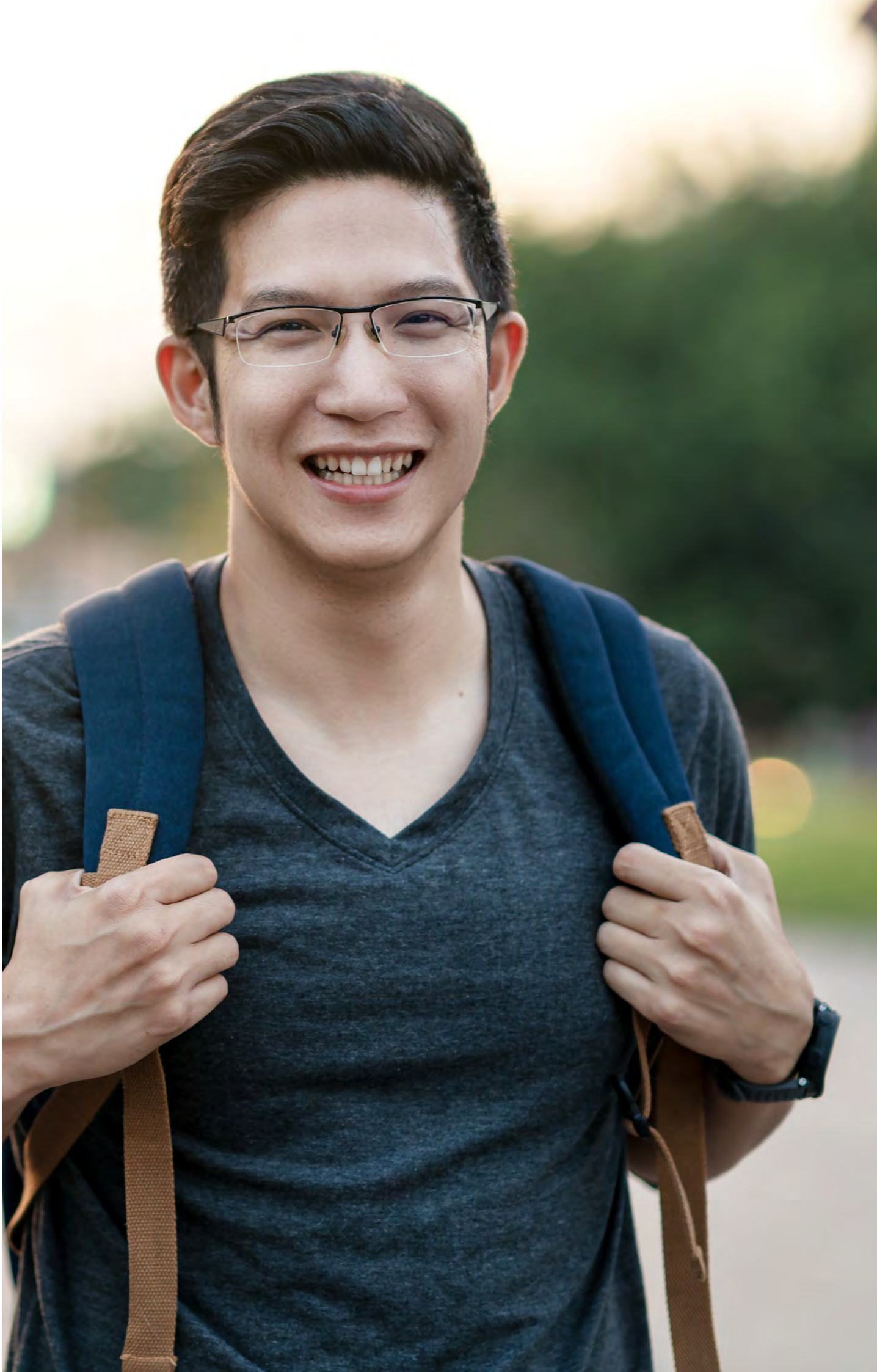
Lastly, the Plan did not change the political settings on Asia.

By 1980, when it kicked on in a muted form, the Plan's alumni numbered 20,000.

"Australian governments cultivated ties that would endure," writes Deakin University historian, Professor David Lowe. "They added 'ballast' to relationships with key neighbours such as Indonesia and Malaysia."

Still, Oakman explains, policymakers' Cold War view of the Asian region as "keystones in Soviet and Chinese plans to dominate Asia" remained for decades after World War II.

The Plan did, however, fulfil Casey's hopes for changing the people's view of Asia. It is widely acknowledged that the experience of hosting the Colombo scholars turned more people against the White Australia Policy, and hastened its removal.



The history of Chinese students in Australia

From the "open door" to the 2011 Knight Review

The story of Chinese international students in Australian universities had its tentative start in 1979. After the chaos and stagnation wrought during the Cultural Revolution, a reformist new leader, Deng Xiaoping, wanted to rehabilitate and modernise China's economy. China would combine free market enterprise with socialist ideology —"socialism with Chinese characteristics" — and meet ambitious targets in agriculture, industry and defence. But for the PRC to achieve this, it needed to close a 20-year skills gap with the West. Deng opened China's doors to foreign businesses, and sent out students to foreign universities. Even if 100 out of 1000 outbound students did not return, Deng said, there would still be 900 left. He was overly optimistic.

Between 1978 and the end of 2007, more than 1.21 million Chinese went abroad for study and research — only about a quarter returned, according to a paper by Chinese studies Professor Cong Cao, in the journal ***Asian Population Studies***. (Concerns about corruption and the lack of meritocracy were among the factors that deterred China's brightest from returning, Cao writes.)

The PRC students who began arriving in Australia in the 1980s were largely top-performing graduate students on government scholarships.

That changed in 1986 when the Hawke Government's Education Minister, John Dawkins, restructured Australia's tertiary education system. With Year 12 retention rates doubling in a single decade and Australia shifting to a skills-based economy, the Whitlam era's free tertiary education was looking unsustainable. The Higher Education Contribution Scheme was introduced for domestic students; they would only have to repay loans once they left university and started earning.

But universities could enrol more students from overseas, and charge them full

fees. The era when international students had attended university for free as part of Australia's international aid program was over. The new regime, recalls former Hawke Government advisor, Dean Ashenden, in Inside Story, was "user-pays, plain and simple."

Meanwhile, with the Cold War ending, the mood in the late 1980s was euphoric.

Professor Francis Fukuyama had famously looked to China's students in the West as evidence that democracy was triumphant and signalled the "End of History."

"It is hard to believe that when they (the students) return home to run the country they will be content for China to be the only country in Asia unaffected by the larger democratising trend," he wrote.

China's students were indeed not content, but their protests were crushed by the tanks at Tiananmen Square in June 1989.

The 20,000 students in Australia at the time of the massacre were mostly enrolled in ELICOS courses. A teary Prime Minister Bob Hawke gave them a safe haven, with four year protection visas. Post Tiananmen Square more Chinese students came, and their families followed. As Melbourne University's Jia Gao writes in the journal ***International Migration***, for the next four years the students, making use of the early internet, lobbied intensely to be allowed to stay. They were successful.

These Mandarin speakers joined the established Cantonese-speaking ethnic-Chinese community in what would become Australia's largest non-European migrant group.

Deng reaffirmed China's open door policy in 1992; PRC students kept coming. But in 2002, enrolments from China still comprised only 14 per cent of total international higher education enrolees.

But the Howard Government was now seeing overseas students as part of the solution to the nation's skills problem. In a significant, albeit quietly executed, policy shift, a government steered by a prime minister known for his unease about the pace of Asian immigration, facilitated a migration boom led by Indians and Chinese. Australian society was undergoing a dramatic transition from European to what journalist George Megalogenis describes as "Eurasian."

Where before, international students were expected to return home after completing their studies — in keeping with Australia's postwar reluctance to see migrants come here on temporary visas and then seek permanent residency onshore — immigration reforms passed in 2005 now offered them a direct pathway from graduation to permanent residency.

In 2008, about 40 per cent of international graduates went on to permanent migration under the skilled migration scheme.

Universities began structuring their curriculums in accounting, IT and engineering to comply with entry standards for employment in sought-after fields, according to population researchers Bob Birrell and Katharine Betts. Providers in the vocational and education training sector, began offering qualifications that aligned with the occupations deemed to be in demand; prospective migrants came armed with level 3 certificate qualifications in cooking and hairdressing. The sector boomed as courses geared to securing permanent residency for students proliferated. Shonky migration agents teamed with dodgy colleges, Australia's educational reputation took a hit and by the decade's end, the Rudd-Gillard government stepped in to put the brakes on.

The skilled migration list was tightened, the VET sector cleaned out of shonky providers and the near automatic link between studying in Australia and gaining permanent residency severed. Partly as a result of these reforms, international student numbers plunged between 2008 and 2010.

A strategic review of the student visa program by former NSW Sydney Olympics Minister Michael Knight re-orientated Australia's international education market away from the vocational sector and towards universities, which were deemed more trustworthy providers. The government introduced streamlined visa processing for international students enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate courses to encourage more overseas students into the higher education sector.

Post Knight: the Go8 is “the winner”

With an undergraduate degree from the UK, and some work experience in China, Austin Cheng* chose to do his MBA at Melbourne University because “it’s a reputable school and I want to get more international exposure.” The university ran a two-week orientation program before the course started so classmates could meet, familiarise themselves with the university and its requirements, and meet alumni. He lives alone in the inner city. As the course is “intense” he doesn’t have time for a casual job.

The “universities first” reforms arising from the 2011 Knight Review of the student visa program proved hugely popular with Chinese students.

Population researchers Bob Birrell and Katharine Betts assembled a striking profile of this new wave of PRC students when they crunched customised federal government data on university commencements — students starting courses. As they explain in a November 2018 report, the numbers revealed a series of surprises.

The first was that the research-intensive Go8 universities emerged as clear winners. Between 2012 and 2016 overseas-student commencements grew by 56 per cent, to 38,179, outstripping the 41 per cent growth for all other universities.

“Surprise number two,” they write, “Almost all of the increase .. of commencements at Go8 universities came from one country — China.”

Surprise number three was that most of the enrolment growth in both Go8 and other universities during this period was in the master's by coursework sector.

“The Chinese market has since been dominated by Go8 universities who charge $40,000 plus a year for business and commerce courses, mostly at the master's by coursework level,” they write.

By 2018, there were nearly 81,000 international commencements in master's by coursework programs — including IT, accounting and engineering — more than double the figures in 2013.

And there is another key difference with this cohort. In the earlier wave of PRC students large numbers ended up staying. But now, as we earlier mentioned, overwhelmingly China's young students abroad are returning home after their studies — a trend we explore in the "After University" section of this narrative.

In coming sections, we examine the implications of the China student boom for the students themselves, and the universities that host them.

Chinese students in “ghettos”

When she was still in China, Sophie Chang* saw an advertisement, in Mandarin, for high-rise student accommodation in Melbourne’s CBD. “I thought it would be a good place for me to adapt to Melbourne,” she recalls. Chang, who has a master’s in accounting, wants to stay in Australia because she likes the freedom — no social pressure to go on “uncomfortable” blind dates with men her relatives deem eligible. In her hometown, close to the coastal province of Guangdong, she had found herself with a bachelor’s degree and an “uninspiring” job as an assistant. A relative who had migrated to Australia urged her to come. She wanted to see the world and boost her sense of self. Her tuition put a “big financial strain” on her parents, so she found a cashier’s job in a Chinese supermarket in Melbourne.

“Sometimes international students are too shy to get out, and sometimes they don’t get access to information about mentorships or volunteering activities,” she says. Chang was lucky to have a friend who shared such information on China’s social media platform, WeChat.

“And in the Chinese community you can feel comfortable with language. But sometimes I also want to step out of my comfort zone; it depends on my mood.”

In their 2017 report, ***Is there a problem with Chinese international students?***, Bates Gill and Linda Jakobson from think-tank China Matters write that an "often-heard (and quite telling)" complaint from Chinese students is that their oral English skills deteriorate during their time in Australia.

It is hard to imagine a more damning observation, but it is not surprising.

In the past decade, in particular, an increasing number of academics and researchers have expressed concern about the isolation of overseas students, especially those from China, and the impact of that isolation on students' academic results and wellbeing. More broadly, the isolation of Chinese students is threatening the success of Australia's international student program, these critics say.

Simon Marginson is one academic who has expressed his doubts that the internationalisation of education is meeting its stated aims. As he explained in 2008 to The Age — in a story headlined "***Welcome to nation of university ghettos***" — besides generating revenue, opening the doors to international students is supposed to enrich higher education institutions and create cultural and intellectual links between overseas and domestic students. Not to mention, the marketing pitch to international students presumes a healthy relationship between overseas and local students.

But what he sees at Melbourne University each day falls well short of those ideals.

Local students tend to work off campus and are disengaged from university life "in a way I've never really seen before," said Marginson, then Professor of Higher Education. International students spend most of their time in the library.

The National Union of Students president, Angus McFarland, said vice-chancellors had discussed with him how "cultural cliques" and "religious ghettos" could be overcome. Mixing in the classroom sometimes prompted complaints from both sides. International students complained they were marginalised. Domestic students complained the international students' poor language skills impeded their progress in group work, an increasingly common form of assessment at universities.

While the size of the international education industry in 2008 was less than half of what it is today, 11 years later, the tensions identified in The Age report endure: "segregation" between international and domestic students, language and cultural barriers, and concerns about a backlash against international education.

Which is not to deny that many Chinese students are able to integrate and find their time here immensely rewarding.

The Federal Government's International Student Survey, released every two years, consistently shows high levels of student satisfaction — although researchers point out that's not surprising because the surveys are intended to be used for marketing purposes and are crafted with that intention. Even so, several academics seized on unpublished data from a 2014 department survey showing Chinese students' satisfaction with opportunities to interact with Australians is almost 10 percent lower than for other international students.

Fran Martin, an Associate Professor in cultural studies at the University of Melbourne, is conducting a five-year ethnographic study of 50 female Chinese students at universities in three Australian cities. She reportedly found that only about 10 per cent of these students managed to form meaningful relationships with locals outside the Chinese community.

Jing Jiang feels that if she "lowers the pace" of her classmates during group assignments, their marks will be affected. "So I think I should be the one to work harder," she says. (From Act of Translation.)

"***I spent yesterday watching a 20-year-old man teach five weeks' worth of post-graduate level film-making to five Chinese students in three hours***," began a much-discussed August 2019 column in The Age, in which radio presenter Meshel Laurie aired her frustrations about studying alongside overseas students she says lack adequate English-language support.

"It's a neat trick: group assessment (with groups allocated by instructors) in courses overloaded with full-fee-paying, non-English speaking students means the English speakers bear the burden of catching the others up, translating the course content for them and helping them pass."

Meaningful information on how Chinese live and work is sketchy. Government and other surveys suggest that most students live in private rental, including newer purpose-built accommodation for international students close to campuses. For the most part, they live with other students from China. While we seem to know even less about the employment patterns of Chinese students, a picture emerges that they tend to fall back on the Chinese diaspora for part-time work opportunities during their studies — which isn't necessarily a problem. As academic Jia Gao notes in a 2016 paper in the Journal of Chinese Overseas, since the mid 1990s the ethnic Chinese community has become one of Australia's "most active, thriving and entrepreneurial.. and its special role in helping, and influencing the lives of Chinese students should never be ignored."

One trend that's attracted media attention is what the ABC described as a "multi-billion-dollar, off-the-radar" industry in which Australian-made products are posted to China, via orders on WeChat and a sophisticated logistics network. An estimated 150,000 "daigou" — Chinese for "buy on behalf of" — work in Australia, and according to the ABC, the demand is increasingly being serviced by international students and new migrants. The industry had its genesis in a baby formula contamination scandal in 2008 in China; personal shoppers in Australia bought up baby formula in bulk and sent it back, causing a formula shortage back here. The point being: students servicing the "daigou" industry are unlikely to meet locals through work.

But the most striking evidence of de-facto segregation on campus is found in the CIS paper by Salvatore Babones. He noted the high numbers of international students enrolled in business schools: 49 per cent in 2016, compared with 15 per cent of domestic students. In Melbourne and Sydney universities, 65 per cent of business school students come from overseas. (And we know students from China are overrepresented in both business studies and in both these universities.)

"When more than half of the students in a particular program are drawn from overseas (or, in the case of Sydney's master's programs in business, 87.2 per cent), the whole idea of international education as an immersive cultural experience breaks down," Babones writes.

In June 2018, The Australian reported a complaint from a student on WeChat that her university class was so full of Chinese students "that group discussions are conducted in Chinese, and after class you still hang out with Chinese." Which at least explains why some students' English might worsen during their time in Australia.

"At uni, sometimes only the lecturers were Aussie," recalls accounting and finance graduate, Yifan Wang, who founded the Australia China Women's Network to nurture women leaders among Chinese international students through mentorship programs. "But I think Chinese students, as well as Australian students, need to show some real curiosity about each other."

University student Samantha Scicluna says it's hard to connect with international students on campus, especially when they aren't doing the same courses as her. "You see them around and you're polite and stuff and friendly but there's no real connection." (From Act of Translation.)

There are emotional costs to isolation from domestic peers even for international students with supportive "same-culture" networks, according to one 2007 Australian study on Loneliness and International Students, led by Erlenawati Sawir, and to which Simon Marginson contributed.

"One of the strongest findings of the study was that there was a strong correlation between the incidence of loneliness and problems with cross-cultural relationships," the authors write.

Based on interviews with 200 students, the study also found that even when international students are friends with local classmates, the bonds are "not necessarily satisfying." This is because students from "individualist cultures" and those from "collectivist cultures" — based around family and hierarchy — have different assumptions about social bonds.

Local students wanting to reach out "will need to become more open to and curious about the lives and values of international students, enabling them to learn more about the mores of collectivist relationships."

"The task for universities is to provide conditions enabling local students to undergo a process of personal transformation that, if not equivalent to that experienced by international students, at least moves part of the way in the same direction. This is challenging."

Universities' dangerous financial dependence on Chinese students

The softening demand for Australian education in China, outlined earlier in this narrative, is worrying because universities have become dangerously reliant on revenue from high-fee paying overseas students — so dangerously reliant that a sudden break in the flow of Chinese students into Australia could bring "catastrophic" consequences, experts say.

