

# Griffith Asia Institute

---

## Regional Outlook

ASIAN CENTURY FUTURES INITIATIVE

2014 ASIA FUTURE FELLOWS PROGRAM FOR  
UNDERGRADUATES – ESSAYS

# Griffith Asia Institute

---

---

## Regional Outlook

Asian Century Futures Initiative:  
2014 Asian Future Fellows program for  
undergraduates – Essays

## About the Griffith Asia Institute

The Griffith Asia Institute produces innovative, interdisciplinary research on key developments in the politics, economics, societies and cultures of Asia and the South Pacific.

By promoting knowledge of Australia's changing region and its importance to our future, the Griffith Asia Institute seeks to inform and foster academic scholarship, public awareness and considered and responsive policy making.

The Institute's work builds on a 40 year Griffith University tradition of providing cutting-edge research on issues of contemporary significance in the region.

Griffith was the first University in the country to offer Asian Studies to undergraduate students and remains a pioneer in this field. This strong history means that today's Institute can draw on the expertise of some 50 Asia-Pacific focused academics from many disciplines across the university.

The Griffith Asia Institute's 'Regional Outlook' papers publish the Institute's cutting edge, policy-relevant research on Australia and its regional environment. They are intended as working papers only. The texts of published papers and the titles of upcoming publications can be found on the Institute's website:

[www.griffith.edu.au/asiainstitute](http://www.griffith.edu.au/asiainstitute)

Asian Century Futures Initiative:

2014 Asia Future Fellows program for undergraduates – Essays', Regional Outlook

Paper No. 47, 2014

## Asian Century Futures Initiative

Griffith University was established over 40 years ago with a strong focus on the Asian region as one of its founding principles. We were the first university to develop and offer a degree in Modern Asian Studies and many of our discipline areas are heavily engaged in Asia-relevant research. In our short history we have forged successful partnerships with some of the region's premier institutions. We have established significant research collaboration with key institutions, particularly in China, with partnerships in environment/water sciences, nanotechnology, material science, medical sciences, and social sciences. Given this historical commitment, Griffith is ideally placed geographically and intellectually to capitalise on the dramatic shift of economic power to the Asian region in recent years. Preparing for and adjusting to this change, will make considerable political, economic and social demands on Australians and universities have a key role to play in assisting the process. Griffith University is committed to continue making a substantial contribution to the education and development of an Asia-capable Australia and to be a thought leader in more deeply engaging the countries of Asia. The Griffith Asian Century Futures Initiative is the University's strategic commitment to enhancing our engagement with Asia and the near Pacific and to consolidate our reputation as one of Australia's most Asia-engaged universities. The Griffith Asia Institute has been successfully leading the Asia agenda through our series of high profile Dialogue events in partnerships with government, universities, industry, and leading international think tanks.

# Contents

Introduction.....	1
1. Analysis of the Potential Mutual Benefits from the Proposed Sino–Australian Free Trade Agreement .....	2
Nicholas FILER, Natalie KING and MENG Xin Yu.	
2. Australia–China Relations in Intergovernmental Organisations – Building Bridges or Exacerbating Conflict? .....	11
Michelle GUNAWAN, Gemma PHILLIPS, JING Tong and YANG Yi	
3. Climate Change Policy: A Comparison between China and Australia .....	22
Jonathan GLINDERMANN, Samuel WHEELER, NEI YiFei and WANG Xian	
4. Comparison of Attrition in Education in Australia and China – Causes and Solutions .....	29
Monique FILET, Branden ROWE, LIU Wen Xin and SHANG Fei	
5. Youth Political Participation in Australia and China: A Comparative Analysis.....	36
Giverny ATKINS, Inez BOTTA-STANWELL, ZHANG Yiyang and WANG Wen Chao	

# Introduction

---

---

Building on the success of the 2009–2013 Australia China Futures Dialogues, The Griffith Asia Institute, Griffith University and the Office of International Relations and the Centre for Australian Studies, Peking University have committed to the development of a new 'Asian Century Futures Initiative' to deepen intellectual cooperation between the two institutions and to contribute to the improvement of the Sino–Australian relationship in the twenty-first century.

As part of the Asian Century Futures Initiative, Griffith University and Peking University have established the Asia Futures Fellows Program for Undergraduates. This program follows on from the successful 'Australia–China Future Dialogues Emerging Leaders' Dialogues'. It aims to enhance opportunities for Griffith and Peking University undergraduate students to enrich their studies, experience a different culture, and make personal and future professional connections.

The program comprises 20 Asia Futures Fellows, ten undergraduate students from each university. It consists of two one-week sessions, the first held in Brisbane and the second in Beijing. Both sessions involve a range of activities for all Fellows, including seminars, government and industry briefings and cultural activities.

The Asia Future Fellows concluded the Brisbane session by forming groups to write a paper that they worked on and presented at the second session held in Beijing. Each group consisted of two students from Peking University and two from Griffith University. This group work provided cross-cultural work experience that also fostered friendship by ensuring regular contact among group members throughout the year.

The reader should keep in mind that these essays are written by undergraduate students, and some of whom are non-native English speakers. For some essays, each group member has written a part of the essay. The students' essays follow.

# 1. Analysis of the Potential Mutual Benefits from the Proposed Sino–Australian Free Trade Agreement

---

Nicholas FILER, Natalie KING and MENG Xin Yu

## Let us just say ...

Forty-two years ago, the forefathers of our two nations sought to establish a friendship that would last the ages. While we have long struggled to embody that fervent hope, our countries have laid solid foundations for a future steeped in a mutual prosperity known only to true *zhengyou*<sup>1</sup>. As the sleeping dragon stirs from its century of slumber, sincere efforts are being made to ensure Australia and China walk shoulder-to-shoulder into the bright Asian Century. The roots of our friendship have grown deep as our relationship continues to be forged militarily, politically, socially and economically. Of these, it is economics that now holds the limelight. Economics hold a special place in the story of our two nations; they are the sinews upon which our societies rely.

For the last nine years, Australian and Chinese leaders have worked to draw our two countries closer together. The proposed Sino–Australian Free Trade Agreement (FTA) has the potential to bring unprecedented benefits to both parties. This essay first addresses the more obvious of these many benefits: economics. The examination is followed by an analysis of benefits within the more ubiquitous realm of politics. Due to the unique nature of each country's political system, the benefits are addressed individually. Overall, this essay explains why the potential benefits of the proposed FTA may mark a new era in Sino–Australian relations.

## To clarify ...

Key to appreciating this essay is an understanding of the term Free Trade Agreement. While pundits' liberal use of the term has made its meaning nebulous, this paper will use the standard economic definition. Therefore, a Free Trade Agreement is an agreement to reduce or eliminate tariffs and/or other trade barriers between countries that are party to the agreement. However, this agreement is not intended to impact on trade relations between the countries that are party to the FTA and countries that are not (Layton et al., 2009, p. 538).

Within this definition, other economic terms also require explanation, such as tariffs and non-tariff barriers. Tariffs are a tax on imports and are also known as 'customs duties'. They are one of the key instruments in a protectionist trade policy, which seeks to limit the import of foreign goods in order to promote the consumption of domestic goods/services (Layton et al., 2009, p. 528).

The second economic term that requires clarification within that definition is non-tariff barriers. Non-tariff barriers take the form of any non-tax based restriction on trade and are also part of a protectionist trade policy. To help illustrate the many forms this restriction can take, two types will be explained. One is embargos, which are laws that ban trade of a specific type of good/s from specific countries (Layton et al., 2009, p. 528). The second is quotas, which are limits imposed on the amount of goods a country can import from another specific country (Layton et al., 2009,

p. 531). Reducing these types of non-tariff barriers can have a significant impact on trade. Examples of this impact include ensuring goods retain more of their value through a reduction of the time they spend in customs, or an agreement on laws that facilitate trade – e.g., the enforcement of intellectual property rights.

## Potential Mutual Economic Benefits

Since April 2005, China and Australia have tried to formalise their long standing historical efforts to liberalise bilateral trade by establishing a Free Trade Agreement (DFAT, 2014). But how could this complex economic policy help these two countries move towards a mutually prosperous future? The answer lies within the heart of these governments' strategies: economics. By first analysing the historical genesis of the current negotiations, this paper will outline the five main benefits both countries can expect to receive subsequent to FTA adoption. Formation of this FTA could be the clarion call for greater engagement within both countries and could present both with the opportunity to become *zhengyou* to each other (Australian National University, 2012, viii).