In June 2019, auditors-general in three states — NSW, Victoria and Queensland — warned, for a second year in a row, that their universities are more reliant than ever on the international student market, and at risk from political and economic shifts in Asia and changes in exchange rates and visa policy.

The strongest words were in NSW. The NSW Auditor-General noted that as Government grants as a proportion of the total income of NSW universities continues to decrease, fees revenue from overseas students continues to grow faster than fees from domestic students. Six universities increased the proportion of overseas students coming from one country of origin, and two universities — The University of New South Wales (UNSW) and The University of Sydney — sourced over 73 per cent of their total student revenue from overseas students from a single country in 2018.

The accompanying graphs clarified which "single country" that is, should clarification have been needed.

In his paper, ***The China Student Boom***, released shortly after the three auditors-general reports, Salvatore Babones investigates the extent of universities' addiction to revenue from China. He identifies seven as having dangerous levels of exposure. They are: Sydney University and UNSW, Melbourne University, Australian National University (ANU), University of Adelaide, University of Queensland and University of Technology Sydney (UTS). With the exception of the latter, these institutions belong to the Go8 universities, typically considered the country's most prestigious.

Universities have strategies to "diversify" their international student intake to lessen their dependence on student flows from China. But "such diversification strategies are doomed to fail," Babones writes. The countries of South and Southeast Asia are either too small or too poor to provide the necessary numbers of fee-paying students. China has approximately 100 million adults with at least $25,000 a year in annual income, compared with approximately 12 million in India. There are around 24 million adults in China with incomes over $50,000 a year, compared to just 3 million for India. And enrolling huge numbers of students from India would require universities to further drop their academic standards, Babones argues.

(A Federal Government advisory panel on the future of Australia's international student market is working on strategies to expand into the Latin American market.)

The seven universities in question are so China-exposed, "even small percentage declines in Chinese student numbers could induce significant financial hardship as universities struggle to meet the fixed costs of infrastructure and permanent staff salaries in the midst of a revenue shortfall. Large percentage declines could be catastrophic."

In his speech in October 2018, Queensland University Chancellor Peter Varghese outlined two potential threats to Chinese demand. The first is China's generous investment in its own universities. China now has one university in the top 30 of the coveted Times Higher Education rankings: Australia has none. He might have added that China is itself a competitor in the international education market, aiming to draw 500,000 students from around the world to its universities by 2020—a target it's already almost reached.

The second major risk to Chinese demand, Varghese said, is political. We turn to this theme now.

The "China debate," and its risks

"China may choose for broader, essentially political reasons, to reduce the flow of students to Australia," said Chancellor Peter Varghese in his speech. Make no mistake, he said, it's in China's interests to keep dangling that threat.

During the past 40 years, Australia's trading relationship with China underpinned an unprecedented 27 years of uninterrupted economic growth. Now, "those four decades are beginning to look like our salad days. What lies ahead looks more complicated at best and gloomy at worst."

China's aspiration to strategic predominance "does not make it an enemy and it would be unwise to treat it as one," Varghese said. "A country which already looks to redeem itself from a century of humiliation does not need its worst fears confirmed."

But, Varghese explained, Australia's China policy has been largely constructed around "the China of Deng: the China of 'hide and bide.'" (The ethos that China should "hide its strength, bide its time and never take the lead.")

"Now we must deal with the China of Xi: a China which seeks to become the predominant power in Asia and whose economic reach gives it considerable leverage."

From the "China of Deng" to the "China of Xi"

Xi's ascension as paramount leader in 2012 — set against the backdrop of discontent and malaise in the West since the Global Financial Crisis — cemented an almost universal perception that China was entering a bold new phase. Exiled as a teenager to rural China during the Cultural Revolution, his rise to power brought an anti-corruption drive, commitment to strengthening legal institutions, strong pledges on improving public health and "green development," — and renewed military provocation in the disputed South China Sea, expansion of China's global influence

through its Belt and Road initiative, redoubled repression of ethnic minorities, the stifling of civil society, strengthening of censorship and surveillance, and a cult of personality. He has fiddled with the constitution to entrench his leadership and even added an idiosyncratic preamble, known as "Xi Jinping Thought."

In what's often cited as the starkest evidence of the ideological shift, the now-infamous "Document Number Nine", a 2013 CCP paper bearing the imprimatur of Xi, took aim at Western liberal values. Document Number Nine warned against "false ideological trends" such as "constitutional democracy," "universal values," "civil society," "neoliberalism," "the West's idea of journalism," "judicial independence," "historical nihilism" (challenging the party's view of history), and critiques of CCP cronyism.

The paper speaks of the need to "purify the environment of public opinion," especially on the internet. The veteran journalist who leaked the document to Western media, Gao Yu, was sentenced to seven years prison and is currently under house arrest.

Document Number Nine, wrote John Lanchester in the London Review of Books in October 2019, "marked a new turn in the history of China, and quite possibly the history of the world: the moment at which a powerful nation-state looked at the entire internet's direction of travel—towards openness, interconnection, globalisation, the free flow of information — and decided to reverse it."

Beijing's Great Firewall of internet censorship is more fortified than ever. Robot censors filter out sensitive keywords from websites. Social media platforms, such as WeChat, are heavily policed and manipulated. Reuters, The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times have reportedly been blocked for years. The ABC's website abruptly disappeared from view in 2018.

Another critical trend for our purposes, the significance of which will become clear, is Beijing's renewed push for favour among an estimated 60-million strong ethnic Chinese in the diaspora. In the decades following the CCP's seizing power in 1949, defectors from China tended to be viewed as traitors. Now, the state is offering generous residency visas to skilled and globally mobile overseas Chinese, regardless of how many generations they've been out of China. Harnessing the talent and capital of Chinese emigres is a central facet of Xi's "China dream" of national rejuvenation.

More contentious — and an emerging issue in the China debate — is the CCP's aggressive bid for influence in global diaspora communities, especially through its penetration of ethnic Chinese media. To be sure, Beijing is amplifying its voice beyond Chinese audiences: under directives from the central government, China's propaganda department is co-ordinating what the ABC describes as an "unprecedented" $9.1 billion a year expansion of state-controlled media, in line with Xi's 2014 pledge to "tell China's stories well."

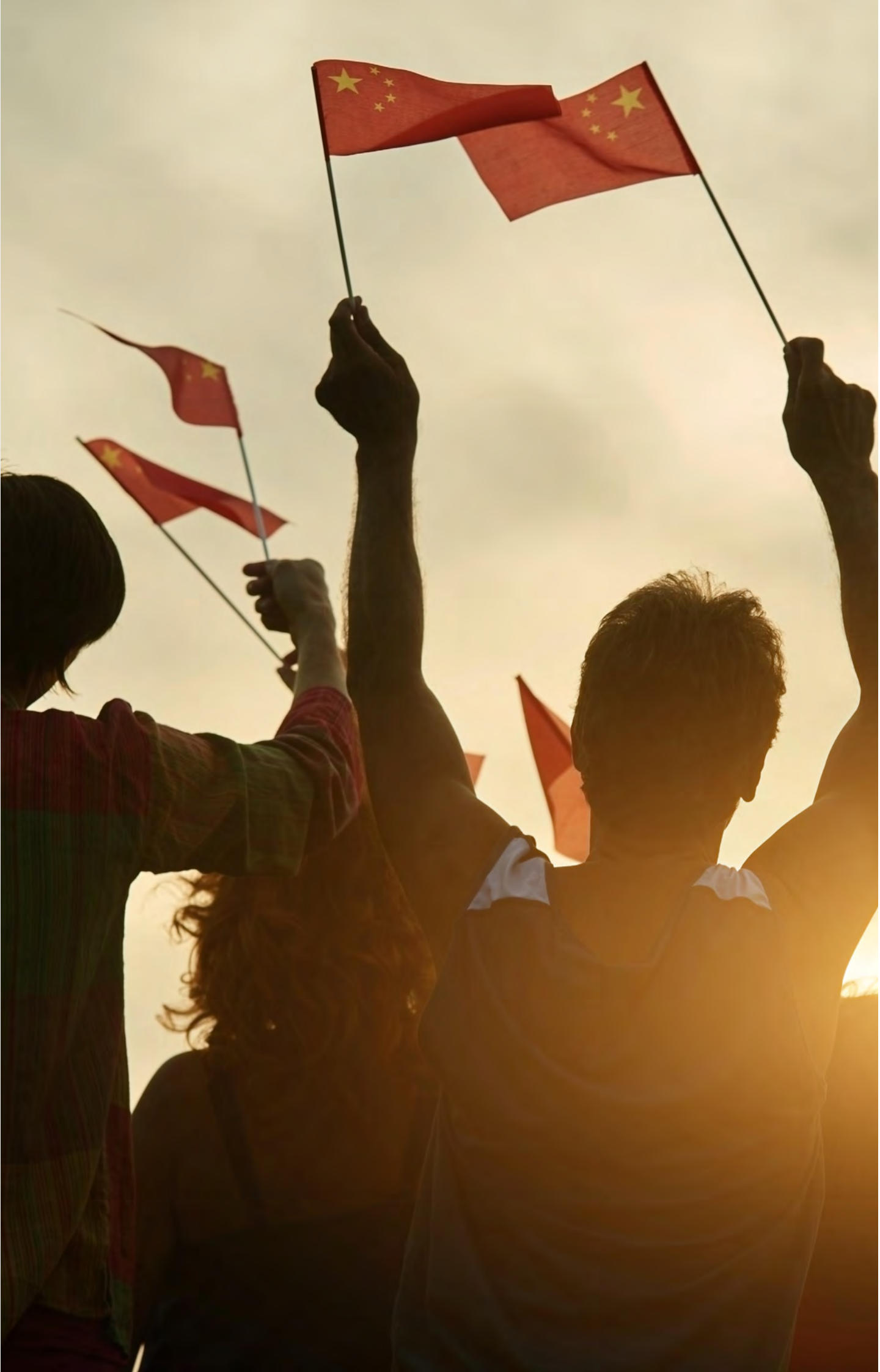
But the CCP's push into global Chinese-language media is singled out by veteran China watchers as an especially worrying development that's been taking place largely under the radar. A 2016 Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) report quoted Australian Chinese media sources saying that the majority of the Chinese language media in the country was owned or controlled by the Chinese state or its affiliates, "with politically sensitive or unfavourable coverage of China and the ruling Communist Party... effectively stopped outside all but a couple of Chinese language outlets."

The control from Beijing, "can come in the form of an admonishing phone call, blocking reporters from a public event, via directives for mainland-linked businesses to pull advertising, or even direct investment from Chinese government bodies."

Crucially, some observers in Xi's China detect a change in official rhetoric about the value of foreign education. In a longform 2018 piece in online China-focused publication, SupChina, journalist Eric Fish reports some CCP agencies have tried to disincentivise studying abroad. Restrictions have tightened on international schools that prepare students for overseas study and students have reported trouble accessing foreign admissions websites.

Carl Minzner, a professor of Chinese law and politics and author of End of an Era: How China's Authoritarian Revival Is Undermining its Rise, sees a shift in the post-1979 reform ethos that believed China's development hinged on learning from the West.

"There are questions being raised at a very deep level within the bureaucracy about how valuable that stuff from outside is," Minzner told SupChina. "This nativist turn is leading Beijing to steadily impose stronger curbs on influences viewed as 'foreign' – whether it be Christmas traditions or overseas academic publications."



Or whether it be the more than 800,000 Chinese students overseas, singled out by authorities as both a "critical constituency," Fish writes, and simultaneously a target for suspicion. We will now turn to the impact of Xi's China on overseas students and how these trends are playing out in Australia.

Overseas students and the China of Xi

Overseas students— along with the wider Chinese diaspora — have become an explicit focus of a special department of the Communist Party, which has come to public attention through the debates about CCP influence: The United Front Work Department. "In its simplest terms," writes Gerry Groot, senior lecturer in Chinese Studies at the University of Adelaide, in The Conversation, "the UFWD is about uniting those who can help the party achieve its goals and neutralise its critics. Its work is often summed up as "making friends", which sounds benign, and often is. But it can have other meanings, such as helping to stifle dissent at home and abroad."

Under President Xi, Groot says, the UFWD has become "much more prominent." Overseas students have been elevated from a Ministry of Education responsibility to that of the UFWD, in order to harness what Party officials describe as their "patriotic energy." When unleashed, this "patriotic energy" can undermine academic freedom and free speech in Western universities.

The evidence is overwhelming that Chinese embassies and consular officials encourage student groups such as the Chinese Students and Scholars Association — which has 150-odd chapters around the world and an active presence on nearly all Australian campuses — to display what journalist John Garnaut described as "red hot patriotic sentiment." This sentiment sometimes entails being the Party's eyes and ears abroad, and stifling classroom discussions on "sensitive" topics such as the "three T's" — Taiwan, Tibet and Tiananmen Square.

In his 2017 Whitlam Oration, Stephen FitzGerald, appointed under the Whitlam Government as Australia's first ambassador to the PRC, where he served from 1973 to 1976, explained there are several dozen Chinese student associations across the country, each with different agendas and often in conflict, "but through its consular officials, China directs or controls many if not most of them, and through them exercises surveillance and at times coercion.

"This is not what we want the experience of our international education to be and, given the values of the government on whose behalf this surveillance is conducted, not in our national interests."

It is hard to gauge how many PRC students have received the official memo, metaphorically speaking.

China's Ministry of Education, through its Service Centre for Scholarly Exchange, holds massive pre-departure briefings for outbound overseas students, giving broad advice that in relation to Australia reportedly includes safety tips about swooping magpies. The Australian government has asked, unsuccessfully, for a role in these sessions.

Most Chinese students in Western universities have no or limited interaction with consular officials. An Australian student with close ties to her Chinese counterparts at Melbourne University told this author that even within the Chinese Students and Scholars Association only the most senior office holders are aware of the group's co-ordination with Beijing's consular officials. We can comfortably conclude that even if the call to patriotic action has been widely disseminated, few PRC students abroad are inclined to obey the CCP's instructions.

But some PRC students, whether responding to official decrees or acting independently, have exerted pressure on universities over the "three T's" and other matters. In 2017, a Sydney University lecturer was forced to apologise for a map showing territory disputed by China and a University of Newcastle lecturer was condemned on social media for a list showing Hong Kong and Taiwan as separate territories.

More worrying still are reports from some Australian lecturers about students self-censoring during classroom discussions, citing repercussions for their families in China. In 2014 John Garnaut reported claims from a senior lecturer at an Australian university that he was interrogated four times in China about comments he made at a democracy seminar at UNSW.

After the clashes in August 2019 between pro-Hong Kong and pro-Beijing students at Queensland University, The SMH reported that the parents of a student who had rallied in favour of Hong Kong were visited by authorities in China and warned to pull their child into line. This was the same protest that prompted China's consul-general in Brisbane, Xu Jie — who is also an adjunct professor at Queensland University —

to endorse the students' "spontaneous patriotic behaviour," earning a rebuke from Foreign Affairs Minister Marise Payne that the nation will not tolerate interference in the exercise of free speech.

A number of Government backbenchers warned after the campus clashes that universities are too reliant on international students and not doing enough to combat China's influence.

It is important to note that many countries surveil their overseas nationals and try to intimidate them into silence. For instance, Malaysia's intelligence agency has long operated against its overseas students, including those in Australia, Asia expert Professor James Chin told Melbourne University publication, The Citizen, in 2018. (His comments were made in the lead-up to Malaysia's election that ended the ruling coalition's six-decade-long monopoly on power.)

But the sheer number of Chinese students in Australia, the universities' financial reliance on their fees and the pivotal Australia-China relationship, gives the CCP's meddling on campus unparalleled significance.

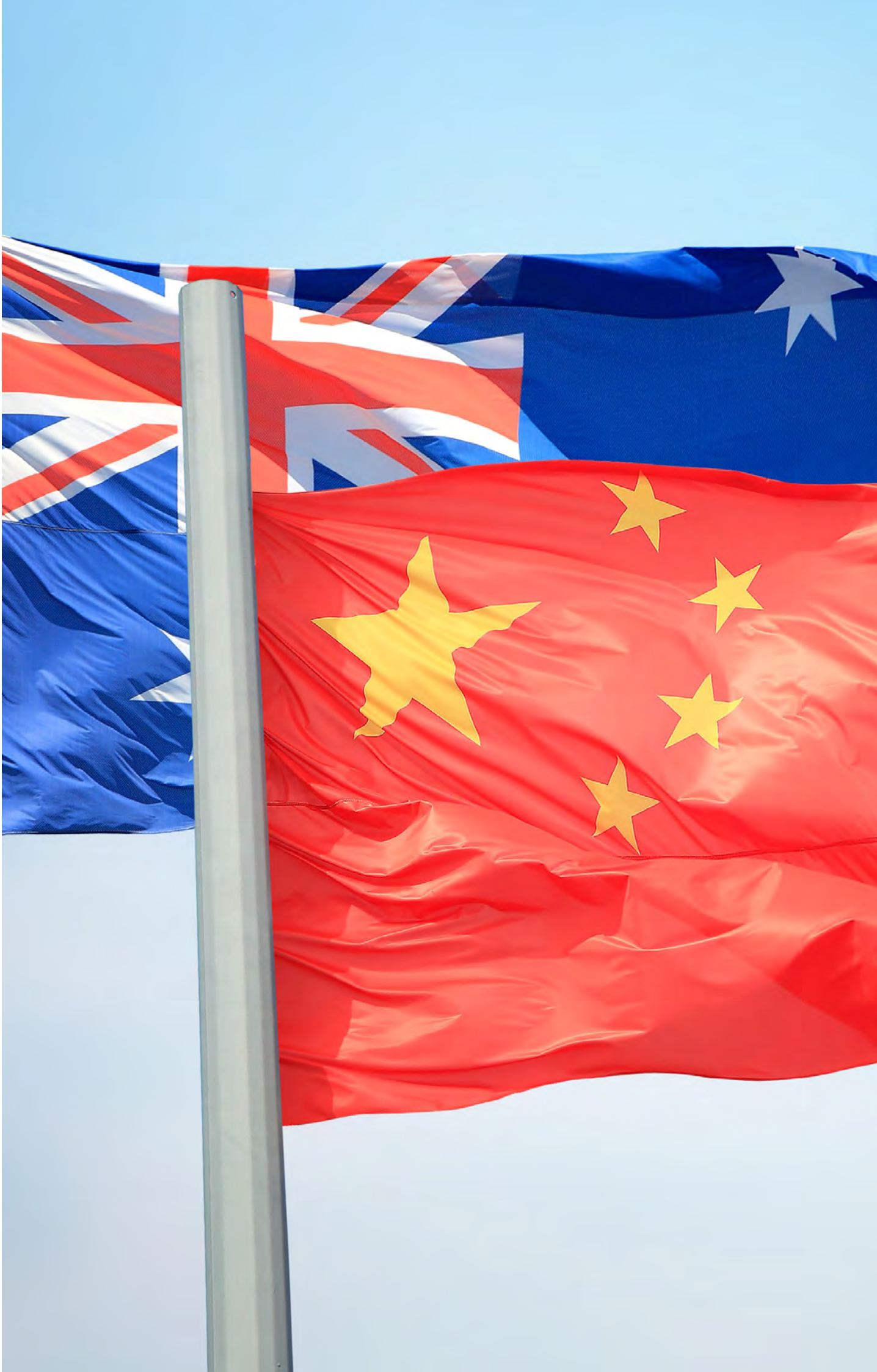
When Vicky Xiuzhong Xu came to Australia in the mid 2010s, having earlier studied journalism in China, she read for the first time about the Tiananmen Square crackdown, “and concluded it was an inside job.” When in an offhand comment, her creative non-fiction tutor at Melbourne University called her “brainwashed” she complained to the course co-ordinator that the tutor was discriminating against her for ideological reasons. (Disclosure: that tutor is this author.) But after she interviewed Chinese political dissidents, who told of being tortured in prison in China, “the brutality of authoritarian rule sank in,” she wrote in the SMH in August 2019. “From that point on, I became an outspoken defender of human rights.”

That outspokenness, which has included reporting for The New York Times and performing stand-up comedy, has made her a high-profile target for a vast army of nationalist online trolls who have threatened her with rape and called for her father in China to be “punished” for his daughter’s views. (Those views have led to her estrangement from her family.) The trolls’ threats were picked up by the widely-read College Daily, a pro-Beijing publication targeting PRC students in the US and Canada, which asserted Xu was an "American mouthpiece" and only criticising the Chinese government to get political asylum in Australia.

“I’m opposed to violence and the filth from online trolls made me physically sick,” Xu says. But, “rather than be shocked and fearful of them, supporters of human rights and democracy should embrace the opportunity to understand them, open a dialogue and educate them so they can make up their own minds about China.”

An Australian government official based in Beijing told this author the only “political” gripe she occasionally hears from outbound students is swimmer Mack Horton’s anti-doping protest against China’s Sun Yang at the 2019 World Aquatics Championships.

“That seems to concern them a lot more than the protests in Hong Kong.”



Australia at "the vanguard of pushback"

"Australia has become the vanguard country for much of the pushback against Beijing's increased reach," writes political analyst Grant Wyeth in The Diplomat. Beginning in earnest under the Turnbull government in 2017, Australian authorities, academics and the media have embarked on a debate about China's growing regional influence that's aroused global attention.

Australia has exposed CCP-linked influence operations within its borders, including political donations to both major parties, banned Chinese-owned tech giant Huawei from taking part in the rollout of 5G mobile infrastructure over national security concerns, and in the wake of spy agency ASIO's warnings about "unprecedented" levels of foreign interference in Australia's democracy, passed foreign interference laws criminalising conduct that falls short of traditional espionage. In a politically explosive book, ***Silent Invasion: China's Influence in Australia***, released in 2018, Professor Clive Hamilton argues CCP-linked espionage and influence operations are eroding Australia's sovereignty. (His argument was bolstered by three previous publishers reneging on their deal with him, citing fears of reprisals from Beijing.)

Liberal MP Andrew Hastie, head of Federal Parliament's security and intelligence committee, even compared the West's handling of China's rise to the failure to contain the advance of Nazi Germany.

"Right now our greatest vulnerability lies not in our infrastructure, but in our thinking," he wrote in the Nine papers.

"That intellectual failure makes us institutionally weak. If we don't understand the challenge ahead for our civil society, in our parliaments, in our universities, in our private enterprises, in our charities — our little platoons — then choices will be made for us. Our sovereignty, our freedoms, will be diminished."

The focus on CCP meddling has generated fierce criticism among sections of the business, academic and ethnic Chinese communities. Virtually no-one denies CCP influence and interference is real, so the argument is largely around the intensity and tone of Australia's pushback.

Some experts, such as Linda Jakobson and Bates Gill in their 2017 book ***China Matters: Getting it Right for Australia***, argue that this more assertive CCP is

precisely why Australia needs more — not less — engagement with China. They say Australia, "needs to rethink its relationship with China across the board," in what should constitute a national project. A new body should be set up with a mandate to advance the Australia-China relationship in an unpredictable and challenging era. Such proposals emerge as a key theme in this narrative.

Others, such as the dozens of scholars who petitioned against the foreign interference laws, argue the claims of CCP interference are exaggerated, the attention on China's interference, as opposed to interference from other states, highly selective, the extension of state powers unwarranted, the pitch of the debate reminiscent of McCarthyist witch-hunts or, worse, that "we are witnessing the creation of a racialised narrative of a vast official Chinese conspiracy."

"The discourse is couched in such a way as to encourage suspicion and stigmatisation of Chinese Australians in general," the scholars warn. We will return to the alleged stigmatising of Chinese-Australians shortly.

First, we need to be aware of the wider ramifications of the China debate for universities.

Universities' broader links with China are also under scrutiny

The China dilemma in universities goes beyond their reliance on revenue from Chinese students — although that's arguably where Beijing has the most leverage. Research collaborations with Chinese institutions in areas deemed sensitive to national defence and human rights, Confucius Institutes and philanthropic donations from China have all come under the spotlight for potentially undermining the core mission of higher education institutions, as well as Australia's national interest. Cyber security is another flashpoint: in early 2019 an ANU database was hacked in what Australian defence experts believe was an attempt by China's spy agencies to collect personal information about former students likely to hold positions in Australia's defence community in the future.

Australian universities together host hundreds of lucrative collaborative research programs with Chinese universities and research agencies. Of these, the ABC's Four Corners program reported in October 2019, there have been 30 collaborations between ANU and Chinese defence universities, including projects to produce aerial

robots, drones and technology to help stealth fighters escape detection. Alex Joske, analyst at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), told the program it was not in Australia's interests "to be recklessly training scientists who will go on to develop technologies that could be used against our military and against our country."

The National Tertiary Education Union has also expressed concerns about university research collaborations that might aid the Chinese state in abusing human rights amid allegations of mass surveillance and repression of the country's Muslim Uyghur population in Xinjian province. Some universities appear to be heeding these concerns. The UTS is reportedly reviewing its $10 million partnership with a Chinese state-owned military tech company that developed an app that Chinese security forces use to track and detain Uyghur citizens. And Curtin University in Perth is reviewing its research approval procedures after Four Corners revealed that an associate professor at the university had been involved in developing facial recognition technology to better identify ethnic minorities in China.

Meanwhile, Australia's 13 Confucius Institutes, funded through China's Ministry of Education, have attracted considerable controversy. The institutes are joint ventures between the host university, a partner university in China, and Hanban, an agency under China's education ministry which supplies funding, staff and resources. The Institutes provide teaching and outreach activities on Chinese culture and language — and according to security and political analysts are also covert propaganda vehicles for the CCP. As with most such controversies, the conduct of the Institutes themselves largely vindicates the accusations.

In December 2018, Victoria University was scheduled to screen a film titled, In the Name of Confucius, which claims a global network of Chinese-backed Confucius Institutes are used to spread CCP ¬influence in Western universities. The university cancelled the screening after pressure from Chinese diplomats — and the campus Confucius Centre.

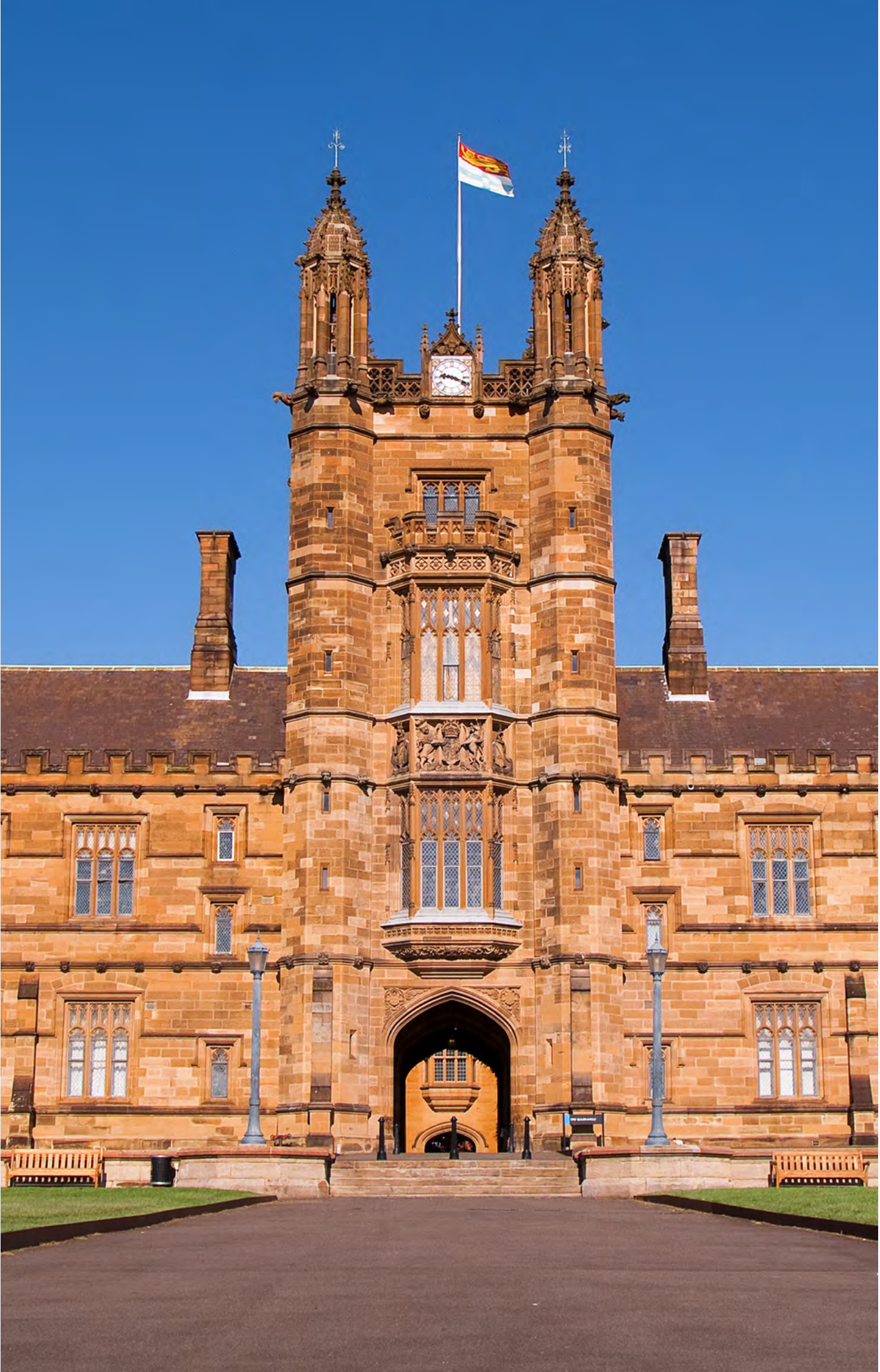
Most of the negative publicity around Confucius Institutes concerns those established under contracts that give Beijing ultimate power over what is taught. In 2019, The SMH reported on agreements signed by Queensland, Griffith, La Trobe, Charles Darwin and RMIT universities that compelled them to "accept the assessment of the (Confucius Institute) headquarters on the teaching quality." Griffith, La Trobe and Charles Darwin University argued the institutes are not involved in the awarding of formal academic qualifications.

In August, the NSW Department of Education announced the scrapping of a Confucius Institute language program that taught Mandarin in 13 public schools, after an internal review identified fears of potential foreign influence. NSW was the first government body in the world to host an institute within its own education department.

Finally, there is the broader, though equally vexed, issue of philanthropic donations from China to Australian universities, which may come with strings attached. The sharpest example is the UTS-based Australia-China Relations Institute (ACRI), of which former NSW premier Bob Carr was director, established with a $1.8 million donation from CCP-linked businessman Huang Xiangmo. Huang's notoriety around alleged foreign interference and influence eventually led to Labor Senator Sam Dastyari's resignation from the Senate in January 2018. About a year later the Home Affairs Department cancelled Huang's permanent residency, and barred him from re-entering Australia on national security grounds.

Assessing ACRI's output, La Trobe University's Associate Professor of Politics and Asian Studies James Leibold concluded: "While it has produced a handful of quality research reports by respected Australian academics, far more effort has gone into the production of often one-sided, decontextualised fact sheets and opinion pieces aimed at promoting what ACRI's own website asserts is 'a positive and optimistic view of Australia-China relations'.

In the second half of 2019, a taskforce of government and university representatives developed voluntary guidelines for universities around cyber security, research and intellectual property, overseas collaboration and raising awareness about foreign interference and intimidation on campus. The guidelines include responsibilities of governance and due diligence around research collaborations and staff appointments.



The risk to social cohesion

The scenario Varghese poses in which Beijing authorities deter students from choosing Australian universities is not fanciful. They have flirted with such a directive before in rhetoric that a former national security adviser to the Federal Government, John Lee, describes as "politicising and even weaponising race as a tool of foreign policy and subversion."

In December 2017, amid debates about CCP influence on campus, China's embassy in Australia slammed media reports "unscrupulously vilifying the Chinese students as well as the Chinese community in Australia with racial prejudice." Later that month it issued a safety warning on its website that "Chinese international students have been insulted and attacked." The warnings related to the bashing of three Chinese students in Canberra in October and racist flyers discovered at two Melbourne universities in July.

The higher education sector held its breath. Sydney University Vice-Chancellor Michael Spence declared the Turnbull Government's foreign interference laws and pronouncements about CCP-influence to be, "Sinophobic blatherings." "For Australian universities to maintain their position in the world's top 100 universities, they need to be open to students from around the world," Spence warned. It is hard to assess the impact of the embassy's safety warnings, though in the first quarter of 2018 to 2019, offshore student visa grants from China dropped 10 per cent.

Should China ultimately attempt to pull the pin on student flows to Australia, Varghese says universities might have to bear some pain, and if that happens the Federal Government should help fill the revenue hole.

But as Lee's remarks about Beijing's "weaponising race" suggest, beyond economic risks, the China debate is a risk to social cohesion.

It might be useful to see the China challenge in universities as a microcosm of that confronting Australia as a whole.

Firstly, in both instances Beijing enjoys disproportionate economic leverage. The higher education sector is dependent on revenue from PRC students; the Australian economy is dependent on trade with China.

By far Australia's largest trading partner, China receives a third of the nation's exports. In 2017-18, according to Department of Trade figures, exports to China eclipsed the almost 30 per cent to Japan, South Korea, the United States and India combined. China is the biggest importer of Australia's top three exports — iron ore, coal and education-related services, and of the fifth largest, tourism. In the same way the CCP dangles threats about stemming the tide of overseas students to Australia, it makes threatening noises about trade. "Lowering Aussie exports by $6.45 billion would send cold chills up and down the spine of Australia," China's state-owned Global Times editorialised in May 2018. "China has been very friendly toward Australia, but their arrogant attitudes in return over the past two years have become a virtual example of what it means to 'bite the hand that feeds.'"

The other striking similarity: just as some universities host tens of thousands of PRC students, Australia has 1.2 million people of Chinese heritage. Both groups are vulnerable to getting caught in the crossfire of the China debate because, as we've noted, in the China of Xi the country's large overseas diaspora is increasingly mined as a political resource. It is this targeting of the Chinese diaspora that distinguishes Beijing's interference as especially dangerous, say two formidable sinologists, both Professor Fitzgeralds — John Fitzgerald, and Stephen FitzGerald, Australia's first ambassador to China.

The latter FitzGerald refers to Beijing's de-facto takeover of Australia's Chinese-language media, its policing and mobilising of international students, and President Xi's calling on "all Chinese" overseas to "unite" and work in the cause of China.

"I've spent a considerable part of my life urging Australia to be open to Chinese and other Asian immigration and ideas and influences, and I love the great churning of East and West you see now, in families you know, or in the street, or on public occasions," said Stephen FitzGerald, honorary fellow at Sydney University's China Studies Centre, and board member of independent think-tank, China Matters, in his Whitlam Oration. "And I don't want to see this derailed or despoiled by Sinophobia. But discuss it (Beijing's influence operations in the diaspora) we must."

"For Beijing to suggest Australian citizens of Chinese descent should unite and serve China is a direct challenge to Australian sovereignty. In these ways, it has clearly crossed the line.

"We have to manage it, looking to the interests and cohesion of the whole community, and the preservation and enhancement of a close working relationship with China."

In an October 2019 ASPI report, John Fitzgerald likewise observes, the CCP's "united front diplomacy gives particular grounds for concern where it reaches out to people of Chinese descent regardless of citizenship, demands their loyalty to the party, and engages in covert and coercive behaviour to silence Chinese-Australians who harbour deep affection for China but none for the party."

Australia's problem is two-fold, John Fitzgerald says. At one end, CCP agencies "distort" legitimate criticism in Australia of Beijing's tactics. "The aim is to divert or silence criticism of the party, disarm critical voices in the Chinese-Australian community, and drive a wedge between communities within Australia."

At the other end, are "Australian politicians and media who run the risk of alienating and possibly stigmatising Chinese-Australians through misleading claims or imprecise choices of words."

He cites as an example, Prime Minister Scott Morrison characterising Labor's parliamentary questioning of Liberal MP Gladys Liu over her alleged links with the CCP as a broader "smear" of disloyalty against 1.2 million Australians with Chinese heritage.