In the 42 years since the beginning of Sino–Australian relations, bilateral trade has significantly grown and aided both countries in their journey towards greater prosperity (Australian Embassy in Beijing, *Anniversary* 2012). Such a strong partnership has moved beyond comparatively humble origins to one of the most significant trade and diplomatic relationships for contemporary Australia. The Sino–Australian trade relationship began at worth less than AUD\$100 million per annum and has developed into China becoming Australia's largest export partner whose business is now worth over AUD\$100 billion per annum (Australian Embassy in China, *Overview*, 2012). When coupled with an over 1,400 per cent increase in Chinese investment within the last decade, it becomes clearly evident how China has secured its position as Australia's largest trading partner and why both governments have undertaken efforts to promote increased economic cooperation and engagement (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d.; Australian Embassy in China, 2012).

Contemporary efforts to liberalise this bilateral trade relationship have been built upon the good-faith efforts of previous governments. These efforts include Australia's gradual reduction in trade barriers since the 1980s, which include floating the Australian dollar, facilitating greater financial/currency trade, and issuing new three-year multiple-entry visitor visas for ease of business travel (Emmery, 1999; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d.). A recent notable example is of the Australian Minister of Trade and Investment leading Australia's largest trade delegation in history to Guangzhou, Chengdu, Shanghai and Beijing to promote further Sino–Australian business relations. Collectively, these efforts provide further context to the Australian government's declaration that the conclusion of the Sino–Australian FTA is its top trade priority (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d.).

Should the Sino–Australian FTA negotiations be concluded, it will mark the establishment of a time-tested means of securing a greater amount/variety of goods at lower prices for both countries. History has shown that FTAs aid in reducing the costs associated with international trade, thereby making more goods more accessible to a larger income-bracket in more markets. A joint government feasibility report conducted by both countries concluded that there are five main benefits to implementing the Sino–Australian FTA (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Joint Feasibility Report*, 2005, pp. 126–27).

First, substantial economic benefit can be gained for both countries by liberalising trade in industry sectors that permit using each country's comparative advantage. China can exploit its comparative advantage in manufacturing, human resources and market size; and Australia can exploit its comparative advantage in raw materials, agriculture and services (e.g., financial, telecommunication and education). Second, the structural adjustments required for trade liberalisation can be more efficiently

implemented through a mechanism such as an FTA than through ad hoc adoption. A benefit of a comprehensive FTA is that it ensures all the legislation and trade policy requirements are both internally cohesive and compatible with the policies of the other trading partner/s.

Third, the increase in bilateral trade also provides other benefits for each government. The resulting increased trading volume allows for each government to collect an increased amount of tax revenue (e.g., sales tax), which can be redirected towards funding government programs such as those distributing welfare services. Fourth, the comprehensive and (potentially eventual) instant application of the FTA will provide immediate trade benefits, rather than the slower ad hoc adoption of trade liberalisation policies. Fifth, introduction of this proposed FTA is unlikely to negatively impact upon either China or Australia's current trading relations with third parties. Collectively, these five benefits summarise the main advantages for both countries under this proposed FTA (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Joint Feasibility Report*, 2005, p. 126–27).

A fundamental goal of an FTA is to facilitate deeper integration between two countries, but while this can present opportunities for all parties there are also risks (Wang, 2009, p. 40). The deeper integration of an FTA is a double-edged sword. We have seen how this greater mutual reliance can result in economic benefits, but this is based entirely on that rarest of commodities: trust. Every step towards greater trade liberalisation is a step toward relying on another for things once supplied exclusively by yourself. There are two issues for China, as raised in the following questions.

One, as China's growing urbanisation requires greater amounts of foreign-sourced resources, is Australia a reliable partner (Australian National University, 2012, p. 14) This concern about Australia's reliability can largely be assuaged by analysing the history of good-faith between these two countries and appreciating that, because trade is inherently positive-sum, it is in Australia's interest to continue supplying goods to China in a reliable manner (Wolfe, 1998, p. 38). Two, will Australia use its comparative advantage in agricultural production to force domestic Chinese producers out of the global market? This issue can be resolved through understanding the seasonal nature of both countries' crops that may compete on the market. Their seasonal nature means that one party can provide a specific agricultural product when the other cannot, making for a cooperative, rather than combative, relationship (Wang, 2009, pp. 40, 44). While these two issues can be dismissed by cutting through the fog of emotive pundits by analysing the facts, a major concern of this FTA is that of any 'open-door policy': who is allowed inside?

Offshore Foreign Direct Investment (OFDI) can be considered a security concern by any country, and the proposed Sino–Australian FTA provides no exception. One only needs contemporary pundits' sample analysis of the ongoing negotiations to see Chinese OFDI into Australia is a significant issue (Drysdale, 2014). Like the FTA more broadly, OFDI is double edged. On the one hand, it aids in creating domestic jobs and business, improves access to capital, and thus contributes to increasing economic performance while lowering domestic rates of poverty (OECD, 2002, p. 5). On the other hand, it can result in social disruptions, increased environmental damage, and potentially the loss of political sovereignty (OECD, 2002, p. 6).

Recognition of these potential benefits and assuaging of such concerns can be found through an increased understanding of the Australian public's main source of anxiety: Chinese State Owned Enterprises (SOE). Despite the implication of the name, the majority of Chinese SOEs are operated at arms-length from the State (Drysdale, 2014; Lee, 2014). This means that there is little foundation for concerns that Australia may lose political sovereignty due to the domestic threshold of the Foreign Investment Review Board potentially being raised to AUD1 billion for Chinese investors. In fact, there is no reason why Australia should treat the vast number of



Chinese SOE as anything other than standard foreign investors willing to invest in the Australian market in a way that complies with Australian laws (Drysdale, 2014).

As both countries move forward into the ever globalising century, this FTA could set a firm foundation for greater resource security and access to ever expanding markets. Steeped in history, this trade liberalisation would mark the strongest trade ties between these two countries in their 42 year relationship. What few concerns there are can be assuaged by an appreciation of the positive-sum nature of trade and the positive bilateral history of these countries. The passing of this FTA could act as the keystone for future relations and allow China and Australia to become true *zhengyou*.

## Potential Political Implications for the People's Republic of China

With the gradual deepening of economic globalisation, and in view of the difficulties in WTO multilateral agreements, free trade agreements have been developed vigorously throughout the world. Bilateral FTAs between countries go through several rounds of consultations so as to promote both trade and investment liberalisation, and to strengthen and deepen the relationship and cooperation, economically and politically, within the region. Such integration is bound to have an important impact on the politics of China.

China and Australia started the first round of FTA negotiations in May 2005 and ended the 19<sup>th</sup> and final negotiation, in June 2013 (Chinese Commerce Ministry's Press Office, 2013). China and Australia both agreed to a pragmatic and flexible way to actively promote the FTA negotiations. As the bilateral FTA proceeds, it will be an important political milestone for China if the two partners successfully sign a Sino–Australia FTA. This will be a strategic opportunity that brings considerable political benefits. From a political perspective, a Sino–Australian bilateral FTA will mainly influence China in five ways.

The first is by reiterating Australia's political and economic recognition of China. In 2003, the trade and economic framework between Australia and the People's Republic of China stated that Australia and China have equal status and that Australia's official recognition of China's full market economy status is the premise of FTA negotiations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2012). This was confirmed in 2005 with the commencement of negotiations (The Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, 2005). Mutual recognition among countries is the premise of national cooperation. This means the need for recognition is always an important topic of international politics. The establishment of the Sino–Australia free trade mechanism will deepen Australia's political recognition and identification of China, enhance international competitiveness, and promote China's legitimacy as an international political entity by reducing discrimination in international trade.

The second is by creating a stable and secure political environment. Within the geo-strategic environment of the Asia Pacific, China's development is facing challenges and perceived security threats from the United States. China has long recognised the salience of alliances constructed by other nations in the region with the United States – nations that are also increasingly intermeshed with China economically. In light of this, tension between China and the United States could create major foreign policy challenges for Australia (CIW and CICA, 2012). Therefore, Australia will need to continue to adjust its foreign policy in order to adapt to the demands of the new situation. China and Australia can effectively promote bilateral and regional economic cooperation and the development of political dialogue to enhance China's strategic opportunities for stability and security in its economic development by building a comprehensive FTA.