"My Chinese-Australian friends thought the critical questioning was about Liu's dubious fundraising practices and connections with China," John Fitzgerald wrote on the Lowy Institute's website in September 2019. "No, according to the Prime Minister – it is all about them."

Some Chinese-Australians indeed perceive the China debate is casting doubt on their loyalty as citizens. "Unfortunately we have reached a point in the public debate where any logical and rational approach to China is deemed "soft" and the only way to prove your 'Australianness' is to publicly condemn it," wrote Chinese-Australian researcher and policy adviser, Jieh-Yung Lo, in 2018 in The South China Morning Post. "To claim that people have allegiance to China on the basis of their race and cultural heritage without an evidentiary base is deeply damaging to our reputation and leaves us open to further discrimination, vilification and the breaking down of trust."

Writing in the wake of the campus scuffles in Brisbane — and the subsequent revelations of spying — Washington Post columnist Richard Glover summed up the dangers of the China debate. "The current concerns play into a long history in Australia over anxiety with China— an anxiety that has, at times, become virulently racist."

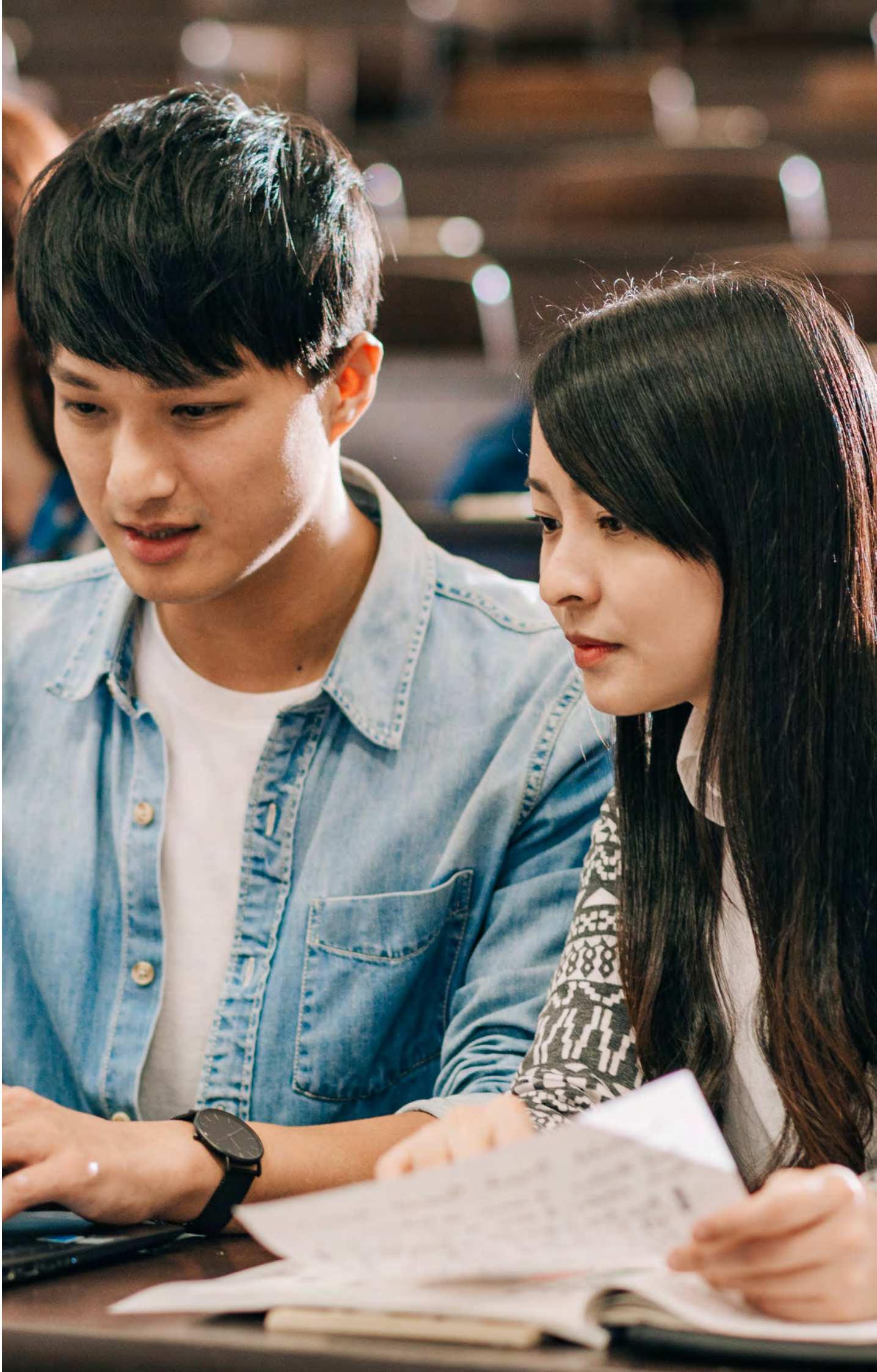
He refers to violence against Chinese migrants during the 1850s gold rushes and the White Australia policy, designed to prevent Chinese immigration.

"Australians," Glover writes, "must steer a difficult course: trying to avoid the dangers of naivete without falling back into the anti-Asian sentiment of our early history."

"The media always represents people on the streets," says Bo Yang* Chinese economics student at a G08 university. "From my perspective I don't mind the protests (in Hong Kong) but they can get a bit extreme. Obviously people from the mainland have a different view from Western media, and the Hong Kong people will say, 'you are censored, you don't have information from all sides.' But there's conflict everywhere: in the US, in France. It's too intense, I feel like everyone has a different story and it's hard to see who is right and who is wrong.

"I remember someone posted a comment about the Hong Kong protests on a university chat group on Facebook. He just said two words, 'Peaceful protest?' And people jumped on him with stuff about re-education camps and that kind of thing. He had to delete his account."

"We don't really care about politics," doctoral student Eric Chen*, says about his fellow PRC students in Australia. "The reason we don't care is that our culture respects power. Although, this is changing (in China), maybe because we are richer now. But this is the reason I prefer to respect our elders and accept policies or law, accept the Chinese government has the smartest, the most serious people. I think Chinese culture is most suitable for most Chinese."



In his ASPI report, entitled ***Mind Your Tongue***, John Fitzgerald urges us to guard against "sloppy" language. "In speaking or writing about China, Australian politicians, media and commentators should distinguish clearly between the Government of China, the CCP and the people of China, and distinguish Chinese-Australians and their many different communities from all of the above."

Fostering harmony on campus likewise involves disentangling Chinese students from their overbearing government and respecting them as individuals with a range of views. At universities, and in Australia as a whole, the China debates challenges us to protect democracy from foreign interference without tearing the social fabric.

Can universities lead the way in fostering freedom and harmony?

The divide between domestic and international students is increasingly viewed as a risk to Australia's strategic interests, and to social cohesion.

John Fitzgerald puts the case starkly when he points out the Beijing-controlled student associations in Australia offer Chinese students a sense of community they otherwise lack. The result is "Chinese students feel like they're being hosted by the Chinese government in Australia."

(One meaningful improvement: in 2018, Sydney University, where PRC students comprise 24 per cent of the total student population, introduced a free shuttle bus from the airport for newly arriving international students.)

Critical to breaking Beijing's hold is ensuring universities are a safe haven, with students of all nationalities and political views free to express themselves lawfully and respectfully without intimidation from state authorities or intelligence agencies.

In their China Matters paper, Bates Gill and Linda Jakobson, say it is "essential" that universities, led by the Go8, adopt a uniform set of procedures to counter harassment and bullying of lecturers, or students, deemed "anti-PRC."

"The Go8 should explore ways to enforce a more binding code of conduct than the one currently in use, which expects students to 'act consistently' with values such as intellectual freedom and critical, open enquiry."

But a tougher code of conduct on intellectual freedom could have unintended consequences outside the context of CCP influence considering recent controversies around students "no-platforming" speakers whose views they find distasteful.

According to Chancellor, Peter Varghese, when CCP pressure compromises academic freedom, freedom of expression and institutional autonomy, "the responsibility lies squarely with the university leadership, not with students who may act in ways inconsistent with the idea of a university."

And as the China Matters paper notes, "not all zealous pro-PRC action on Australian campuses is directed by the PRC government. Some of the actions are initiated by individual students who ardently believe they should counter what they see as ill-informed views about the PRC. Others are more pragmatic — keen to demonstrate patriotism to boost career prospects upon their return home."

As is the case with Chinese-Australians, and Australians in general, forcing PRC students to denounce the CCP to prove they are not suspect is the antithesis of democracy. Studies also show Chinese students abroad have complex, nuanced and evolving views about their homeland.

As Monash University scholars Diarmuid Cooney-O'Donoghue (a PhD student) and Chinese Studies lecturer Jonathan Benney point out in The Conversation in October 2019, while "some students from China fear political change inside China could threaten the country's stability ..this doesn't automatically mean they are hostile to liberal values."

In his SupChina piece, Eric Fish found "many (PRC students) feel caught in the geopolitical crossfire – forced to choose a side or keep their heads down." His piece includes a telling interview with Wang Zilong who studied at a Massachusetts college in 2009. Classmates were forcing him to answer for sociopolitical issues in China, issues he'd never even thought about.

Wang often found himself resorting to propaganda phrases he didn't necessarily believe in: "That's our internal affair" and "The West always applies double standards."

"When we're 18, we're very self-conscious and pretty insecure about our self-identity anyway," Wang explained of his conduct. "I think the combination of dealing with national identity and personal insecurity is a pretty potent mix."

Part of the lesson appears to be that clumsy political engagement between PRC and domestic students can be counter-productive, and worse than no engagement at all.

"Some Chinese international students ...complain that although host students want to talk with them about China, they often exhibit misinformed, prejudiced and offensive views of Chinese current events," found a 2015 study by Henry Chiu Hail of 18 Chinese students at the University of Hawaii. Hail has recalled his own experience befriending a Chinese classmate a decade ago, while studying for his master's: "I thought I would shock her with American democracy, and show her all this stuff she never knew about her own country. I think a lot of Americans get off on that idea: that they're going to liberate the minds of overseas students."

His study concluded: "international students may learn more about democracy and human rights through observing the host society rather than directly discussing these topics with host country members."

Some of the more worrying studies and expert analysis in recent times suggests that far from promoting a more liberal outlook, study in the West may in fact be arousing greater disdain for the West among Chinese students.

In the next section we examine a recent, and rare, Australian study probing the impact of international education on the political outlook of Chinese students.

No "cosmopolitan identity"

Are Chinese students' views "being challenged or transformed (or consolidated) because of their overseas experiences? Or are their existing views, values, attitudes and prejudices reinforced?"

These questions animate Melbourne University scholars Claudia Astarita, Allan Patience & Sow Keat Tok in a paper titled ***Chinese Students in Australia: Generators of Cosmopolitanism, Evidence of Economic Necessity or Agents of Political Influence?*** Published in the Journal of Australian Studies in August 2019, their paper interrogates the idea that the more students study in overseas institutions, the more open-minded and cosmopolitan they become.

Nineteen Chinese university students in Australia attended repeated interviews over an eight-month period. The interviews were conducted in English; when necessary, Mandarin translations were provided. For the first two rounds, individual students spoke to the researchers alone, with the final round conducted as a focus group. Two students decided not to participate in the focus groups because they feared the consequences of sharing their opinions in a group of peers— although the authors found no evidence any of the students involved in the project "are engaging in activities that could have them identified as Chinese agents of political influence."

Overwhelmingly, the students displayed little interest in politics or history, explaining their decision to study in the West as a way of boosting their employability back home. They expressed scepticism about both Western and state-controlled Chinese media — although one student described Western media as "more reliable." (We discuss PRC students' media consumption in the next section.) Many were ignorant of cataclysmic markers of 20th century Chinese history, including the Cultural Revolution, the Great Leap Forward and the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

But the students were willing to educate themselves and discuss their findings. At the second interview, one student said of the Great Leap Forward, the CCP's agricultural campaign between 1958 and 1960 that led tens of millions to die of starvation: "Now I think it was a bad time for China." Another student called it "a disaster." In general, the students were proud of China, seeing it as an emerging regional and global influence for peace and order.

"An equally striking observation from the interview responses is that several students showed a willingness to deliberately separate their knowledge gained overseas from the knowledge they acquired at home, suggesting their understandings had geographical boundaries. They expressed the view that whatever they discovered about China overseas would be put aside (at least for the time being) after they returned home. The geographical compartmentalisation of their knowledge is worthy of further research."

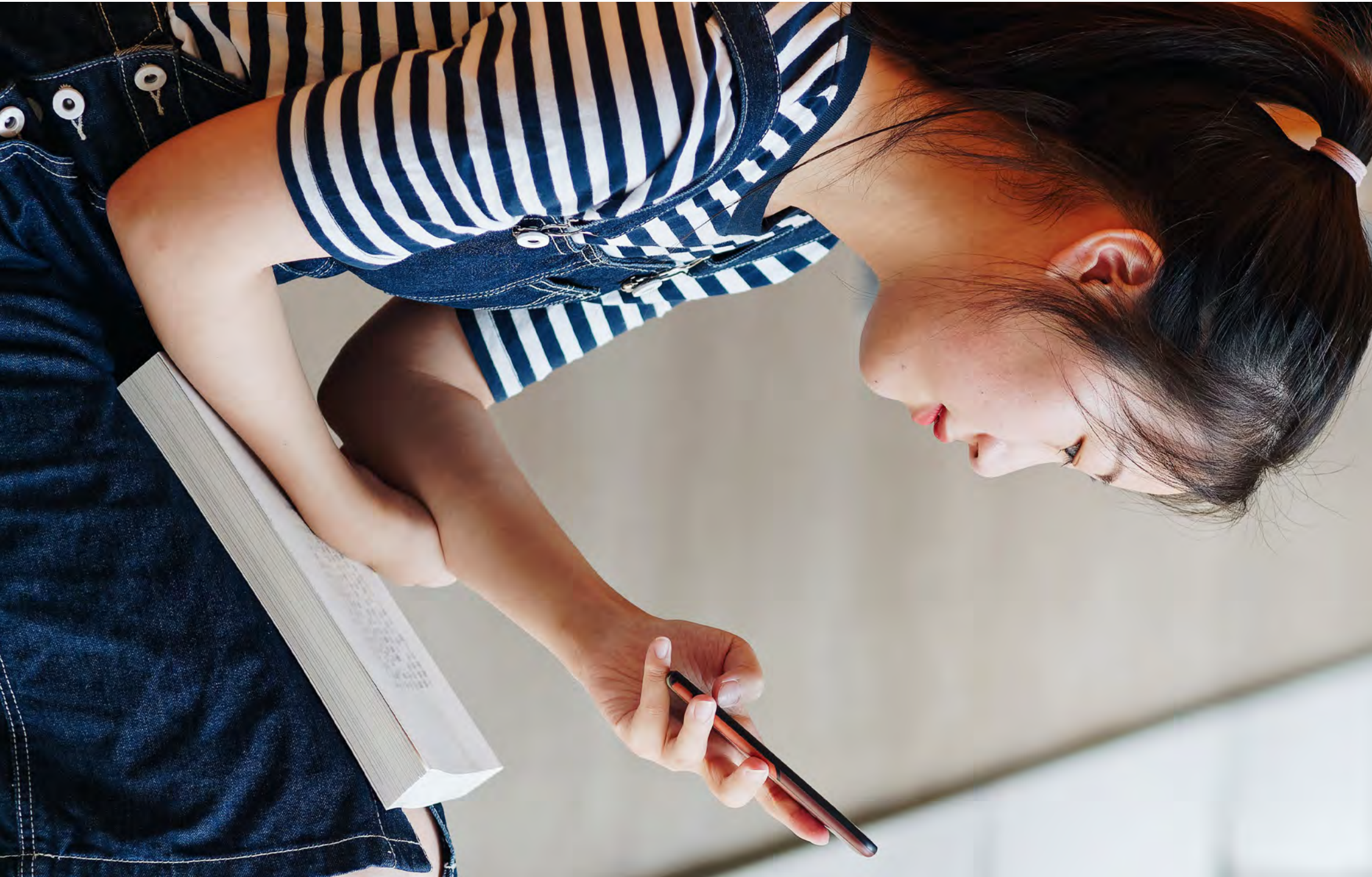
The authors concluded: "Any notion that China may be open to the ideals of global citizenship or that the students would see themselves as agents of cosmopolitanism were absent from the interviews."

Perhaps that's hardly surprising given all the respondents noted that "their interactions with non-Chinese students on campus are rare and, in not a few cases, non-existent."

"This could point to the fact that both the Chinese students and their local counterparts are primarily focused on gaining qualifications for specific career purposes — or to the fact that there is a lack of interest and openness on both sides of the local-international student equation."

The authors argue, "further research is urgently needed to dispel ignorance and challenge prejudice on all sides, to enable the international student experience generally — and the Chinese student experience in particular — in Australian universities to be a positive experience for all concerned."

One of the paper's authors, University of Melbourne Associate Professor Allan Patience, proposes an Asian-Australian studies curricula be compulsory for first-year undergraduates so that domestic and international students get introduced to, and educated about, one another. We flesh out this proposal later.



WeChat: is there space to engage?

"I'm always careful what I say on WeChat," says former politics student Cathy Yang* in Melbourne. "I don't want my parents back in China to get into trouble."

The divide between Chinese international students and Australians is not just physical, but also digital.

The two groups congregate on different social media platforms, read different news sources and absorb radically different world views. In the pre-internet age it simply wasn't possible for visiting students to be so insulated from the conversational heartbeat in their host societies, to travel far from home and simultaneously carry a localised version of home in the palm of their hand.

In China, Facebook, Twitter and the like are banned. Chinese international students are ubiquitous on the social media platform WeChat, which accepts registered users from both inside and outside China.

According to the ABC, WeChat account holders in China cannot "see" politically-sensitive content sent to them by international accounts, but restrictions rarely apply to content shared between accounts outside the mainland.

Professor Wanning Sun, a researcher at UTS, explains that WeChat "is subject to censorship from China, yet exists more or less outside Australia's regulatory framework." In the lead-up to the 2019 federal election both major political parties campaigned on WeChat; some critics argue this amounts to tacit acceptance of authoritarian censorship.