Regionally based bilateral FTAs are regarded as an important means to promote security. Close economic relations reduce the potential of military and political

conflicts occurring, even if relations between major powers change. Increased trade strengthens economic dependence between countries, thus increasing both the cost of war and the political need to avoid war accordingly. Furthermore, through trade countries increase various types of exchanges and deepen mutual trust politically, so trade makes further integration possible (Zhu Ying, 2008). The establishment and development of Sino–Australia free trade will be conducive to China's strategic security by improving the external political and economic environment while alleviating the adverse effect brought by the 'China threat theory'. Meanwhile, wider regional cooperation and the reduction of pressure in politics and security are also conducive to China's reform and opening up.

The third influence is by promoting China's regional influence and status by enhancing China's political and economic power. National interactions are mostly geostrategic. Research shows that if a country signs bilateral FTAs, its political intention can be to increase its influence in multilateral negotiations under the WTO framework (Ma Shuzhong & Liu Wenjun, 2007). If the signing and establishment of the Sino–Australia FTA goes according to plan, it will be one of the most significant bilateral FTAs between China and a developed country since the comparable FTA signing with New Zealand in 2008 (Ministry of Commerce of the PRC, 2014). The FTA is also an excellent platform for China to improve its voice on the international stage.

In the process of bilateral negotiations, parties tend to reach a consensus on some issues of multilateral negotiations, which enhance their future rulemaking influence in multilateral negotiations (Chen Jun, 2007). Furthermore, in consideration of the current geo-strategic environment, China will utilise the opportunity for a bilateral FTA as the basis for continued regional cooperation. This will also help increase its national power and yield additional external benefits so to strengthen bilateral political connections and reach certain regional political goals.

The fourth influence is by ensuring the safety of China's energy and resources. At present, nearly all of the global major energy channels are significantly influenced by the United States and other Western powers. Lacking sufficient capacity to protect the marine transportation routes of energy and resources, China has focused on the expansion of land transport channels like the Sino–Kazakhstan oil pipeline. However, excessive dependence on the Middle East and Africa's oil, and single sea transport routes, is unsustainable, thus highlighting the vulnerabilities of China's energy and resource security. The main products imported to China from Australia are minerals and energy resources, e.g., iron ore and its concentrate, coal, crude oil, wool, copper flotsam, manganese ores and its concentrate, zinc ore and its concentrate, etc. (The Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, 2013). After establishment of the bilateral free trade system, improved trade stability will increase the security of strategic raw materials supply from this partner country, which will reduce the threat of a potential embargo.

The fifth is that the establishment of a Sino–Australia FTA increases China's need to establish more efficient management and operation mechanisms. China will likely adopt the specified system and administrative management system outlined in the bilateral FTA. Because the FTA is one of the main forms of regional economic cooperation between countries, China needs to be familiar with the international rules of establishing such an agreement. Also, through increased engagement, China will strengthen its international business negotiation skills, establish relevant managerial institutions, adjust the government's administrative management system, and improve the FTA supervision mechanism and evaluation mechanism. Only in this way can China ensure the smooth implementation of the strategy of free trade agreements.

If China and Australia sign an FTA, they will strengthen and deepen the political and economic interdependence of the region. The move is bound to have an important impact on China politically. For both Australians and Chinese, it is an important

opportunity. Furthermore, this is an important step for the continued maintenance of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

## Potential Political Implications for Australia

After nine long years of free trade negotiations between Australia and China, Prime Minister Tony Abbott has declared his wish to finalise a Sino–Australia FTA by the end of 2014. Unlike free trade negotiations between Australia and other countries that have been concluded within a relatively normal time frame, such as the United States–Australia FTA, negotiations with China have been meticulously unhurried. This may be due to contentious political issues surrounding the agreement. It may also be the case that Australia finds it easier to negotiate with other liberal pluralist economies such as Japan and South Korea, rather than the State Owned Enterprise (SOE) dominated Chinese economy. In this part of the essay, key political issues in Australia concerning a potential FTA will be discussed. While both countries remain committed to a mutually beneficial agreement, political sensitivities could hinder both parties from reaching an overall agreement.

In 2003 Australians witnessed an historic event as the leaders of what are now the world's first and second largest economies and Australia's most important trading partners, US President George W. Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao, addressed the Australian federal parliament in the same week. Australian Prime Minister John Howard suggested to President Hu during his visit that Australia and China should 'further entrench institutional linkages between the economies' through a free trade agreement (Wang, 2012). A comprehensive feasibility study was established to set out a framework for closer economic cooperation between Australia and the world's most dynamic economy. While an FTA is related to removing tariffs and regulatory barriers, it was clear both parties also wanted measures that would more quickly encourage greater foreign direct investment in each other's countries.

Australia was also hoping to gain greater access to Chinese markets particularly in agriculture and the services sector. China would like less restrictions on OFDI. The latter issue remains a hotly contested political issue in Australia with a Lowy poll recording that 56 per cent of Australians think there is too much Chinese investment in Australia (KPMG, 2014), particularly by SOEs investing in Australian farmland (Golley, 2014). However, this view is based largely on fear mongering by a politically motivated press rather than on any factual basis. The evidence suggests China has a 3 per cent share of international investment in Australia. This contrasts with the United States (24 per cent), Japan (10 per cent) and Singapore (4 per cent), which all have a larger share of the investment pie (KPMG, 2014) than China does. China would like to increase its share of investment in Australia by having the Australian government remove what the Chinese consider to be inequitable and unequal restrictions, thereby levelling the playing ground so they can be treated in a manner consistent with other investing countries. China's negotiators are also pushing for higher thresholds than the current allowance of A\$0 on SOE investments and A\$248 million on non-SOE investments; the latter they would like to see raised to A\$1 billion (US\$935 million), in line with investments from New Zealand and the United States (Golley, 2014).

While Australia is China's largest FDI destination outside Hong Kong, China receives only 3 per cent of Australian OFDI (ANU, 2014). Australia can and has rejected investment due to national security concerns, and similarly China continues to restrict Australian access to 'sensitive markets' that it regards as fundamental to China's national economic security, such as the agriculture and some service sectors (Jiang, 2008). Furthermore the Chinese political leadership is hesitant to grant more access to Australian agricultural products because they may have a serious effect on Chinese social stability (Jiang, 2008), impacting heaviest upon farmers who are part of China's rural population.

While a potential Australia–China Free Trade Agreement would ‘encourage greater trade and investment flows as well as economic co-operation’ (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2005), motivations beyond economic also inspire trade deals (Wesley, 2008). O’Neil and Manicom (2010, p. 32) stated that the successful negotiation of the US–Australia FTA also had security payoffs that could further enmesh the US into the Asia–Pacific region. However, on the Sino–Australia FTA, Australian policymakers have remained silent about any broader benefits for regional security. Wesley (2008, p. 221) asserts that such an FTA may be a part of China’s grand strategy to build strategic partnerships in an effort to drive economic interdependence throughout the region and form positive relationships. It is possible this could change the calculus of support from some of these countries in the event of US–Chinese conflict.

In this part of the essay, some of the contentious issues in negotiating an FTA are outlined. The fact that Sino–Australia FTA negotiations are in their ninth year highlights the complicated politics of free trade agreements. While Australia and China have two very different political systems, there is a common thread that policymakers from both countries are wrestling with: how will foreign investment and trade in the agricultural sector impact on their domestic communities socially and economically? While investment is a sensitive area for both countries, ‘it is an area with enormous potential for future growth’ (ANU, 2014, p. 31). To neutralise these fears, negotiations need courageous political leadership because all free trade agreements are born out of political relationships and will have diplomatic implications for relations between the countries and for their own domestic politics (Jiang, 2013, p. 73).

What is needed is a Sino–Australian FTA concluded on the grounds of mutual long-term benefit and understanding, not based on political expedience. What is needed in Australia is to foster positive attitudes towards a bilateral FTA with China through the government educating the public about the benefits of a productive relationship with China, and promoting investment as a way to advance the interests of the wider Australian community (ANU, 2014, p. 181.) Practical steps are already being taken, such as with Sydney set to become the latest hub for trading Chinese currency, the yuan. Sydney will join the likes of Seoul, Paris, Luxembourg, London, Frankfurt, Singapore and Hong Kong. This step will make it easier for investors to complete financial transactions, and will expand the range of financial products including bonds, foreign exchange and equities. These outcomes could all be achieved while lowering the cost of doing business for importers and exporters (Lefort, 2014).

The political debate about ‘whether, how much and what kind of Chinese investment should be allowed into Australia’ may seriously impinge on a successful conclusion to the Australia–China Free Trade’ (Golley, 2014), but it has been noted by the former Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd (2012), that dealing with China ‘will require the highest levels of political engagement and thoughtful diplomacy ... there is sufficient common sense, common interest and, therefore, common purpose for these difficult decades ahead to be negotiated’.

### **The final say ...**

As the People’s Republic of China transitions from sleeping dragon to world leader, that reestablishment requires unprecedented alliances in a continually globalising world. The Sino–Australian FTA signals such an alliance. By building on the prosperous foundation of the previous 42 years, this next step in the bilateral relationship can help ensure a future through which greater mutual benefits can flow for decades. This paper has sought to highlight some of these benefits. The political economic analysis presented has shown that both countries stand to gain from greater integration of their markets. Analysis of any of these benefits – whether access to more products at lower prices, increased opportunities to refine and develop key market and administrative skills, or even the cultivation of political capital in the region – shows

the Sino–Australian FTA as the foundation for a new era of mutual prosperity reserved for true *zhengyou*.

## References

- Australian Embassy in Beijing 2012, *40<sup>th</sup> anniversary*, Australian Federal Government, <http://www.china.embassy.gov.au/bjng/20120223anniversary.html>
- Australian Embassy in Beijing 2012, *Australia–China relationship overview*, Australian Federal Government, <http://www.china.embassy.gov.au/bjng/relations1.html>
- Australian National University & China Institute of Contemporary International Relations 2012, *Australia and China: a joint report on the bilateral relationship*, Australia Centre on China in the World, AUS.
- Australian National University 2014, *A new Australia China agenda, experts on the Australia–China relationship*, [http://ciw.anu.edu.au/publication/new\\_agenda.pdf](http://ciw.anu.edu.au/publication/new_agenda.pdf)
- Chen Jun 2007, *Research on motivation and strategy for development of bilateral FTA in China*, Master's Thesis at Nanjing Normal University.
- Dashu Wang 2009, 'Notes from multilateralism and FTAs: a Chinese perspective on an Australia–China FTA', in Sisira Jayasuriya, Donald MacLaren & Gary Magee (eds), *Negotiating a preferential trading agreement: issues, constraints and practical options*, Edward Elgar Publishing Inc., AUS.
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade & Ministry of Commerce 2005, *Australia – China Free Trade Agreement: joint feasibility study*, Australian Federal Government and People's Republic of China's Ministry of Commerce.
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2014, *Australia–China Free Trade Agreement negotiations*, Australian Federal Government, <http://www.dfat.gov.au/fta/acfta/>
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade n.d., *People's Republic of China country brief*, Australian Federal Government, [http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/china/china\\_brief.html](http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/china/china_brief.html)
- Drysdale, P 2014, *Chinese state-owned enterprise investment in Australia*, East Asia Forum, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2014/08/25/chinese-state-owned-enterprise-investment-in-australia/> accessed 30 October 2014.
- Emmery, M 1999, *Australian Manufacturing: A Brief History of Industry Policy and Trade Liberalisation*, Research Paper 7, 1999–2000, Parliament of Australia, [http://www.apf.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp9900/2000RP07](http://www.apf.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp9900/2000RP07)
- Golley, J *A perfect storm in Australia–China bilateral relations*, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/11/20/a-perfect-storm-in-australia-china-bilateral-relations/>
- Jiang, Y 2008, 'Australia–China FTA: China's domestic politics and the roots of different national approaches to FTAs', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 62, no. 2, pp. 179–95, via Routledge Politics and International Relations Online.
- Jiang, Y 2013, *China's policymaking for regional economic cooperation*, <http://www.palgraveconnect.com/pc/doi/10.1057/9781137347602>
- KPMG 2014, *Demystifying SOE investment in Australia*, [www.kpmg.com.au](http://www.kpmg.com.au)
- Layton, A, Robinson, T & Tucker, IB 2009, *Economics for Today*, Third Asia Pacific Edition, Cengage Learning Australia Pty Limited, AUS.
- Lee, J 2014, *Bar set low for a 'do no harm' China–Australia FTA*, Chinese Spectator, <http://www.businessspectator.com.au/article/2014/10/6/china/bar-set-low-do-no-harm-china-australia-fta>
- Lefort, C 2014, *Sydney set to become yuan hub, clearing bank appointment eyed*, Reuters, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/11/03/uk-australia-china-yuan-idUKKBNOIN01E20141103>

- Ma Shuzhong Liu Wenjun, A Political Economy Analysis on the Upsurge in Establishing Bilateral Free Trade Area: A perspective of New Regionalism[J];World Economy Study;2007-10
- Manicom, J & O'Neil, A 'Accommodation, realignment, or business as usual? Australia's response to a rising China', *The Pacific Review*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 23–44, via Routledge Politics and International Relations Online.
- Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, 2014, *China–New Zealand FTA*, <http://fta.mofcom.gov.cn/topic/ennewzealand.shtml>
- Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China – Press Office, 2013, *China Australia News*, [http://fta.mofcom.gov.cn/article/chinaaustralia/chinaaustralianews/201307/12995\\_1.html](http://fta.mofcom.gov.cn/article/chinaaustralia/chinaaustralianews/201307/12995_1.html) accessed 10 October 2014.
- Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China 2005, *The commencement of negotiation of a free trade agreement between Australia and the People's Republic of China*, [http://fta.mofcom.gov.cn/article/australia/200809/105\\_1.html](http://fta.mofcom.gov.cn/article/australia/200809/105_1.html) accessed 10 October 2014.
- Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China 2013, *The country's trade and investment environment report 2013*, Shanghai People's Publishing House, China.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2012, *Assembly of China and Australia bilateral relations important documents*, The World Knowledge Press, China.
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2002, *Foreign direct investment for development: maximising benefits, minimising costs*, Overview, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, France.
- Rudd, K 2012, 'The west isn't ready for the rise of China', *New Statesman*, 11 July 2012, <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/international-politics/2012/07/kevin-rudd-west-isnt-ready-rise-china>
- Wang, Y 2012, *Australia–China relations post 1949*, Ashgate, United Kingdom.
- Wesley, M 2008, 'The strategic effects of preferential trade agreements', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 62, no. 2, pp. 214–28, via Routledge Politics and International Relations Online.
- Wolf, M 1998, 'Richard Cobden and the democratic peace', in G. Cook (eds), *The economics and politics of international trade – freedom and trade: volume II*, Routledge Studies in the Modern World, UK.
- Zhu Ying 2008, *Try to talk about the U.S. global strategy of free trade agreement*, Shijia Corpus.

## Notes

- 1 靜友/ 诤友 – *zhengyou*, 'a partner who sees beyond immediate benefit to the broader and firm basis for continuing, profound and sincere friendship' (Australian National University, 2012, ix).

## 2. Australia–China Relations in Intergovernmental Organisations – Building Bridges or Exacerbating Conflict?

Michelle GUNAWAN, Gemma PHILLIPS, JING Tong and YANG Yi

### Abstract

As advanced technology and media channels disseminate information around the world at lightning pace, domestic issues of concern attract the attention of the wider international community – especially in relation to human rights. In light of the atrocities of World Wars I and II, intergovernmental organisations emerged in the twentieth century as forums to resolve causes of potential conflict between states through cooperation, collaboration and peaceful dialogue. While recognising the role and framework of these organisations, the potential for exacerbation of state-to-state conflict within these forums cannot be understated. In examining the China–Australia bilateral relationship as its case study, this essay analyses potential for conflict between these two countries with reference to three intergovernmental organisations: the United Nations, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the Asia– Pacific Economic Cooperation forum. Ultimately, this essay concludes that China–Australia interaction on cultural, geographic, and social issues poses the greatest risk to the bilateral relationship due to differences in political and cultural norms and traditions between the two countries. This conclusion highlights the importance of multilevel dialogue to invigorate a meaningful relationship between Australia and China and to prevent the perpetuation of ideological and political mutual distrust in the aforementioned issues. It is predicted that stronger ties can and will be built between Australia and China through these intergovernmental organisations due to their focus on mutual understanding, communication and cooperation.