Meanwhile, this writer has been told about university administrators seeking out "key opinion leaders" or "influencers" in WeChat communities — the charismatic students who are apparently the oracles on the best noodle bar near campus or

where to get help with tenancy disputes — to better disseminate information about services and opportunities.

WeChat is also where most of Australia's Mandarin speakers, including Chinese international students, get their news, according to a study by Sun and her colleague, Haiqing Yu. And the news they're reading is often different from that of their domestic peers. Highly popular with Chinese international students are Australia-based online tabloids with a pro-Beijing bent. Such outlets, says Sun, in a separate paper published in Media International Australia, have emerged in recent years and "seem to be proliferating." The fastest-growing and most extensive network, the Media Today Group, claims to have up to seven million registered users. Owned and operated by entrepreneurs in mainland China, written and produced in Australia, the Group's publications, such as Melbourne Today and Sydney Today, target newly-arrived Chinese migrants, Sun writes. Especially popular is Sydney Today, which had its genesis in 2011 as the brainchild of Zhang Dapeng, an IT graduate from Sydney's UTS. In 2016, the publication reached 370,000 subscribers via WeChat, most of them in Australia.

Funded mainly through advertising, publications such as Sydney Today either translate — and link to — material from English-language media in Australia or reproduce news from China's state media, sometimes adding its own slant. Sun describes the stories on Sydney Today as wide-ranging, covering crime, food, migration law, culture, gossip. Stories geared to helping Chinese international students find their feet in Australia. Stories that are sometimes pure clickbait — for the tabloid is a commercial operation — and sometimes peddle political outrage.

"Their tone is often strident, sensational or jovial, depending on the nature of the topic covered," Sun writes.

(Another Chinese-language tabloid website, New Impression, described an ABC report on the campus scuffles between pro-Beijing and pro-Hong Kong protestors as "extremely distorted.")

Sydney Today features discussion forums such as "If you return to China after having lived in Australia for more than a year, what are the things that you are no longer used to there?" "Too many smokers and spitters," is one response. "No awareness of the need to queue," says another. But what about the faster internet speeds? someone else asks. What about the efficiency and modernity?

On the occasions when user-generated content throws up generous conversations like this one, Sun writes, might the forum “already be operating as a de facto agency of nation-to-nation diplomacy?”

Some experts think Chinese students have a major role to play in Australia-to-China diplomacy. We hear their ideas in the next section.

How guests can enrich their hosts

In his speech on Australian universities and China, Chancellor Varghese reminded his audience that "there used to be those" who argued that international students stole university places from Australian students. Now we know that they actually subsidise our universities, especially our research programs, Varghese said, as well as stimulating the wider economy.

But public debate tacks towards seeing the large numbers of international students as a problem, or cost: their exploitation in the labour market drives down wages, their poor English holds back domestic students in the classroom, their political views create tension on campus. In April 2018 former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull introduced a new theme when he linked international students with urban congestion. "If you feel there are more foreigners on the tram and you can't get a seat," he said, that's largely because of the 200,000 more international students in Australia today compared to a few years ago.

And yet the official line from both the Government and higher education sector is that encounters between international and domestic students broaden the latter's horizons.

Some in the university sector propose a solution that revives the focus on a more specific, if sometimes contested, policy aspiration: building Australia's engagement with Asia. In 1989 the Hawke Government released Ross Garnaut's landmark report, "***Australia and the Northeast Asian Ascendency***," an optimistic blueprint that called on Australia to see itself as part of a dynamic, rapidly-growing Asia Pacific.

"For the first seven decades of the Federation a fearful, defensive Australia built walls to protect itself against the challenge of the outside world, and found that it had protected itself against the recognition and utilisation of opportunity," Garnaut wrote.

Australia and China have since become more integrated economically. But Garnaut's call to reorientate Australia's secondary and tertiary education systems to produce

graduates schooled in the history, politics, culture and languages of Asia has not fully materialised. He envisioned every Australian school teaching at least one Asian language by 2000; interestingly, part of the reason this hasn't happened is because education departments and institutions failed to implement another of his recommendations that native speakers be separated from the rest to ensure a "level playing field." Researches have pointed out that the students enrolled in Chinese-language studies are overwhelmingly native Chinese speakers — non-native speakers cannot compete, so they stay away.

Garnaut's vision gained little traction under the Howard Government which sought a greater emphasis in the school curriculum on the history of Western civilisation and Judeo Christian heritage. The Rudd-Gillard governments tried to reinvigorate Asian studies; the 2012 White Paper, "***Australia in the Asian Century***," broadly echoed Garnaut's recommendations from nearly 15 years earlier. Such is the default cultural tug-of-war between the more nostalgic conservatives and Labor about Australia's place in the world.

Some experts say the ideal of "engagement with Asia" needs refreshing, to prioritise engagement with China.

"We are living in a Chinese world," said Stephen FitzGerald in his 2017 Whitlam Oration. "But we don't have a relationship to match it." This "Chinese world," he explains, coincides with the end of Western ascendency over the non-Western world— a reality many people are reluctant to accept—coupled with China's wealth, power and political and social influence. The failure of Australian governments to implant the study of China and Chinese into our education system means "in the national parliament, the sum of China literacy is close to zero. And it's not much better across our public sector institutions."

FitzGerald is among the voices calling for the establishment of a new body to guide Australia's increasingly complex relationship with China.

In 2017, under the Turnbull government, foreign minister Julie Bishop released a new White Paper promoting a New Colombo Plan. In a reversal of the (enlightened) paternalism that underpinned the original Plan, the government would each year assist 10,000 young Australians to study in the Indo-Pacific region, with China included on the list of about 40 possible destinations. The government wants to see work and study in the Indo-Pacific become "a rite of passage" for Australian undergraduates. The Plan is devised as "a two-way flow of students between

Australia and the rest of our region, complementing the thousands of students from the region coming to Australia to study each year."

While the New Colombo Plan was well-received, some in higher education point to what they see as a glaring blind spot back home. We want our young people to engage with Asia, they argue, but "Australia is endowed with 600,000 international students from across the Indo-Pacific region: future business leaders, bureaucrats, change makers and politicians," writes, Laurie Pearcey, Pro Vice-Chancellor International at UNSW Sydney.

"Imagine what would be possible if our universities invested more in creating stronger engagement with them. Consider every student from China buddying up with a local student or another international student on a language-exchange program."

If we do nothing to help domestic and international students learn from one another, educators say, we short-change both.

When in 2016 Helen Sawczak took over as national head of the Australia China Business Council, a decades-old organisation that fosters bilateral trade and investment between the two countries, the large cohort of Chinese international students in Australia weren't on her radar. After all, the students — not being an Australian business or company — weren't eligible for full membership rights in the Council's 1500-strong membership. But it later dawned on Sawczak that these visitors are China's next generation of industry leaders; a valuable resource for growing Australia's future prosperity in a climate of boundless opportunities.

"Financial services, project management, funds management...there are so many opportunities for us in China beyond education and tourism," she explains. Consider Xi Jinping's declared commitment to boosting public health, she says. Australia could set up TAFE institutes in China to train allied health and aged care workers. These days the Council organises social and cultural events to help connect PRC students to life in Australia. And once those students return home, the Council keeps in touch with them.

Melbourne University's Allan Patience proposes an Asian-Australian studies curricula be compulsory for first-year undergraduates, "to expose students to the intellectual value intrinsic to studies of Asia." The course might include overviews of four enduring cultural narratives in contemporary Asia: Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Islam; Australia's historical estrangement from its region, and how Australia may contribute to the growth "of a cosmopolitan Asia Pacific regional community." Students would be invited to debate The Great Leap Forward, the Tiananmen Square Massacre, the White Australia Policy, Pauline Hanson.

Students would diarise their reflections throughout the course, and be encouraged to post them on a blog. What interested them? What did they struggle to understand? How do these big ideas play out in their own lives?

> Many Chinese students enrol in business courses, because "we are threatened (from family back in China) that we have to get great marks," explains international student Jing Yang. "So we choose something we're good at." (From ***Act of Translation***).

The mechanics of delivering such a course might be difficult as the structure of undergraduate degrees varies between universities. Its introduction would be relatively simple at Melbourne University where students only specialise as postgraduates and the undergraduate degrees have students taking "breadth" subjects outside their main study area. Pearcey thinks UNSW could also embed such a course as one of its general education units for undergraduates. "For postgraduate students this would be a little trickier," Pearcey told this narrator, "but not impossible. Perhaps an online module coupled with an extra curricular face-to-face component —and we could make this compulsory, so you can't graduate unless you complete it."

Even if such a course could be widely implemented, might it be criticised as an instance of the corporate tail — the universities' heavy reliance on international student fees — wagging the academic dog? One Chinese student told this narrator her peers would be unlikely to engage with such a course, seeing instead "just another assignment."

“We don’t need welfare — Australian students don’t need to ‘understand’ us,” doctoral student Eric Chen told this narrator in response to the proposal, expressing a pragmatic self-reliance that’s not uncommon among Chinese international students. “All they need to understand … is that Hong Kong is part of China and under China’s law. Just as all we need to understand is that NSW, or wherever, is part of Australia and under Australia’s law. Simple as that.”

Fortunately for Chen, governments and institutions aren’t doling out “welfare” to Chinese international students. But authorities are trying, albeit belatedly, to help the students better help themselves. And many Chinese international students are helping themselves in standing for elected positions on campus. In coming chapters we explore these positive developments and how we might build on them.

Study Melbourne: helping overseas students find their way

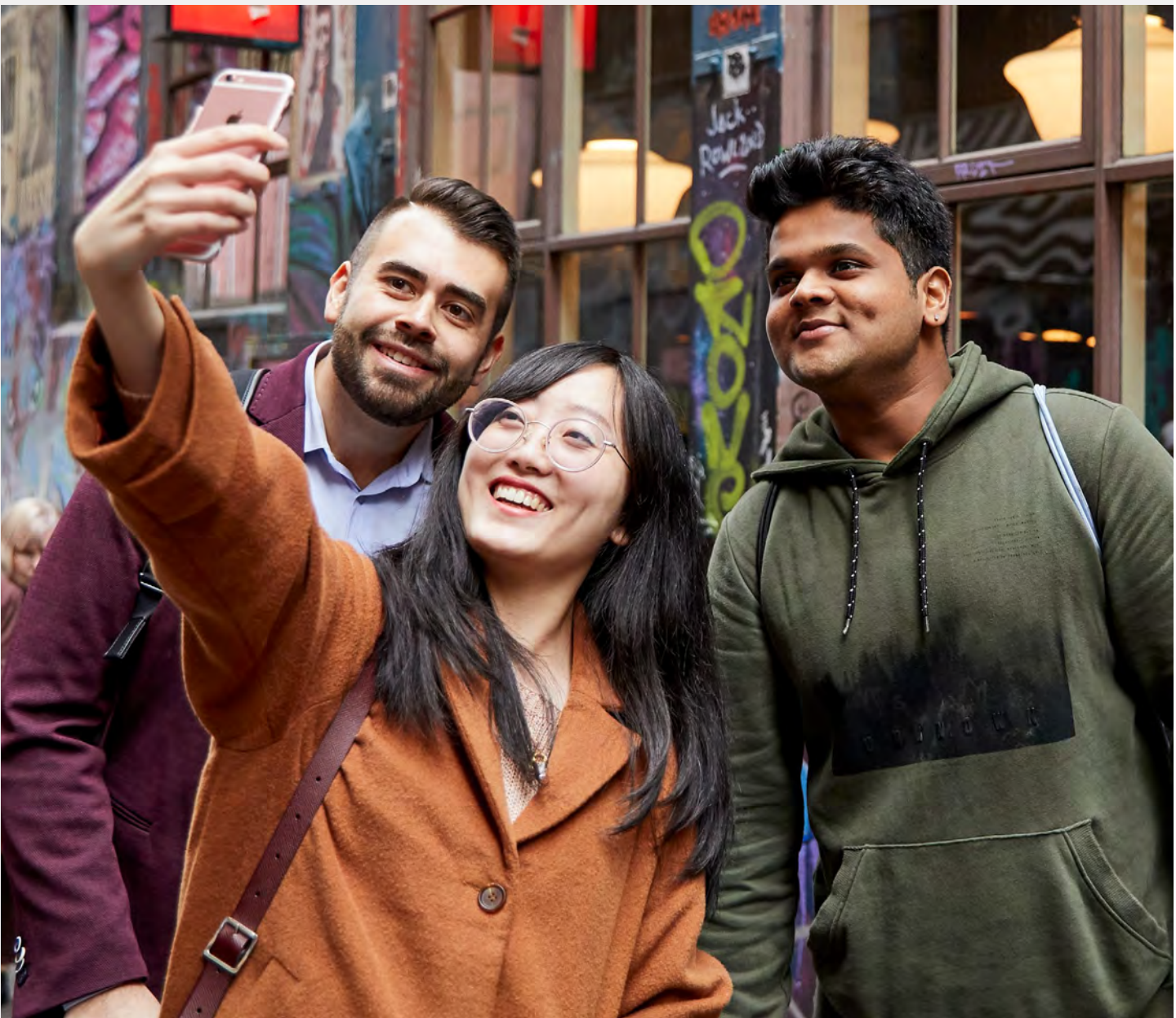
In recent years Australian governments and the higher education sector have been collaborating on programs to help support international students and deepen their engagement with mainstream society. These efforts exist within the prevailing transactional approach to international education, which recognises that in a fiercely competitive global market "brand Australia" can be tarnished if students have a flat experience during their time here. While this narrative argues that hosting students from China in particular can no longer be viewed in simply transactional terms — with students as mere consumers — it is worth noting some of the exisiting structures for improving the experience of international students and consider whether these foundations can be built upon.

One example is the Victorian Government's Study Melbourne program, established in 2006, which works with education agents and institutions, and private industry, to promote the state's largest export and support the roughly 200,000 international students enrolling in Victorian institutions each year. The Victorian Government points to the Study Melbourne website for its "rich detail" and "authentic voices" to "inspire and excite prospective students and reassure their parents."

The program was the first of its kind in Australia to set up a physical hub; Study Melbourne's CBD student centre has WIFI, a coffee machine, and free support services from legal and health advice, to interpreters. (It also runs a 24/7 phoneline.) The centre is spruiked by Study Melbourne, which provides information, such as how to obtain the (limited) public transport concessions for international students, write a resume, build a professional network and enjoy a "traditional" Melbourne night out.

Study Melbourne supports students to build volunteering and leadership capabilities; for instance, Chinese student leaders attended a work rights seminar, delivered in partnership with Melbourne University, the Chinese Consulate and the Fair Work Ombudsman. Through Study Melbourne's International Student Welfare Program, the Victorian Government has distributed $4 million in partnership-based grants to support various projects and build capacity in the sector. One project focused on the mental health of Chinese international students.

Another Study Melbourne employability project gets international and domestic students working together to solve a problem on behalf of a business or organisation — say, how Victoria Police might better provide security to international students, or figuring out how the Arts Centre could attract more diverse audiences to its performances. Over the past two years, according to the Study Melbourne website, about 1000 students took part in these three-week problem solving exercises.



It was only after spending time in Australia that Yiling (surname withheld) could gather the courage to come out as lesbian to her mother in China. She still feels she can't tell her father.

"I feel like I have different lives, here and back in China," she says. "Here I don't care because I think society gives me the sense that I don't have to fear about coming out."

"But back in China, I had always been very cautious and careful about telling anyone I'm gay, I just avoid telling anyone about that."

Yiling said she was not worried about what people thought or said about her but she was careful not to bring shame on her parents.

"Before I came to Australia, I never thought that I would come out to my parents, because I know the environment they grew up in and I know their education about gay people.

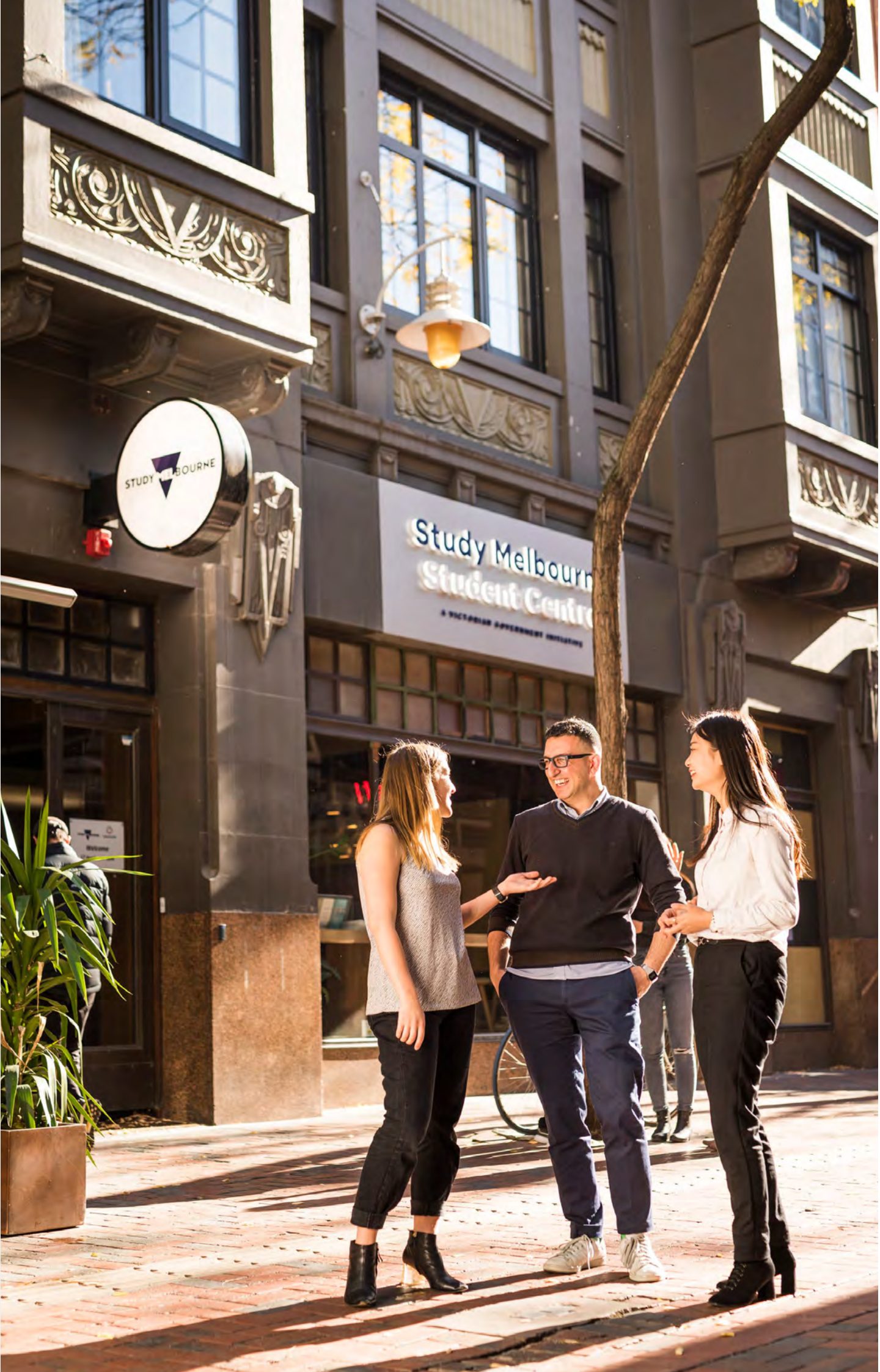
"For them it's a shame for the family, so I don't want them to feel shameful about me. I don't want to let my family down.