### I: Introduction

With the current wave of globalisation, the international community is characterised by the proliferation of flows of information, ideas, people and capital across national boundaries. As these flows promote global interconnection, advances in technology and media channels disseminate information around the world at a lightning pace. Consequently, domestic issues of concern attract the attention of the wider community, especially in relation to human rights. While some theorists believe we now live in a ‘borderless world’ (e.g., Albrow & King, 1990, p. 8), this essay posits the doctrine of state sovereignty has been reinforced by the emergence and increasing popularity of intergovernmental forums. As global issues require collaborative responses, these intergovernmental organisations act as forums to resolve causes of potential conflict between states through cooperation, collaboration, and peaceful dialogue. For the majority of nation states, fostering strong and sophisticated bilateral and multilateral relationships has become a leading foreign policy aim, and participation in intergovernmental organisations is key to realising these relationships.

In light of this need to facilitate global and regional cooperation, multidimensional intergovernmental organisations have formed to meet specialised needs. However, as we acknowledge the role and framework of these organisations, we must also recognise the potential for conflict that these forums present – especially conflict that is capable of threatening a developing bilateral relationship. In considering the

China–Australia bilateral relationship as its case study, this essay seeks to analyse the potential for conflict between these two countries in three intergovernmental organisations: the United Nations (UN), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.

This essay begins with a brief summary of the history and current state of the China–Australia bilateral relationship, and then of each of these organisations. The essay ultimately demonstrates the crucial role that these intergovernmental organisations play in fostering the Australia–China relationship. The focus of these organisations on mutual understanding, cooperation, relationships and solutions will assist in building stronger ties between Australia and China in the Asia–Pacific region.

## **II: The History and Contemporary State of the Bilateral Relationship**

In August 2012, the China–Australia bilateral relationship celebrated its fortieth anniversary since Australia formally recognised the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1972. Despite indications of trade exchanges continuing throughout the early-to-mid twentieth century, then Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam’s recognition of the PRC as the sole legal government of China laid the foundations for a new chapter in bilateral relations between China and Australia. During the 1980s China and Australia shared common interests in pursuing closer relations, with Beijing seeking to foster a ‘model relationship’ and Canberra a ‘special relationship’. The relationship China sought to foster with Australia was a ‘model’ of peaceful and cooperative relations, notwithstanding differences in social systems and stages of economic development. To the Chinese, political friendship outweighed economic considerations, and this implied Australia’s acceptance of the principle of non-interference when it came to Chinese domestic affairs.

Despite raising no objection to the Chinese vision, during the early-to-mid 1980s, Bob Hawke described his ‘special’ vision for the relationship as one that focused on common interests and downplayed political and cultural differences (Minyue, 2007, p. 345). As Wang described (2012, p. 38), during this period the ‘warmth’ of the new political relationship was matched by the ‘emancipation’ of bilateral trade exchanges. However, this ‘warmth’ soon faded. After Tiananmen Square in 1989, Australia’s foreign policy vision in relation to China altered considerably, following the US view. After enforcing economic sanctions on China on 13 July, human rights became one of the guiding principles that informed Australia’s relations with China, and still remains so. In contrast, China favours stability and certainty over individual rights. As Deng Xiaoping stated in 1975, in setting China on its new path to restoration, ‘stability is of overriding importance’ and personal interests should be ‘combined with the overall interests of the collective, the state, and society’ (Zhu, n.d., pp. 236, 321). For these reasons, China and Australia often hold conflicting perspectives on issues of cultural and political rights, which present obstacles to the continued growth of bilateral ties. Moving from this context, the essay now analyses Australia–China relations within three intergovernmental organisation – the UN, ASEAN, and APEC.

## **III: The United Nations**

Many of the questions that surround intergovernmental organisations in the twenty-first century and beyond can be best addressed by considering the UN, the world’s largest international organisation with a current membership of 193 States (UN, n.d.). In light of the atrocities of World War II and the failure of its precursor, the League of Nations, the UN was established in 1945 with the principal concern to promote international peace and security. With this concern in mind, the Charter drafters designed the UN to minimise the possibilities of war breaking out, by granting veto powers to five super powers (United States, China, United Kingdom, France, Russia) as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which was charged with maintaining international peace and security (UN, n.d.). The UNSC has a



mandate to deliver punitive sanctions for any breach of international law, which means it possesses the power of coercion that the League of Nations lacked. On 10 December 1948, resolution 217A adopted the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is accompanied by a commitment to the fundamental human rights of the person enshrined in the Preamble of the UN Charter. Over time, the number of UN organs has grown, and the UN now pursues a wide-ranging social and economic agenda that can respond to the complexities and challenges of modern global politics (Heywood, 2011, p. 432). One such new organ is the the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) established in 2006. The following section examines two UN organs that have proven key to the development of Australia–China relations: the UNSC and the UNHRC.

#### *A: China's relationship with the UN*

In October 1971, the People's Republic of China replaced the Republic of China (or Taiwan) as the 'real' China on the United Nations, after General Assembly Resolution (GAR) 2758 was passed by a two-thirds majority (Morphet, 2002, p. 151). Since then, as Morphet argues, China has increased its involvement in global affairs, partly due to its permanent position on the Security Council, and has displayed flexibility and consistency on the world stage. China has illustrated its adherence to the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence', the foundation of which is sovereignty, by exercising its veto on Security Council resolutions seven times since 1971. China's most recent veto, for example, was against a resolution that threatened sanctions against Syria. China has tended to abstain from matters that do not directly involve its interests (Morphet, 2002, pp. 164–65).

As Wei (2014) posited, China's historical relationship with the UN can be classified in key stages. The first is characterised by Mao's leadership. During this stage, China presented itself as a 'third world country' and 'anti-hegemonic/anti-imperialist' state that 'stood with other peoples being exploited and repressed by the superpowers'. As China was unwilling to involve itself in the issues dominated by the two superpowers, during this time China was a substantively inactive participant in the UN and was often uncooperative.

From 1982 China began to project a different image after embarking on Deng Xiaoping's series of 'two-handed reforms', economic and institutional, which over time have transformed China's 'planned economy' to a 'socialist market economy' (Heisey, 2000, p. 258). According to Wei (2014, p. 198), during this period China made progress on bilateral relations with all of its neighbours except Vietnam. China also began participating more frequently in the UN on socio-economic matters, while still remaining hesitant on political-security concerns. After 1996, China's foreign policy stance within the UN changed significantly, signifying that China wanted to follow rather than deviate from international norms, and that China 'had been internalising these norms' (Wei, 2014, p. 199). Borne of necessity, the irresistible trend of globalisation has brought states together to negotiate on issues of common concern, and China now plays a key role in UN affairs, even initiating and leading some activities. For example, China took an active role in the 'six party talks' with North Korea in response to North Korea's withdrawal from the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty, as well as a key role recently in lobbying for the resumption of these talks.

#### *B: Australia's relationship with the UN*

Australia has a long history with the UN. As a founding member and drafter of the UN Charter, Australia has participated in the UN for over 65 years (Australia–UNSC, 2013–14). As a middle-power that maintains economic relations with major powers, Australia can exercise a relative degree of independence in bilateral and multilateral negotiations. Australia lacks the power to impose its will, but can be persuasive in compelling other states to see its national perspective, e.g., its lead role in procuring

an international investigation into the MH17 plane crash in 2014. This is the strategy that guides Australia's participation in the UN. According to Harry (1980, p. 19), it is an Australian duty and in Australia's interests to abide by the principles of the UN and 'actively promote its purposes'.

### *C: Australia–China relations in the United Nations: Points of conflict*

According to Liu and Hao (2014), Chinese scholars have advised that Beijing should make it clear that if countries such as Australia wish to continue receiving economic benefits from China, the diplomatic actions of these countries should not alienate China politically or be wary of China in relation to security matters (p. 392).

A point of potential conflict in the future may be the situation regarding Hong Kong elections. While China is a signatory to the *UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, the Chinese government has never ratified the document, or any other UN treaty pertaining to human rights, into domestic legislation. The situation has been acknowledged recently in a UNHRC meeting, with the Committee directly requesting further information from China's foreign affairs delegate. According to Chu, the Committee plans to assess Hong Kong's plans for elections in the context of the civil and political rights enshrined in the *International Covenant*, and it will make its non-binding decision based on that. Ms Hua Chunying, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, noted that as China has not ratified the Treaty, this Treaty should not be used as a 'benchmark for assessing Hong Kong's political development' (Chu, 2014). In consideration of China's stance, the Hong Kong election situation may be a live issue in years to come and may present a future point of conflict for Australia if the Australian government aims to acknowledge it, which has not happened as yet.

## **IV: ASEAN**

ASEAN is an intergovernmental organisation with ten member states (Brunei, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia) located between the Indian sub-continent and China (Asialink, 2012). ASEAN was established in 1967 (Asialink, 2012) with the initial aim to 'accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to promote regional peace and stability through the rule of law and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter' (DFAT, n.d.). The ASEAN Charter provides a legal and institutional framework for the realisation of this aim (DFAT, n.d.), and establishes the guiding principle that 'member-states should work more closely together to strengthen their individual abilities to manage their relations with many extra-regional and interested great powers' (Cook, 2011, p. 1). China and Australia are not ASEAN countries, but are both ASEAN Dialogue Partners (DFAT, n.d.).

Since its establishment, ASEAN has been transformed from 'merely a formal legal entity' to a 'common regional identity' (Kivimäki, 2008, p. 433) and now represents Asian regionalism, the process of 'regionally based co-operation and co-ordination' (Beeson, 2003, p. 253) motivated by 'the existence of shared values, traditions and beliefs' (Heywood, 2011, p. 490). ASEAN has taken centrality as a 'driving force' in implementing regionalism (Cook, 2011, p. 2) as the 'designer, pusher and organiser in the process of East Asian cooperation' (Kun, n.d., p. 26).

### *A: Australia's relationship with ASEAN*

Australia became ASEAN's first dialogue partner in 'political, economic and functional cooperation, including defence and security matters' (Blaxland, 2011) in April 1974 (DFAT, n.d.). As a non-member, 'Australia has traditionally placed emphasis on developing bilateral trade and investment links with ASEAN member states', and has succeeded in developing 'strong and wide ranging' links with each of the ASEAN member countries (Australian Parliament House of Representative Committee, n.d.,

p. 41). ASEAN has ‘become increasingly important to Australia’s economic and trade interests’ (Australian Parliament House of Representative Committee, n.d., p. 41), which are now ‘more dependent on the fortunes of the ASEAN economies than at any time previously’ (Australian Parliament House of Representative Committee, n.d., p. 41). The value of Australian exports to ASEAN has been rising at an average of 18 per cent per annum, with imports rising at an average of 14 per cent per annum (Australian Parliament House of Representative Committee, n.d., p. 44). ASEAN is now Australia’s second biggest trading partner (Blaxland, 2011). Not only is ASEAN a valuable economic partner for Australia, but commentators have argued that ASEAN will lead Australia in terms of future security and stability of the region (Louie and Willett, 2012). Some commentators have alluded to the possibility of Australian membership of ASEAN, due to the migration and educational links, as well as Australia’s membership of a range of ASEAN-centric international bodies (Blaxland, 2011).

### *B: China’s relationship with ASEAN*

ASEAN–China Dialogue Relations commenced at the initiative of H.E. Qian Qichen, former Foreign Minister of the PRC (ASEAN, n.d.). China was accorded ‘full Dialogue Partner status’ in July 1996 (ASEAN, n.d.). Since then, ‘China has pursued a policy of building strong bilateral China–ASEAN ties’, and was the first major power to negotiate the establishment of free trade agreements with ASEAN (Kun, n.d., p. 29). This free trade area encompasses some 2 billion people (Heywood, 2011, p. 491). China is currently ASEAN’s major trading partner, with exports to China valued at US\$113 billion in 2012, and imports valued at US\$119 billion in 2012 (Asialink, 2012).

China has ‘signalled readiness to discuss political and security issues in the context of the forum, starting out with non-traditional security issues and transnational crime, initially and gradually proceeding to more sensitive issues’ (Hund, 2003, p. 294). Commentators have argued that ‘China and ASEAN have achieved a win-win relationship’, bringing ‘feelings of stability, sureness and accomplishment to China’s neighbour policy’ (Kun, n.d., p. 30) and ‘smile diplomacy’ to Southeast Asia (Kun, n.d., p. 29).

### *C: The achievements of ASEAN*

East Asian nations are ‘remarkably different in terms of their political systems, cultural heritage and historical experience’ (Acharya, 1997, p. 322). Despite these differences, ASEAN has ‘made great progress in the fields of its integration process ... with some scholars even contending that ASEAN is becoming the centre of power in East Asia’ (Kun, n.d., p. 21). The factors that have led to ASEAN centrality include the post-Cold War power shift to the East, the active involvement of non-ASEAN states (such as Australia) and the ‘process of intra-ASEAN integration and confidence-building’ (Cook, 2011, p. 2). This confidence-building has been facilitated by important discussion forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit (EAS) and ASEAN+3 (Pakpahan, 2012), which enable the free flow of discussion between ASEAN states.

In 1997, Members of ASEAN ‘committed themselves to full implementation of the ASEAN Free Trade Area’ (Ravenhill, 2008, p. 470), and ASEAN has also established free trade agreements with both China and Australia (Pakpahan, 2012). ASEAN is now ‘home to more than \$153 billion in US investment’, is at the ‘centre of the global free trade movement’, and is ‘a key partner on transnational global issues such as the fight against terrorism’ (Bower, 2010). As a result of this economic integration, Kivimäki argues that ‘the main trend is that ASEAN countries have indeed become more peaceful after joining ASEAN’ through the decrease in the average number of conflict dyads and in interstate conflicts (Kivimäki, 2008 p. 438).

As a consequence of ASEAN's active role, the term 'ASEAN way' has been coined (Acharya, 1997, p. 328). This refers to a 'distinctive approach to dispute-settlement and regional cooperation developed by the members of ASEAN with a view to ensuring regional peace and stability' through consultations and consensus (Acharya, 1997, p. 328). ASEAN's approach to security cooperation is based on informality and person-to-person decisions, effectively 'raising the level of comfort among the participants' and creating a 'flexible decision-making environment which allows room for shifts in national bargaining positions' (Acharya, 1997, p. 329). The 'ASEAN way' is unique and valuable because it is process-orientated, more than product-orientated (Acharya, 1997, p. 329), and focuses on a level of comfort and lack of hostility in consultations and negotiations (Acharya, 1997, p. 330), which are guided by a 'shared commitment to moderation and accommodation' (Acharya, 1997, p. 332). The ASEAN way seeks to 'construct a harmonious social reality in the minds of the people by expanding upon their common interests, common identity and other features held in common, and smoothing away disputes and other things that divide them' (Kivimäki, 2008, p. 345). The fostering of the ASEAN way is a significant development in the China–Australia relationship.

#### *D: The future of ASEAN*

There is no doubt that 'ASEAN's internal developments affect East Asian economic and political developments', and that 'the progress in regional integration (through the ASEAN Community) and enhanced connectivity' will continue to improve economic regional activities in East Asia (Pakpahan, 2012). ASEAN aims to achieve an 'ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) by 2015', which will be realised through establishing 'a common good and production base to allow free trade in goods, services, investments, flow of capital and movement of skilled labour' and integrating ASEAN into the global economy (Pakpahan, 2012). There is hope that ASEAN will 'strengthen its position as a regional stabiliser between the Southeast and the East Asian regions in order to create balance and synergy among actors' (Pakpahan, 2012). ASEAN can also 'help drive regional forums such as ARF and EAS in order to develop dependability of action within the political and economic cooperation between ASEAN and its external partners' (Pakpahan, 2012).