"I think Australia changed me a lot in my thoughts, I have more confidence to speak out to just be myself."

When she returns to China after her studies, she plans to find a "fake husband."

"I know it sounds very ridiculous, finding someone acting as your husband ... but for me I think it's very necessary."

Yiling shared her story as part of the theatre performance, She'll Be Right. Study Melbourne has supported the theatre project with two successive grants. Yiling's profile featured on ABC Radio Melbourne in May 2018.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English: universities are thinking hard

Studying politics at one of Australia's Go8 universities, Cathy Yang's* struggles with English went beyond simply unfamiliar words. Just as unfamiliar were the concepts the words described. "Concepts such as the separation of powers in a democracy were very difficult to understand because I'd never heard of such things before."

Though data about Chinese international students in Australia may be scant, one theme consistently emerges: language difficulties are a major cause of isolation and stress.

Universities are frequently accused of using international students as "cash cows," and even lowering admissions standards to get more of them in. The worst scandals — such as commission-based brokers circumventing English language requirements to ensure students get enrolled — have involved less prestigious universities.

But in his CIS paper, Salvatore Babones argues entry and academic standards have also been systematically relaxed to accomodate Chinese students at respected, Go8 universities. It is not simply that universities waive English-language requirements for students, he writes, "they turn the students' language problems into a money making opportunity."

Students are directed to preparatory courses run by university-linked private providers. Completion of the courses, which typically cost tens of thousands of dollars, virtually guarantees the students university entry, without them formally meeting the language pre-requisites.

Babones has recounted his own experiences teaching second or third year Chinese students at Sydney University "who still can't alphabetise Western authors by family name in a reference list."

"Some can't even distinguish between the name of a journal and the title of an article in that journal. It really is that bad."

We can assume the students Babones describes struggle academically and socially, and as we've seen, their weaker English can spark resentment from domestic peers in the classroom. Most commentators say that while universities must be held accountable for maintaining university entrance and academic standards, they also have a responsibility to provide international students with adequate English-language support.

Laurie Pearcey, Pro Vice-Chancellor (International) at UNSW, told this writer universities are "actively thinking" about this. One idea involves a compulsory English-language enhancement option for international students. The students would get credit and would be gaining meaningful English support in parallel with their main studies. This might involve customised programs relevant to student majors such as "Communications for Business" or "Communications for Science."

Standing for election: an encouraging trend?

Wesa Chau, an adviser to government and business about cultural diversity, established the Australian Federation of International Students in 2002. She saw so many international students needing better support services, and this was especially the case with students from mainland China.

“They didn’t know where to go when they had a problem,” she recalls. “So at first I became their resource, directing them to necessary services and departments, organising social activities.”

In time, the Federation evolved from helping individual students fix their problems to advocating for their collective welfare.

On the recent political tensions at universities, she says: “The best thing about democracy is that you can have your own views without resorting to violence. But as many Chinese students have no experience of this, there almost needs to be some education of how it can be done.”

She likes the idea of holding formal debates about matters involving China, including one-party rule, in which PRC and domestic students are made to argue for “the other side.. to help them understand each other’s perspective."

In September 2019, student government leaders at Monash University's Caulfield Campus sparked national headlines and accusations of anti-Chinese racism when they passed a rule that only students able to work 22 hours a week could stand for elected positions. As students on international visas are only permitted to work a maximum of 20 hours a week, the rule effectively banned more than half the campus population from running for election — and most tellingly, barred a rival group led by, and consisting mainly of, Chinese international students that was expected to seize power of the student council at the upcoming poll.

President of the university's Chinese association, Jack Guo, denounced "a biased, racist decision against Chinese students and other international students." The decision — made under cover of an intense public debate about alleged foreign interference — threatened to undermine Australia's reputation in the international market by creating the perception Chinese students were discriminated against on campuses. Nervous state and federal government officials sought urgent briefings from campus officials. Swiftly, Monash University's administration cancelled the tainted elections.

The episode, typical of the headiness and intrigue that's long characterised student politics, also pointed to a positive story: Chinese international students' growing participation in campus government.

There are some risks, however, say Beijing influence experts such as ASPI's Alex Joske. Chinese students' involvement on campus should only be seen as concerning "if student politics is being used as a way for student politicians to shut down discussions and for the (Chinese) government to push their own agenda on university campuses."

The international student constituency on campus grew following partial deregulation of Australia's universities by the Hawke government in the late 1980s and the substantial growth in international enrolments that followed.

The same period saw formation of the National Liaison Committee for International Students (NLC) as a national representative body for international students in Australia. Later reformed as The Council for International Students in Australia, such elected bodies advocate for international students ripped off by unscrupulous private training providers, exploited in private rental, vulnerable to crime, denied basic welfare, such as public transport concessions, and so on.

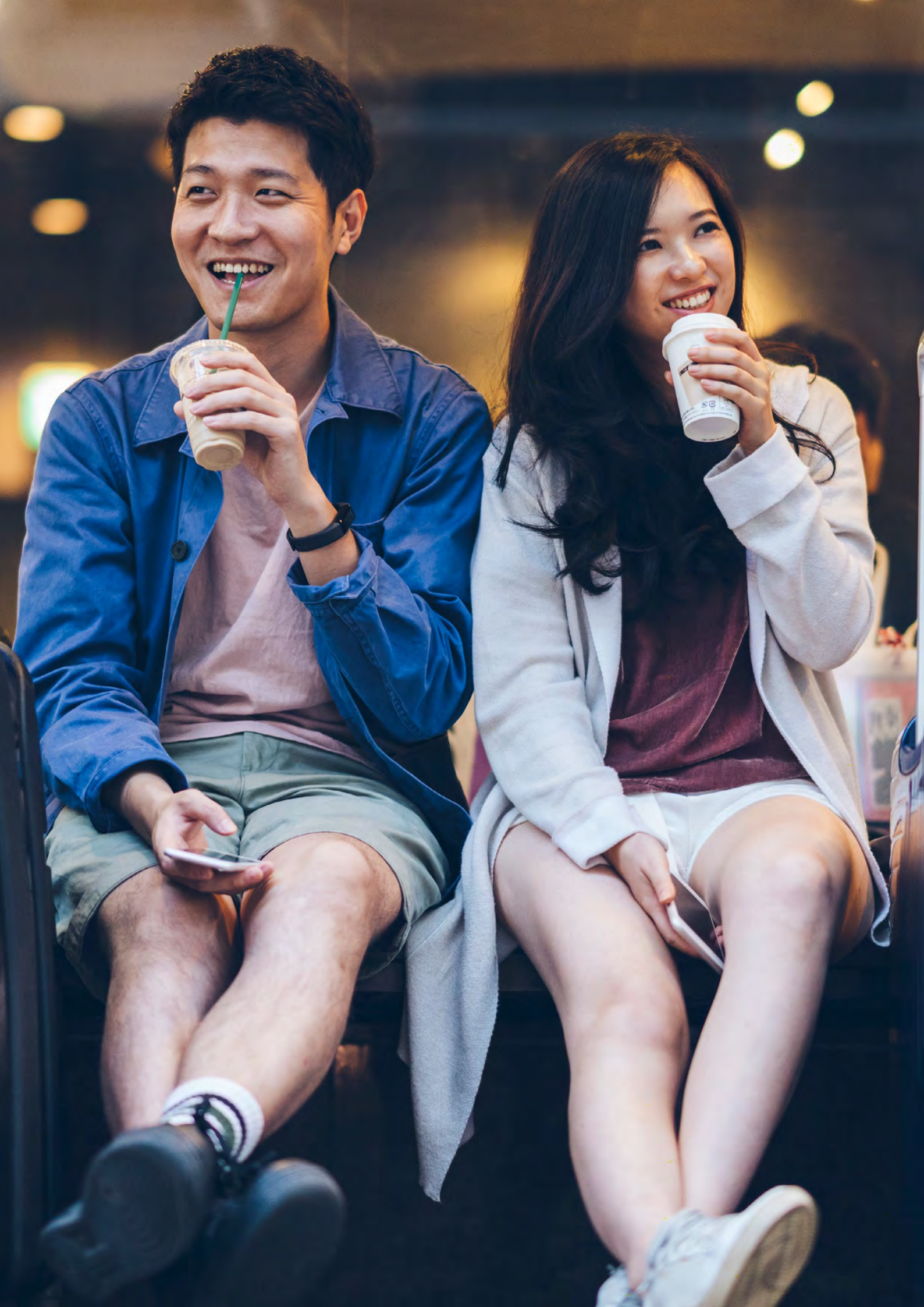
International student representation in Australia has had a somewhat bumpy ride. In 2008 the NLC had effectively been taken over by what the press described as a "mysterious" Sydney businessman, "Master Shang," whose strident tone and hidden agenda exploited legitimate student grievances. The National Union of Students disaffiliated the NLC claiming it had gone rogue under unelected leaders. Shang himself was banned from entering several campuses around Australia as universities closed their doors on his overtures. A newspaper reported at the time that Master Shang's group was "believed to be motivated by a desire for political influence on campus."

Chinese international students are contesting and winning positions in student organisations in universities around the country, including the University of Sydney, the institution that was a breeding ground for Gough Whitlam, Tony Abbott and Malcolm Turnbull. Here, candidates from Chinese international student blocs hold about half the elected positions on student union boards, as well as the presidencies of the student representative council (SRC) and the Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association. The students' political success on campus, which began in earnest in 2016, has ended the decades-long dominance of domestic students aligned with Labor, the Liberals and the Greens — although the two dominant Chinese factions are bitter rivals. A 2019 SRC council meeting was reportedly cancelled because staff were worried about the "unsafe" hostilities between all sides.

SRC president Jacky He, a second-year engineering student who moved to Australia as a child and is now a permanent resident, described the acrimony to the SMH this way: "You know how Labor left and Labor right can't really stand each other?.. Sometimes it's like this."

In making their voices heard, PRC students are aligning with Australia's professed soft-power aspirations to promote free speech and democracy through international education, and driving engagement between Chinese and domestic students. Less clear is whether PRC students' experience with democracy abroad shapes their approach to business or government back in China.

This leads us to questions about the future, in a broad sense, for Chinese students after graduation.



After university

“Sea turtles” no more? China’s overseas graduates return home.

As China’s economic liberalisation gathered pace during the past two decades, its students fanned across the globe to Western universities — and as we noted earlier, during the first three decades of China’s open door policy most Chinese students who went overseas to study stayed overseas permanently. As recently as 2013, The US National Science Foundation was reporting 92 per cent of Chinese graduates who had obtained their PhDs in America still lived in the US five years later. The same year, according to a report in Forbes, the Chinese government cited figures showing more than 45 per cent of its 339,700 students studying overseas were choosing to stay abroad after graduation.

Those graduates who ultimately returned to China tended to find lucrative jobs on account of their overseas work experience and contacts. Such returnees were affectionately referred to as “sea turtles.”

But as in other aspects of China’s relationship with the West, post-graduation trends have seen a sharp reversal in the past five to six years. The number of overseas graduates returning to China each year has more than doubled since 2011, according to figures from the Chinese Ministry of Education. While more and more Chinese students were departing for universities abroad, of the more than half a million outbound PRC students in 2016, nearly 80 per cent — 432,500— returned home.

China’s graduates, reported Forbes in January 2018, “are now answering the call of home more than ever before,” with many turning down lucrative careers on Wall Street or in Silicon Valley for offers in Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen.

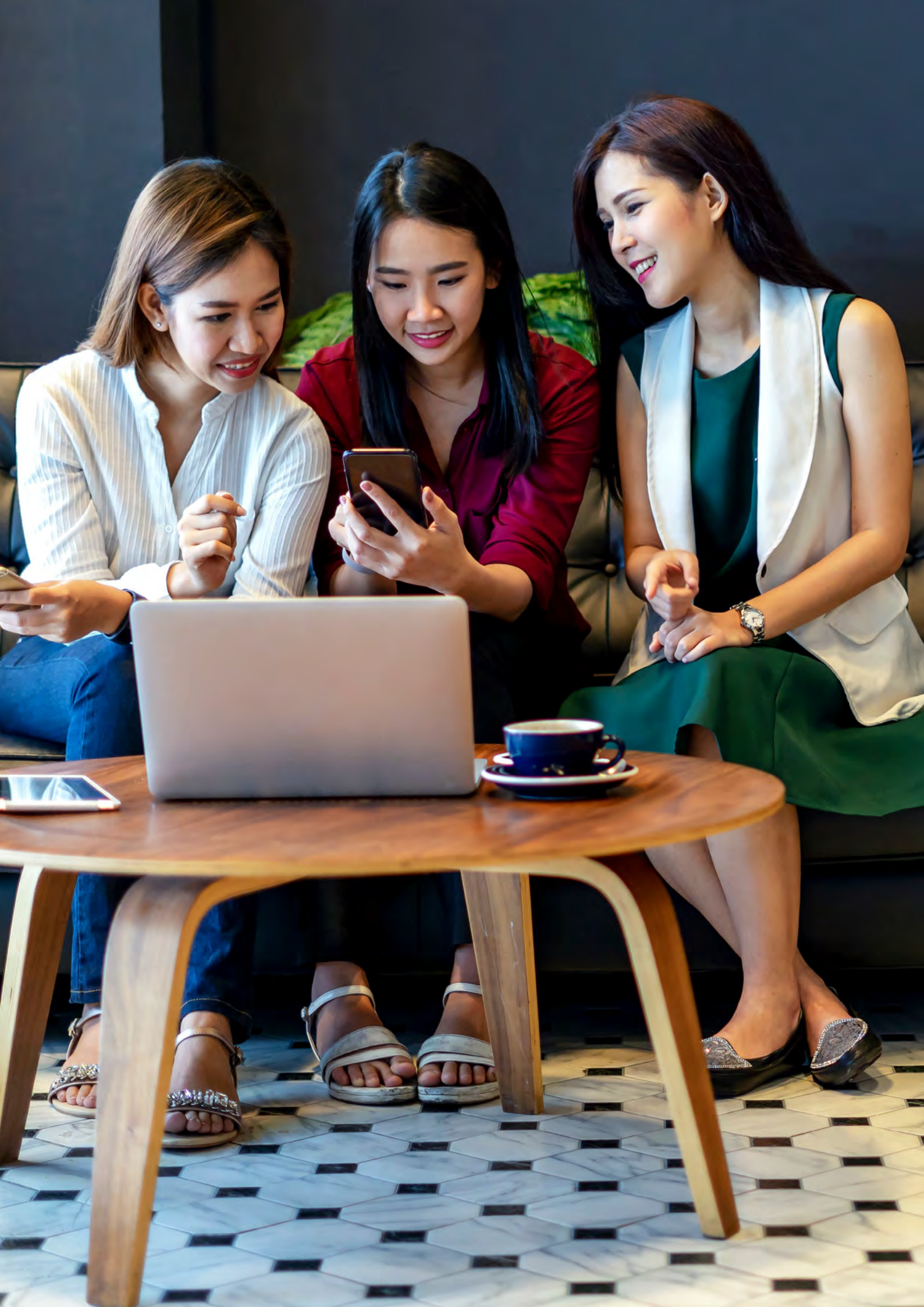
Why the abrupt change?

We've seen how the CCP is calling the Chinese diaspora home and talking down Western influences. A likely more potent factor is China's continuing economic growth — albeit at a slower rate — especially in the IT industry. While the nation's official statistics are prone to occasional overstatement, research group Preqin points to the exponential growth of large tech companies such as Tencent and Alibaba as a sign of the industry's underlying robust health.

And yet one consequence of China's increasing affluence is that a university degree from the West— unless it's from somewhere like Harvard or Oxford— no longer has the cache it once did. (In the same way degrees are losing their cache in the West itself as more people access higher education.) Many of China's returning graduates are finding their hopes of automatically landing a job lucrative enough to validate their families' hefty investment in foreign education somewhat diminished. The Beijing-based Center for China and Globalization and surveys by Chinese media and other companies suggest the salary gap between local and overseas graduates in China is narrowing — the SMH cited one 2017 survey that found on average overseas students made only 500 Chinese yuan ($100) more per month than Chinese university graduates.

In one disturbing case reported by Chinese media, a PRC student whose parents sold their home to pay for an Australian degree only found a job handing out product samples. Amid a wave of such reports about disillusioned returnees, China's official People's Daily editorialised that the risk of studying abroad was getting bigger because it did not guarantee a good job. Returnees, the editorial warned, may be "incompatible to domestic society."

The out-of-work, frustrated returnee has become so commonplace, the affectionate "sea turtles" moniker has been replaced by the less flattering, "seaweed."



Does Australia encourage Chinese graduates to stay?

While Chinese graduates across the globe are answering the call of home, local barriers also impede their chances of finding meaningful work, studies reveal. Language is one such barrier, as we discuss elsewhere in this narrative. Another barrier might be shortcomings in Australia's post-study work rights. A third barrier might be cultural and linked to the underrepresentation of Asians in Australia's professional and power elite.