However, some commentators are sceptical of the likelihood of ASEAN achieving the AEC since ASEAN's culture is 'one of voluntary commitment and compliance, of flexibility in the implementation' (Ravenhill, 2008, p. 479), with the organisation itself lacking 'effective monitoring procedures' (Ravenhill, 2008, p. 480) and vision 'triumphing' over implementation (Ravenhill, 2008, p. 484). However, this pessimism overlooks the fact that ASEAN has currently 'achieved around 80 per cent of its targets in the last four years' for the implementation of AEC (Kesavapany, 2014). ASEAN is further criticised because it is 'not a union but a group of diverse states and it doesn't necessarily present a unified front on different issues' (Louie and Willett, 2012). The ASEAN way may be 'soft', but it represents a culture of cooperation and dispute resolution, which is a significant achievement for the culturally diverse Southeast Asian nations.

#### *E: Implications for the Australia–China relationship*

One issue with potential for conflict may be ASEAN's role in conflict management of the South China Sea, 'potentially putting the association's unity at risk and jeopardising the establishment of the AEC' (Pakpahan, 2012). Indeed, in 2012 ASEAN 'ended a meeting in Cambodia without issuing a joint statement for the first time in its 45-year history' (BBC News, 2012). However, a 'win-win' outcome can be achieved (Kun, n.d., p. 30) with ASEAN taking a leading role (Acharya, 2011) in negotiations and discussions through use of the iconic 'ASEAN way'. Closer integration with ASEAN by both Australia and China will enable both countries to become more integrated and

culturally understanding. ASEAN has a powerful role to play in developing the relationship between Australia and China, and will continue to be influential in the future. Australia is able to engage as a middle power, avoiding the need to choose between its security ally the United States, and its new ally in the East, China. The unique ASEAN way will ultimately provide both countries with the mechanism to engage with each other in the region and will lead to strengthening of the China–Australia relationship.

## V: APEC

The Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum is the most influential economic cooperation mechanism in the Asia–Pacific region (MFA of PRC). It was established in 1989 with 12 founding members, those being Australia, Brunei, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and the United States. Two years later, the Seoul Declaration was approved which formalised the purposes and aim of APEC as interdependence, mutual benefit, adherence to the open multilateral trading system, and reduction of barriers to trade in a region. In 1991, China joined APEC as a sovereign state while Chinese Taipei and Hong Kong joined in the name of the regional economy. In 2014 APEC had 21 member economies.

### *A: Australia's relationship with APEC*

On his visit to Seoul in 1989, Australia's former Prime Minister John Howard proposed convening ministerial conferences to strengthen cooperation among countries in the Asia–Pacific region. In November that year, the first APEC ministerial meeting was held in Canberra, Australia. In 1993, the first informal APEC leaders' meeting was held in Seattle (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC). In 2007, the fifteenth informal APEC leaders' meeting was held in Sydney and it issued The Sydney Declaration that focused on the meeting's consensus on climate change, the Doha Round negotiations, and regional economic integration. In the past 25 years, Australia has combined its high technology, sufficient capital and abundant natural resources with the ample labour force and broad market of APEC developing countries. This has resulted in enhancing the welfare of all members and has promoted the development of Australia's industrial structure (Xu Shanpin, 2014).

### *B: China's relationship with APEC*

China joined APEC as a sovereign state in 1991, and held the ninth informal APEC leader's meeting in Shanghai in 2001 in which participating leaders engaged in in-depth discussions on the world economic situation, the effect of the 11 September terrorist attacks on the world economy, and the future direction of APEC (Zhang Jianjing, 2011). The meeting endorsed The Shanghai Consensus and Leader's Declaration: Meeting New Challenges in the New Century. With development of the Chinese economy, China has made a large contribution to APEC. China has changed its role from listening to rules to rule-making. China is also offering capital and technology to other members and protecting the interests of developing countries through APEC (Zhao Jianglin, 2012).

### *C: The achievements of APEC*

#### Economic growth

Since its inception in 1989, the APEC region has consistently been the most economically dynamic part of the world. In APEC's first decade, APEC member economies generated nearly 70 per cent of global economic growth and the APEC region consistently outperformed the rest of the world (Wang Yi, 2014).

APEC member economies work together to sustain this economic growth through a commitment to open trade, investment and economic reform. By progressively reducing tariffs and other barriers to trade, APEC member economies have become more efficient and the flow of exports has expanded dramatically (Wang Yi, 2012)

#### Benefits to the people

Consumers in the Asia–Pacific have benefitted both directly and indirectly from the collective and individual actions of APEC member economies. Some direct benefits include increased job opportunities, more training programs, stronger social safety nets, and poverty alleviation. More broadly, however, APEC member economies on average enjoy a lower cost of living because reduced trade barriers and a more economically competitive region lowers prices for goods and services that everyone needs on a daily basis – from food, to clothes, to mobile phones (*Beijing Morning Post*, 12 November 2014).

#### *D: The future of APEC*

APEC conforms to the tendency of economic globalisation and strengthening cooperation among economies, which reflect its vitality now and into the future. In terms of trade and investment liberalisation, APEC also provides a strong impetus which sets the stage for an increased degree of intergovernmental economic cooperation. Through the efforts of APEC, the importance of knowledge and technology cooperation has been borne deeply into the human mind (Lu Jianren).

On the other hand, the conference form of APEC is instructive. The annual leader's informal meeting provides an opportunity for every member to express their views about the world economy, which leads to a relatively balanced agreement considering the interests of all member states. The meeting of leaders also offers an occasion of diplomatic activity, which also shows the charm of APEC.

For these reasons we can conclude that the value of APEC will live forever. APEC is an economic forum with the purpose of promoting cooperation rather than making regulations. What this really means is that the agreements may not be workable. However, through a macroscopic lens, APEC is of long-term value and will benefit the world and the Australia–China relationship.

#### *E: Implications*

Australia, as one of the initiators of APEC, has a profound influence on the organisation, and benefits immensely from its relationship with Asian countries. After the establishment of APEC, Australia started to take an active part in Asian affairs through institutions such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and East Asia Summit (EAS) (Lu Qingwen, 2007). As an important member of the ARF, China has made great contributions to the healthy development of East Asia (Ouyang Huanzi, 2008). Under these circumstances, Australia and China have built a close and friendly intergovernmental relationship with each other.

Through this existing good relationship, Australia and China have also gained pace on economic cooperation. Trade between China and Australia has been extended beyond iron ore, natural gas, wool, grain and dairy products to many other fields. In 2012, China became the largest trading partner of Australia, while Australia has become the eighth largest trading partner of China (Lu Qingwen, 2007).

APEC brings China and Australia closer and provides a platform for these two countries to communicate effectively with each other, which has turned a lukewarm relationship into an enthusiastic one. In the era of economic globalisation, this kind of relationship is not only necessary, but will have effects on the development and peace of the whole world.

## VI: Concluding Remarks

As the irresistible trend of globalisation forces the international community to work together to deal with global concerns, both China and Australia have been pressured to adopt a more active role in international organisations as prominent members of the international community. As China has recently overtaken the US as the world's largest economy, a novel dilemma arises for Australia as goals for economic complementarity with China and security alliances with the US clash. It also means that Australia may not be as responsive to human rights abuses that China may commit for fear of trade ramifications. However, from the perspective of aiming to develop stronger people-to-people relations and integration between Australia and China, strong friendships often require frank and candid discussions. While Australia's wealth and prosperity are underwritten by the economic relationship with China, friends are not afraid to call out on one another's actions if they believe the other's actions are out of line. As such, undoubtedly there are points of contention in the future for the Australia–China relationship, but these are inevitable as two nations with different polities and prevailing attitudes work to strengthen their relationship. Multilevel dialogue in international organisations provides a useful forum for candid and frank discussion, and while possibly posing danger to the mutual relationship, such dialogue is indispensable to stronger ties.