Post-study work rights: is everyone getting the best deal?

A key plank of the Knight review in 2011 was new post-degree work rights designed to bolster Australia's attractiveness to international students. In surveys, international students — including those from China — consistently nominate the opportunity to secure jobs in their host countries post-graduation as a significant drawcard when deciding on a study destination.

The Gillard Government brought the rights quietly into force in March 2013. "Quietly", because as researcher Peter Mares has noted in Inside Story, just three weeks earlier Julia Gillard had vowed at a debate about skilled temporary migration in Western Sydney "to stop foreign workers being put at the front of the queue with Australian workers at the back."

Changes to visa subclass 485, the Temporary Graduate Visa, made it easier for international students to stay in Australia after successfully completing their studies by no longer requiring them to be qualified for job categories the government deems in short supply.

Many argue Australia gets a good deal from foreign workers, who contribute taxes but aren't entitled to subsidised government services. International graduates from Australian universities can be an asset in building a highly-skilled workforce, given most are multilingual, with global connections and intercultural knowledge — attributes especially saleable, one would assume, for graduates hailing from Australia's biggest trading partner.

For international students, working in their host country offers a chance to get a return on their educational investment, build their CV, pay back loans and for some, a limited pathway to permanent residency.

The Temporary Graduate Visa has two streams. The more popular and accessible is the post-study work stream that allows graduates from a degree of at least two years to live and work in Australia for two to four years, depending on their qualifications. In March, the Federal Government granted an extra year to graduates of regional universities.

On an international comparison, Australia's post-study work rights rank third in generosity, slightly behind New Zealand and Canada — the latter's experience with Chinese international students is explored in the next section. In September, the UK government announced a two-year work visa for international university graduates. This re-introduced a policy that in 2012 then home secretary Theresa May scrapped as "too generous," replacing with a restrictive regime giving graduates only four months to find a job. International student enrolments had dropped sharply.

In Australia, the 485 visa has proven hugely popular. In June 2019, according to figures from the Department of Home Affairs, there were nearly 92,000 visa holders. Have Chinese students embraced the post-study work rights with the same enthusiasm? Not so much.

While Chinese students have always shown less propensity to seek work rights and permanent residency than have Indian students, the newer wave of arrivals is even more disinclined to pursue work rights and permanent residency after graduating. While the number of Chinese holders of temporary graduate visas rose steadily from just under 7,500 in 2013 to 12,500 in 2018 to 2019, that's notably fewer than the nearly 20,000 graduate visas given to Indian students in the past year.

The PRC students' reluctance to take up post-study options might be partly attributable to the gap between what the visa promises and how it's actually working. To borrow Julia Gillard's analogy, international graduates are finding themselves "at the back of the queue."

A Deakin University study into Australia's post-study work rights released in September 2019, found that while the 485 visa helps attract international students to Australia, it is poorly understood by employers, and highly-qualified graduates struggle to find work in their field, ending up with jobs in retail, hospitality and cleaning.

Authors Ly Tran and Mark ¬Rahimi from Deakin and the University of Adelaide's George Tan found that while most visa holders find a job, only 36 per cent secure full-time work in their field of study. That figure is likely a bit higher for PRC graduates, according to an October 2019 report from Jonathan Chew, commissioned for the International Education Association of Australia, which found 44 per cent found work as professionals, with roughly half those positions in business, human resources and marketing. But this still means most PRC graduates in the workforce aren't in professional positions. Chew also found Chinese graduates on post-study work visas have "visibly" lower rates of employment overall compared to graduates from most other countries, which could reflect "high levels of disengagement from work or deliberate choices to take time off." The data on Chinese graduates also suggests "a high proportion did not need or intend to work while students"— and this carries through to the post-study work phase.

Conversations this writer has had with graduates from China suggests it's not uncommon for qualified accountants or architects to be working as real estate agents.

> When Jacob Gui, a finance student at the University of Adelaide, scrolls through his university's career hub website he finds numerous employment advertisements bearing the caveat, "Australian citizens and permanent residents only."

Graduates on the 485 visa are caught in a "chicken-and-egg" problem, the Deakin report says. Even for short-term positions, employers prefer candidates with permanent residency; but without at least a year's employment in their field of study, international graduates can't get the crucial five additional points that helps secure permanent residency under Australia's skills-based migration program. So graduates can't get jobs because they don't have permanent residency; and they can't get permanent residency without securing a relevant job. And many simply run out of time to find work before the visa expires.

“Many candidates spend a year trying to find a job and when they finally get shortlisted they only have a year left,” Dr Tran told The Australian. “But if the employer is happy with the performance of the can¬didate, it would be beneficial to both parties if (the visa) was easily extended.”

Among the report’s recommendations is an option for renewal or extension of the visa for those who have secured full-time or part-time jobs for more than six months in their field of study.

Access to skilled work visas has tightened

Also relevant here is that since 2017 overseas students’ access to temporary or permanent entry visas under Australia’s skilled migration program has narrowed, as a result of various changes that did not specifically target them but has claimed them as “collateral damage,” according to researchers Bob Birrell and Katharine Betts. The changes were mostly a response to perceived public anxiety about population growth, urban congestion and whether the Government was putting Australian jobs “first.”

Thousands of former students had obtained the 457 temporary migrant visa, which required an offer of work from an employer, and this often led to the employer sponsoring them for permanent residency.

Ariel Brott, an accredited specialist immigration lawyer and migration agent, encountered some Chinese students who “long before they left China” — and before seeking his advice — had planned a five year immigration strategy: picking an occupation they predicted would endure on the government’s fast-changing skills list — say, chemical engineer — with the aim of enrolling in a master's and immediately after graduation applying for an employer-sponsored visa, perhaps at the factory or other business of an Australian relative.

The 457 visa was first “reset”— tightened— and in March 2018, scrapped. The 457’s replacement visa, the Temporary Skill Shortage, requires applicants to have had two years relevant work experience in the occupation that they are being sponsored for — a condition most international students cannot meet.

Lastly, from 2016 to 2018, roughly 15,000 fewer international students were invited to apply for permanent status through the points-tested skilled visa in the independent category, which doesn't require state or employer sponsorship. This likely reflects the Coalition's 2016 directive to the Department of Immigration to treat the annual immigration program overall as a ceiling rather than a target, so with fewer visas being granted, the competition is tougher in popular occupations such as accounting and the requirements for English proficiency more stringent.

"This makes it very tough for the relatively few former Chinese students who apply," the Birrell and Betts report stated.

"Students doing a master's program expect to come here for two or three years; they already know they won't get a job here. So they already have an expectation that they won't integrate," says MBA graduate, Yifeng Hwang. He works as an accountant in a large organisation and is applying for permanent residency.

The "Bamboo ceiling"?

So what happens to the Chinese graduates who obtain permanent residency or skilled visas — if the temporary graduate visa dissuades employers from hiring then presumably the jobs outcomes improve markedly when that barrier is removed? But here too, the evidence is troubling.

Researchers Birrell and Betts have examined 2016 census data relating to China-born males, aged between 25 and 34, who arrived in Australia over the previous decade and hold qualifications at degree level or above in management and commerce. Only 34.1 per cent were employed as managers or professionals, as opposed to clerical workers or other positions that fall below professional level. The outcome was similar for those with engineering degrees, though IT graduates fared better. Meanwhile, almost a third were either unemployed or not in the workforce— the researchers chose to isolate males because otherwise such high unemployment figures might simply indicate women taking time off for children. While the data doesn't indicate where the graduates obtained their qualifications, the researchers point out that as

most China-born graduates who obtained skilled visas in recent years applied from within Australia — and not China — they most likely graduated from an Australian university.

The researchers allege the poor outcomes reflect falling entry and teaching standards at Australian universities all-too-eager to profit from the China boom.

“Employers expect their appointees to have complex problem solving, collaboration and communication skills,” they state. “Many Chinese graduates lack these skills and thus struggle to compete with local graduates and with graduates from English-Speaking-Background countries.”

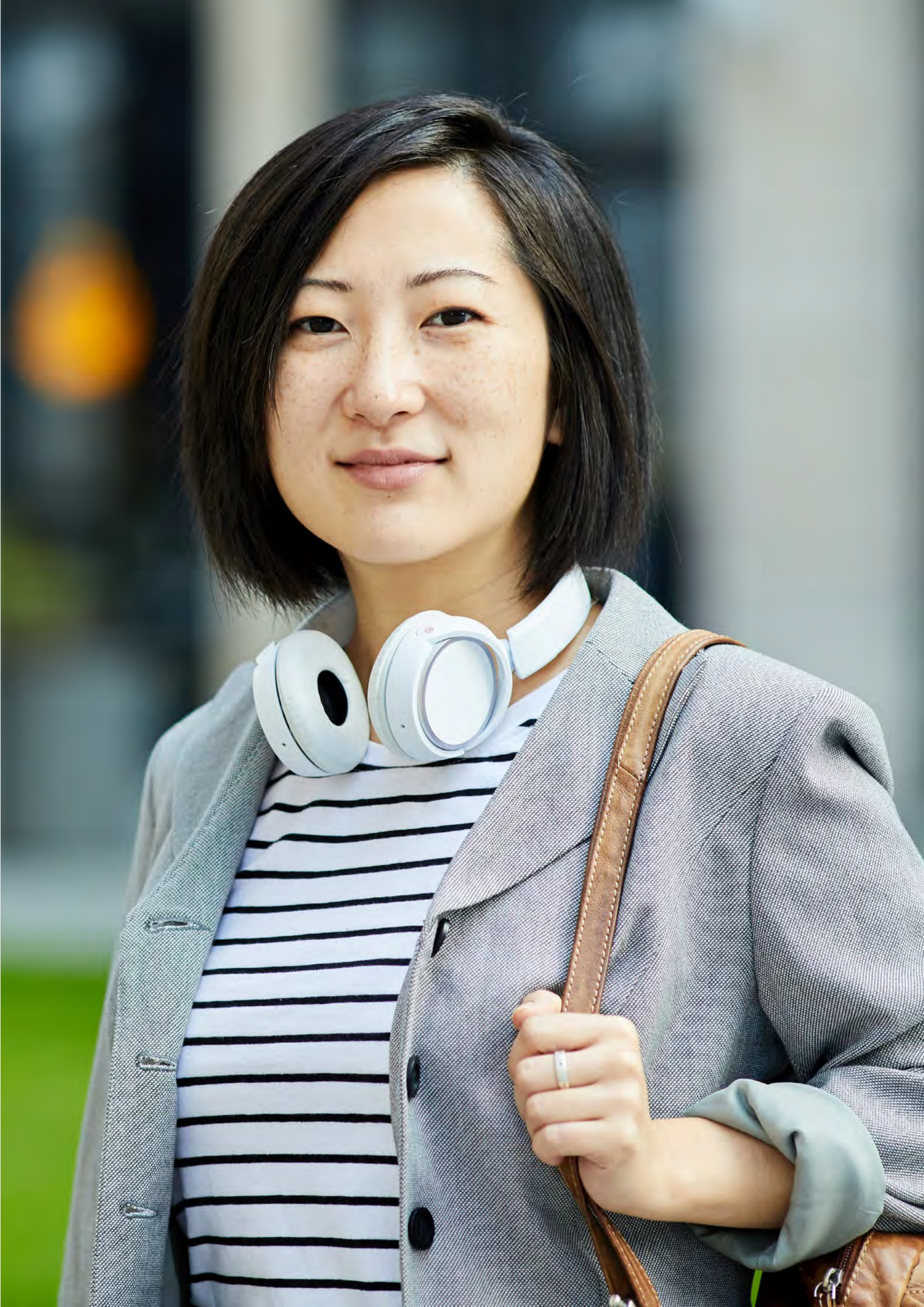
So what about the Chinese graduates who do land managerial and professional jobs? Do these elite graduates enjoy an unobstructed pathway to advancement?

A much-publicised 2015 US study found that in five large companies, including Yahoo and Google, Asians and Asian-Americans accounted for 27 per cent of professionals but only half that number in executive ranks. Author Jane Hyun coined a term to describe such under-representation: “the bamboo ceiling.” In other words, discrimination and prejudice. According to Forbes, a perceived bamboo ceiling is one of the factors spurring larger numbers of Chinese graduates to return home.

In Australia, the bamboo ceiling “is real,” former foreign minister and ANU Chancellor Gareth Evans said in a speech to the Asian-Australian Leadership Summit in September. While Asian-Australians comprise 12 per cent of the total population, they hold only around 3 per cent of senior leadership positions in public institutions and ASX 200 companies — they have been an “under-appreciated and under-utilised national resource for too long.”

Evans said the bamboo ceiling reflects some outright racism, more general stereotyping, “some degree of cultural inhibition among Asian-Australians themselves and a lack of the same level of institutional commitment to cultural diversity that we have seen for gender inclusion.”

He also warned the “current environment of hyper-anxiety in some quarters” about CCP influence was making it harder for some Chinese to obtain positions in fields seen as “even remotely security sensitive,” despite evidence that the influence sought has been of a “minimal and marginal nature.” Chinese-Australians will continue to have “overriding loyalty” to Australia, he said.



Should we be helping students find jobs in China? Actually, we're trying.

One reason China's returning international students often find themselves at a disadvantage with job hunting is a simple question of bad timing. China's most prestigious companies tend to fill their graduate intake with local students selected through trade fairs at top universities — the students in Australia are usually absent during the recruitment period. Returning students also struggle with re-establishing their social and professional networks, and with adjusting to the rapid pace of cultural change at home — their assumptions are "old fashioned," Ben Newman of the Australia China Alumni Association in Beijing, an organisation boasting a network of more than 26,000 alumni across greater China, told the SMH in 2017.

The universities have been trying to address the problem. The ANU has trialled sending its Chinese students to China for work experience. The UNSW encourages students to side-step the employment market altogether and launch their own start-up; in 2017 the university promoted "Startup China," described as "a full-time entrepreneurial support program focused on China, the first of its kind at an Australian university."

Austrade, the Australian Government's trade and investment agency, also stages jobs fairs in China for Australian graduates to "demonstrate to the market that we are attempting to address this," a spokesman told the SMH.

In all, the predicament is a fascinating case study on globalisation's enduring capacity to upend structures and sometimes logic. Students go overseas for an education, largely to improve their employment prospects at home. Then once a foreign degree no longer guarantees higher status — and sometimes even obstructs students in getting ahead — the foreign institutions step in to help their alumni find jobs back home. As long as the system delivers for everyone, we should perhaps applaud Australia's impulse to innovation, astute marketing and reciprocal investment.

Canada and Chinese students: familiar dilemmas

The Canadian experience with Chinese overseas students bears distinct similarities to our own.

First, there's some similarities around university funding. Government funding to universities decreased one to two percent annually during the past decade; a gap filled with the rapid rise in fee-paying international students, especially students from China. Canada's international student market has increased four-fold since 2000, expanding by about 25 per cent yearly. International student numbers grew by 40 per cent between 2013 and 2017, but the growth was 54 per cent for PRC students.

In 2019, Canada hosted roughly 186,000 students from China, around one in three of the country's 500,000-odd international students. (As we've seen, Australia's China concentration among its overseas students is higher still, nudging 40 per cent of the whole.) As in Australia, the growth is not confined to the higher education sector, as schools and colleges, especially in British Columbia, are also enjoying a boost in enrolments from the PRC.

Politics, as well as economics, has been cited as a reason for Canada's China student boom, with industry observers pointing to a "Trump bump" that's heightened Canada's appeal as a study destination. Tensions from growing nativism in the US, its trade war with China, new visa restrictions, heightened scrutiny around research collaborations with PRC scholars and a drumbeat of safety warnings from Chinese state media and government — all these factors are cited in reports about a dip in Chinese student numbers in the US in 2019, the first such decline in a decade. Even the prestigious Yale and Stanford universities complain the trade war has affected student recruitment from China, and the uncertainly prompted one business college at the University of Illinois to take out insurance against the potential loss of revenue from PRC students. (In July 2019, Donald Trump attempted to reassure Chinese

students they were still welcome in the US, flagging a speedier process for the smartest candidates to obtain permanent residency.)

Beyond politics, Canada's generous post-study work rights and a skilled immigration drive — to plug labour market shortages — are also enticing more Chinese students to come. A 2018 survey found 60 per cent of international students in Canada plan to take advantage of the Trudeau government's streamlined pathway to permanent residency. Canada opened seven new visa offices in China to cope with demand for its Express Entry Immigration Program for skilled candidates.

It is unlikely to surprise Australians that some media reports have linked the rising numbers of international students to a rental and housing squeeze, particularly as parents from China are buying properties for their children in Canada. And concerns about disreputable education agents have prompted calls for Canada to follow Australia's example in signing an international regulatory protocol.

Unsurprisingly too, some educators contend Chinese students are being shortchanged. As in Australia, PRC students in Canada tend to be segregated from mainstream society. Ohio University researchers Mengwei Su and Laura Harrison found many Chinese students in Canada struggle with English and integrating into Western culture, partly because they're living and learning in spaces dominated by other students from China. One student told the researchers, "the class is not much different from that in our country." The authors write: "Western higher education institutions are slowly evolving into a corporate-like enterprise that pursues monetary gain, at times eclipsing their educational mission." We might say that in Australia such "evolution" has not been slow.

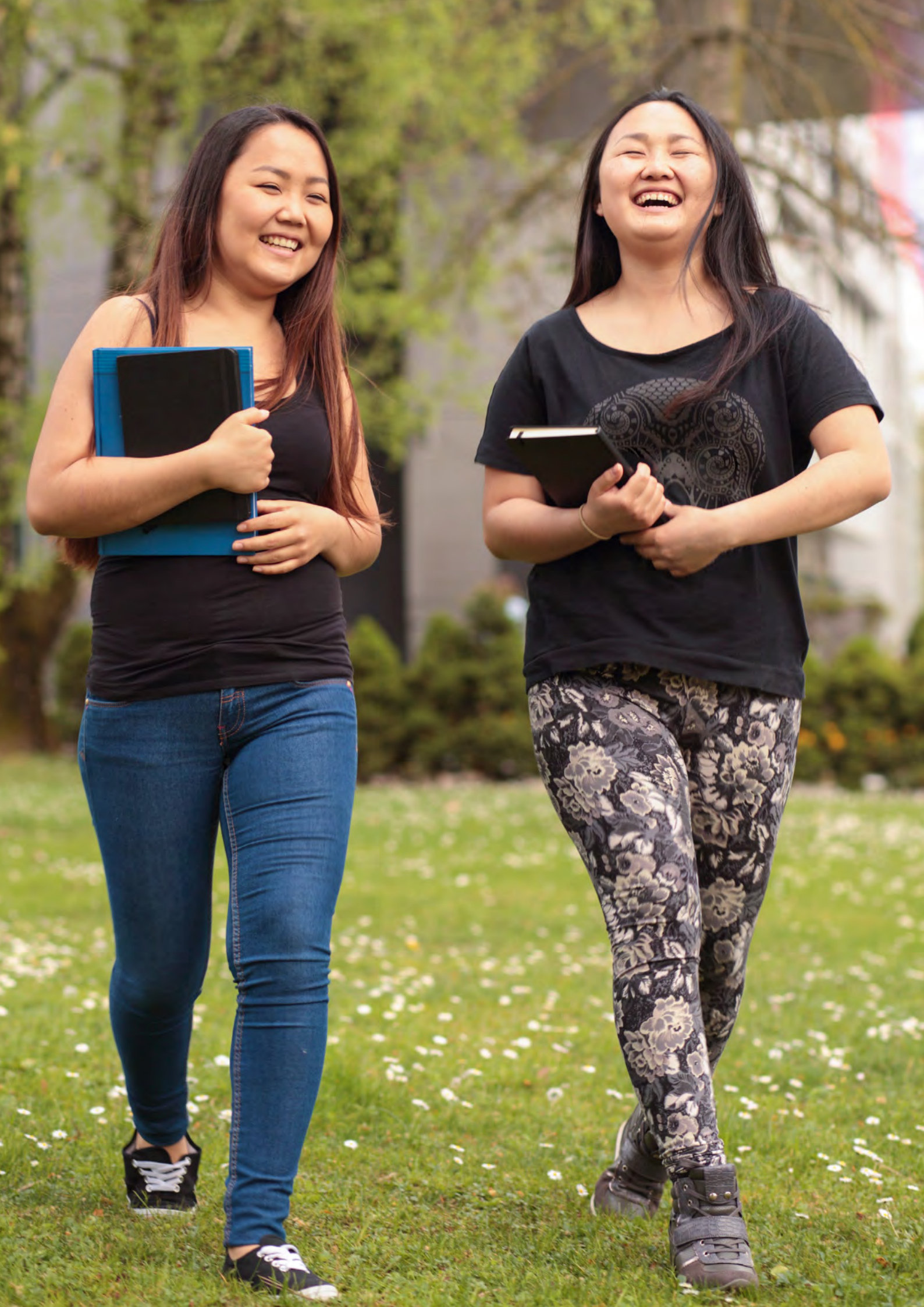
Yet Canada's Immigration Minister Ahmed Hussen candidly insists his government will "do whatever we can," to lure more students from China.

Still, the risks to Canada's higher education sector from its exposure to the PRC student market are becoming apparent. Tensions between Canada and the CCP spiked in December 2018 with the arrest in Vancouver of Huawei's chief financial officer, Meng Wanzhou. (Meng is charged in the US with bank fraud.) China's ambassador to Canada linked the arrest to English-speaking countries being rife with "white supremacy." The following February, credit rating agency Moody's warned three of Canada's biggest universities faced a cash crunch should the diplomatic row with China lead to China pulling its students from the country. At one of the three institutions, the respected University of Toronto, Chinese students

comprise nearly two-thirds of the international student body. The Moody's warning seemed the more ominous because only months earlier Saudi Arabia yanked scholarships from nearly 8000 of its students in Canada after the government called on Saudi authorities to release jailed women's rights activists. Whereas Saudi students accounted for only about two per cent of overseas enrolments; China is by far the biggest source country. As was the case in Australia when tensions with China spiked under the Turnbull government, Canada's university sector is holding its breath. Commentators doubt the Chinese government will do a Saudi-style recall of students already in Canada but they can envisage authorities discouraging students from choosing Canada from now on.

Canadian campuses have also been the site of fraught political encounters: in September 2019, the student union at an Ontario university revoked the club status of the Chinese Students and Scholars Association, finding the group's alleged coordination with the Chinese consulate violated student union regulations. The Association had spearheaded a campaign against a talk given on campus by a Uyghur activist.

If all this sounds familiar, the bigger picture perhaps distinguishes Canada's China predicament from that of Australia. While China is Canada's second largest trading partner, the world's most populous nation accounts for less than 5 per cent of Canada's exports—75 per cent of Canada's trade is with the US. The country's universities may be increasingly reliant on revenue from Chinese students, but their predicament is not emblematic of a national reckoning — and to state the obvious, Ottawa is a long way from Beijing. Canada is having its own China debate, but it does not share the existential character of Australia's dilemma.



Australia's National Strategy for International Education: worth building on?

As the example of Study Melbourne shows, governments are recognising that a sustainable and competitive international education market requires public investment and co-operation with the education sector. In 2016 the Federal Government launched the National Strategy for International Education 2025 — the first long-term roadmap for international education. Significantly, a new body, the Council for International Education, was set up to guide the strategy, with its members drawn from educational institutions, international student organisations, industry and government, including local councils. As with Study Melbourne, this suggests the architecture might already exist for a more targeted and co-ordinated approach from government and universities to Chinese international students in Australia.

A central focus of the Council's work is "presenting international students with a uniquely Australian experience during their studies, including through ensuring domestic and international students are well-integrated." The Council's working group on China also wants more partnerships between Chinese and regional Australian universities to promote regional Australia as a "key study destination" for Chinese students — and dilute the high concentration of PRC students in a small number of universities.

It is worth nothing that the Council's chief expert, Phil Honeywood, head of the International Education Association of Australia, thinks Australia should be recruiting more Chinese students to its high schools and marketing its school curriculum to overseas international schools more aggressively. Only 3 per cent of full-fee paying international students in Australia are studying at secondary schools. Of the roughly 1000 international schools in China, only 40 are teaching an Australian curriculum — in part because consumers are confused by the different

secondary qualifications in each state. Honeywood told The Australian Financial Review Education Summit in August 2019 that studying here in high school would help international students form bonds with local students and reduce their risk of social isolation at university.

The National Strategy for International Education is allied to the New Colombo Plan, which supports young Australians to study in the Indo-Pacific, and to an Australian Global Alumni Engagement Strategy, described as "a whole of government initiative" devised with the universities. The alumni strategy reaches out to former international students from Australian universities via a website and LinkedIn to foster a global alumni community that promotes "Australia's interests." The site includes "inspirational" video testimonials: a journalism graduate now working at the state-owned China Global Television Network says her studies in Australia taught her the value of objectivity and scepticism, a PhD in electrical engineering launched a travel-related start-up on his return home.

The alumni strategy, while evidently a positive development, does reveal a tension. While the strategy is billed as a tool of "public diplomacy," the Council's first progress report to government noted "alumni initiatives have an increased focus on promoting Australia's world-class education, training and research system." So is the alumni strategy primarily about preserving relationships with future leaders in China for Australia's long-term prosperity and security? Or is the strategy mainly about luring more overseas students to Australia?

Once again, the tension is around the fundamental purpose of Australia hosting international students, and students from China in particular. The remaining sections will dissect this tension and suggest ways to resolve it.

The higher aims of international education?

As we've seen, during the Cold War the Menzies government went to great lengths to "sell" the Colombo Plan to the public, arguing Australia had to help develop the economies in the region or else communism might spread. The government also hoped the scholarship aid program would neutralise any resentment from poorer countries about Australia's higher living standards.

The user-pays system for international students was introduced in 1986 as a way for universities to increase their revenues. It was purely transactional and largely still is.

However Australian governments still appeal to foreign policy objectives in promoting international education.

For instance, the Government's 2017 ***Foreign Policy White Paper*** says international education strengthens Australia's soft power, which is the ability to influence the behaviour or thinking of others through the "power of attraction and ideas." Such ideas include "quality education," democracy, the rule of law and multiculturalism. Education "exchanges" between Australia and other countries "build influence, and strengthen people-to-people links and mutual understanding."

University chiefs and academics tend to put the case for higher education differently. Some talk about the imperative of Australia "engaging with Asia," including China. Others invoke the ideal of "global" citizenship or identity, in which overseas study makes people more open-minded and cosmopolitan.

American philosopher Martha Nussbaum describes the ideal of international education as equipping students "to function effectively…as 'citizens of the world,' to use a time-honoured phrase, rather than as merely Americans, or Indians, or Europeans".

Or, Chinese. Yet in an age of Brexit, President Donald Trump's "America First" ethos, and an increasingly nationalistic China, the ideal of "global citizenship" seems at odds with the global zeitgeist.

In any event, the gulf between Chinese international students and the rest of Australian society means whatever the aims of international education, they're not being met.

Other ideas for integrating Chinese students

Suggestions are being put forward to build engagement between Chinese international students and Australians. Here are some examples, most of which come from the China Matters report on PRC students:

- University leaders and the federal government be held to a specified minimum level of engagement between Australian and international students in after-class activities and in the local community. (Is there a risk a specified "minimum level" of engagement might encourage complacency, turning a minimum into a maximum?)
- Matching international students with Australian families. For instance, the federal and state governments might jointly declare a "National International Student Weekend" to encourage Australian families to welcome international students in their homes.
- Scaling up successful programs at universities, which are currently limited in scope. These include "buddy" mentoring programs, language exchanges and leadership programs.
- The government provide financial incentives to universities to lessen the isolation of international students, such as building student housing in which Australian and international students would be encouraged to live in closer proximity.
- Universities and the Australian government should run programs that deepen PRC students' interaction with Australian society, such as internship programs in Parliament House and the High Court.

These are all proposals worthy of further investigation, and investment of time and infrastructure, but they need to exist within one big idea, one goal, pertaining to Chinese international students. In the absence of this wider theme and perspective, worthy proposals can resemble a shopping list.

Does fixing the divide between Chinese and domestic students require the Federal Government and universities to articulate an overarching, long-term goal, beyond mere profits, of hosting students from China? By China, we mean the "China of Xi," an emerging regional superpower whose fast-developing economy continues to offer Australia enormous opportunity, but whose projection of soft and hard power brings significant risks to Australia's democracy and social cohesion.

Conclusion and recommendations: Chinese international students should be in a class of their own – but not literally.

This narrative has identified the following themes and ideas about Chinese international students in Australia:

- During the Cold War, Australia hosted students from the Asia/Pacific region as part of an aid package aimed at containing the spread of communism. Because these students represented a wider foreign policy objective the Department of External Affairs worked to ensure their integration into Australian society. The Colombo Plan changed Australia more than it changed the home countries of visiting students. Through their interaction with overseas students, more Australians came to reject the White Australia Policy.

- Since the partial de-regulation of university funding in the 1980s, overseas students are no longer tools of diplomacy but revenue sources for higher education institutions. This is especially the case with PRC students, whose numbers have grown exponentially as a rapidly-developing China opened to the world. In this transactional framework, PRC students tend to have limited engagement with their domestic counterparts and Australian society. Many are vulnerable to loneliness, frustration and disappointment.

- Profound global changes during the past decade, even the past five years, mean that neither Australia nor its universities — both of which are financially dependent on China — can proceed with business-as-usual. At universities, the de facto segregation between Chinese and domestic students is potentially bad for business in an increasingly competitive international education market. We might argue that universities should be better hosts to all overseas students to fulfil the professed ideals of international education. Even so, PRC students should be treated as a separate category. Their problems are distinct and urgent — and their presence a tremendous opportunity to deepen, even transform, Australia's crucial relationship with China.

- Critically, the social divide at universities is a threat to social cohesion — and not just on campus. Under Xi Jinping, the CCP is more aggressively projecting its power into the Chinese diaspora, ramping up control over PRC students overseas and engaging in racialised wedge politics when it is displeased with the Australian government. And Australia, caught between a rising China and an protectionist US, is immersed in a "China debate" that has prompted warnings about a revival of "yellow peril" tropes and a new wave of xenophobia. In this sometimes febrile context, PRC students — as well as Australia's 1.2 million ethnic Chinese citizens — risk getting caught in the crossfire. Universities should lead the way in modelling democracy, intellectual freedom and multicultural harmony.

- In their 2017 book ***China Matters: Getting it Right for Australia***, Linda Jakobson and Bates Gill argue that Australia "needs to rethink its relationship with China across the board" in what should constitute a new national project. They propose a new national body with a mandate to advance the Australia-China relationship in an unpredictable and challenging era.

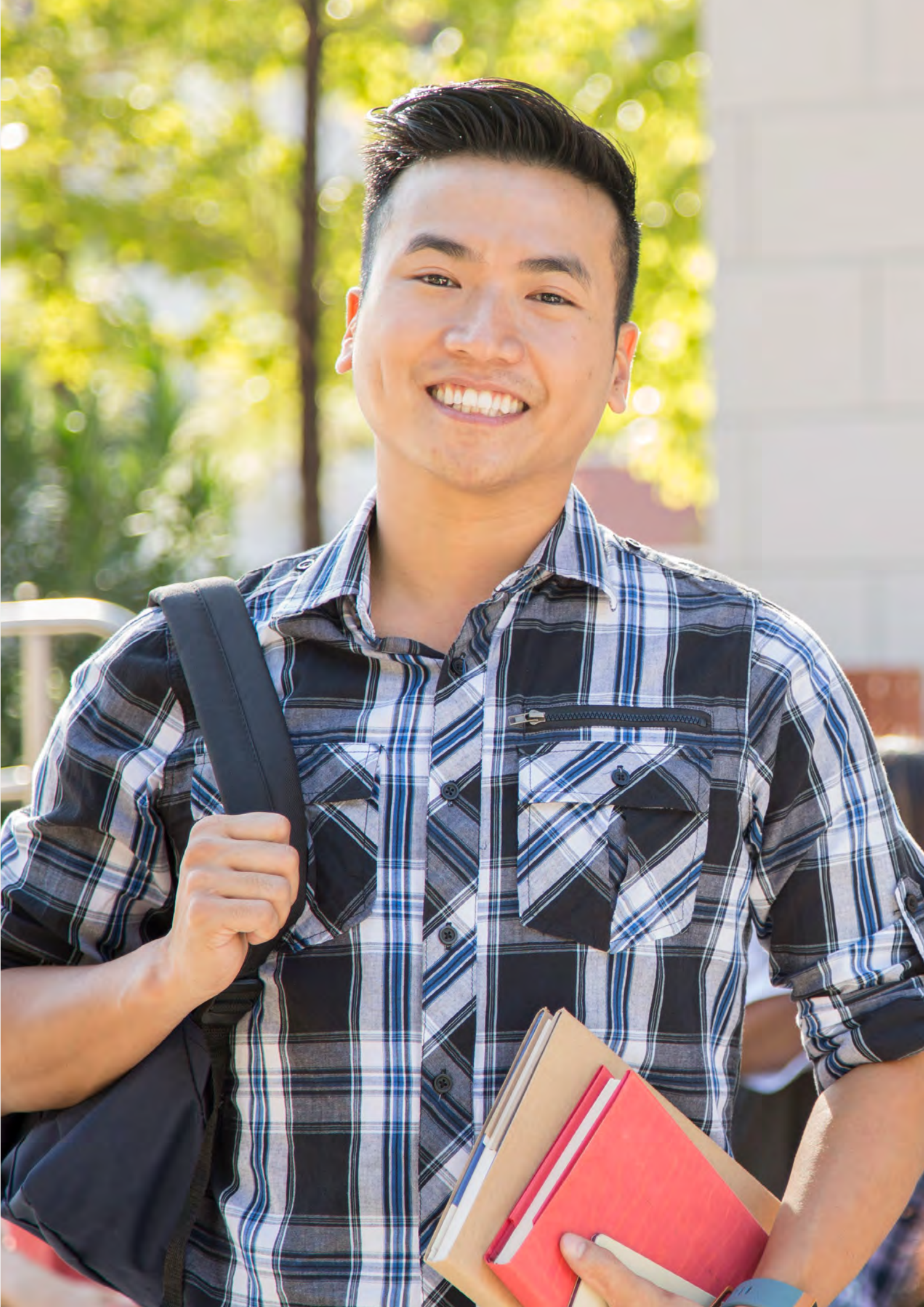
- The Federal Government and universities should see hosting Chinese students as central to this national project, as an investment in Australia's long term prosperity and security in a spirit reminiscent of the Colombo Plan. Promising examples already exist of co-operation between governments and universities to improve the experience of international students; perhaps this architecture can be built on to roll out the red carpet for PRC students.

- Universities must be uncompromising in protecting academic and intellectual freedom. Staff must be counselled against caving in to pressure from Chinese international students to suppress discussion or classroom material the CCP deems offensive. Allegations about CCP spies on campus should be referred to security agencies. The public needs to be reassured about the universities' commitment on all these fronts so that Chinese students can be welcomed without suspicion or resentment.

- Universities and governments should assess the many suggestions that informed observers have made for bridging the divide between Chinese students and Australians, either formally through university studies or via other programs. PRC students should receive targeted help with English throughout their degrees.

- Australia's regime of post-study work rights should also be reviewed to ensure international graduates have ample opportunity to work in their field; the Federal Government should better educate employers about the nature and benefits of the post-study work visa.

- Finally, the community must address the under-representation of Asian-Australians in leadership positions, not just to blunt Beijing's divisive attacks on Australia but because the nation is missing out on a rich source of talent and the many benefits of diversity.



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About the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute

The Scanlon Foundation Research Institute exists as a bridge between academic insight and public thought, undertaking research to help Australia advance as a welcoming, prosperous and cohesive nation, particularly where this relates to the transition of migrants into Australian society.

In doing so, the Institute links thought to action to ensure informed debate drives the agenda, and empowers the critical thinking that will help drive Australia's social cohesion forward.

The Applied Research Centre forms a key part of the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, translating research and resources relevant to social cohesion into practical insights.

Through twice-yearly narratives, events, learning programs and considered explanations of research, the Applied Research Centre provides tools, information and innovations that empower individuals and organisations to strengthen cohesion in their communities.

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