## References

- Acharya, A 1997, 'Ideas, identity and institution-building: from the "ASEAN way" to the "Asia–Pacific way"?', *The Pacific Review*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 319–46.
- Acharya, A 2011, 'ASEAN in 2030', *East Asia Forum*, 15 February 2011, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2011/02/15/asean-in-2030/>
- Albrow, M & King, E 1990, *Globalization, knowledge, and society: readings from international sociology*, Sage Publications, London, UK.
- Asialink 2012, *Our place in the Asian Century*, University of Melbourne, November 2012, [http://asialink.unimelb.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/662107/TheThirdWay\\_ASIALINK-11-2012\\_Small.pdf](http://asialink.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/662107/TheThirdWay_ASIALINK-11-2012_Small.pdf)
- Association of Southeast Asian Nations (n.d.), *ASEAN–China dialogue relations*, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, <http://www.asean.org/asean/external-relations/china/item/asean-china-dialogue-relations>
- Australia Centre on China in the World & China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations 2012, *Australia and China: a joint report on the bilateral relationship*, [http://ciw.anu.edu.au/joint\\_report/CIWCIIRJointReport-Australia\\_and\\_China-Feb2012.pdf](http://ciw.anu.edu.au/joint_report/CIWCIIRJointReport-Australia_and_China-Feb2012.pdf)
- Australian Government n.d., *Australia and the UN*, <https://australia-unsconf.gov.au/australia-and-the-un/>
- Australian Parliament House of Representative Committee (n.d.), *Chapter five: Australia–ASEAN economic relations*, Australian Parliament, [www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary\\_business/committees/house\\_of\\_representatives\\_committees?url=jfadt/asean/aseanch5.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=jfadt/asean/aseanch5.pdf)
- BBC News 2012, *ASEAN nations fails to reach agreement on South China Sea*, BBC News Asia, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-18825148> [13 July 2012].
- Beeson, M 2003, 'ASEAN Plus Three and the Rise of Reactionary Regionalism', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 251–68.
- Blaxland, J 2011, *Australia should collaborate closely with ASEAN*, Canberra Times, <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/editorial/australia-should-collaborate-closely-with-asean-20111113-1v1f7.html> [13 November 2011].
- Bower, E 2010, 'A U.S. Strategy for ASEAN', *The Globalist*, 26 May 2010, <http://www.theglobalist.com/a-u-s-strategy-for-asean/>
- Chu, K 2014, 'U.N. Committee prods China on Hong Kong elections', *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 October, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/u-n-committee-prods-china-on-hong-kong-elections-1414143820>

- Cook, M 2011, *ASEAN's triumph*, University of Adelaide Indo–Pacific Governance Research Centre, June 2011, [http://www.adelaide.edu.au/indo-pacific-governance/policy/Malcolm\\_Cook.pdf](http://www.adelaide.edu.au/indo-pacific-governance/policy/Malcolm_Cook.pdf)
- Australian Centre on China in the World and China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, 2012, *Australia and China: A Joint Report on the Bilateral Relationship*, Australian National University, [http://ciw.anu.edu.au/joint\\_report/CIWCICIRJointReport-Australia\\_and\\_China-Feb2012.pdf](http://ciw.anu.edu.au/joint_report/CIWCICIRJointReport-Australia_and_China-Feb2012.pdf).
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) n.d., *Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN): 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ASEAN–Australia relations: 2014*, Australian Government, <http://www.dfat.gov.au/asean/>
- Harry, RL 1980, 'Australia's role in the evolving United Nations', *Australian Outlook*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 13–19.
- Heisey, DR 2000, *Chinese perspectives in rhetoric and communication*, Ablex Publication Corporation, Stamford, Connecticut.
- Heywood, A 2011, *Global politics*, Palgrave Foundations, Gordonsville, USA. <http://sp.chinadaily.com.cn/info/20141112/1089834.html>  
<http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2014/10-29/6730469.shtml>
- Hund, M 2003, 'ASEAN plus three: towards a new age of pan-East Asian regionalism? A skeptic's appraisal', *The Pacific Review*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 383–417.
- Kesavapany, K 2014, 'ASEAN to face a summit of challenges', *East Asian Forum*, 9 May 2014, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2014/05/09/asean-to-face-a-summit-of-challenges/>
- Kivimäki, T 2008, 'Power, interest or culture – is there a paradigm that explains ASEAN's political role best?', *The Pacific Review*, vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 431–50.
- Kun, Z n.d., 'Chapter 3: the ASEAN power', *The Architecture of Security in the Asia–Pacific*, [http://press.anu.edu.au/sdsc/architecture/mobile\\_devices/ch03.html](http://press.anu.edu.au/sdsc/architecture/mobile_devices/ch03.html)
- Liu, W & Hao, Y 2014, 'Australia in China's grand strategy', *Asian Survey*, vol. 54, no. 2, pp. 367–94.
- Louie, C & Willett, M 2012, 'Australia: an ASEAN perspective', *The Strategist*, 31 October 2012, <http://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australia-an-asean-perspective/>
- Lu Jianren 2001, 'Theory of the relationship between APEC and SFTAs', *The Journal of World Economy*, 2001.9, pp. 11–17.
- Lu Jianren 1999, 'The problems existing in APEC and its prospects', *World Economics and Politics*, 1999.12, pp. 60–4.
- Lu Qingwen 2007, *Study on the Sino–Australia relationship since the new century*, 2007.6.
- Ma Weimin 1998, 'APEC with China', *Journal of PLA University of Foreign Language*, vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 115–19.
- Martin, MF 2010, *Understanding China's political system*, Congressional Research Service, Washington DC, USA, <http://www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=ADA518968>
- Minyue, H 2007, 'The post–Tiananmen human rights issue in China–Australia relations', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 344–62.
- Morphet, S 2000, 'China as a permanent member of the security council: October 1971–December 1999', *Security Dialogue*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 151–66.
- Ouyang Huanzi 2008, 'Process and prospect of the Sino–ASEAN economic and trade relations', *World Economy Study*, 2008.9, pp. 72–78.
- Pakpahan, B 2012, 'ASEAN: regional stabiliser in Southeast and East Asia?', *East Asian Forum*, 12 October 2012, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2012/10/12/asean-regional-stabiliser-in-southeast-and-east-asia/>
- Ravenhill, J 2008, 'Fighting irrelevance: an economic community "with ASEAN characteristics"', *The Pacific Review*, vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 469–88.
- United Nations n.d., *UN at a glance*, <http://www.un.org/en/aboutun/index.shtml> accessed 22 September 2014.
- Wang Yiming 1998, 'Features of APEC and China's countermeasure', *Journal of Ningbo University*, (Liberal arts edition), vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 107–111.



- Wang, Y 2012, *Australia–China relations post-1949: sixty years of trade and politics*, Ashgate Publishing, UK.
- Wei, L 2014, *China in the United Nations*, World Century Publishing Company, Hackensack, NJ.
- White, H 2008, 'Why war in Asia remains unthinkable', *Survival* (London), vol. 50, no. 6, pp. 85–104.
- Xu Liqing & Zhang Fan 2012, 'Analysis of interdependence and complementary in the Sino–Australian trade competition', *International Trade*, 2012.12. pp. 201–5.
- Xu Shanpin 2014, *The process of Australia's engagement and integration with Asia (1972–2012)*, 2014.5
- Zhang Jianjing 2011, 'China: The strategy of "keep a new profile"', *Nanfengchuang*, 2011.11, pp. 9–10.
- Zhao Jianglin 2012, China elements in APEC, *Renmin Forum*, 2012.9, p. 4.
- Zhao Ming 2012, 'A study of APEC organisations', 2012.4.
- Zhu Majie, 'Cultural impact on international relations', *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change*, Series III, vol. 20, ch. 4, *Deng Xiaoping's Human Rights Theory*, [http://www.crvp.org/book/series03/iii-20/chapter\\_iv.htm](http://www.crvp.org/book/series03/iii-20/chapter_iv.htm)

# 3. Climate Change Policy: A Comparison between China and Australia

Jonathan GLINDERMANN, Samuel WHEELER, NEI YiFei and WANG Xian

## Introduction

Politics shapes policy. Australia and China have very different political systems and very different climate change policies. Australia's parliament has recently legislated a direct action policy, widely criticised as expensive yet unlikely to have any real effect on carbon emissions in Australia, after repealing the previous government's carbon tax (The Australia Institute, 2014). In comparison, China has capped the amount of coal burnt in China every year and is rapidly expanding renewables (ABC News, 2013). It has also recently committed to cap growth in carbon emissions by 2030 in a landmark deal with the United States (Hall, A, 2014). This essay first outlines the principles of good policy development. It then examines the challenges that China and Australia face in confronting climate change. The essay outlines the differences in the two countries' political systems and discusses their climate change policies, including history of the policies' development. It then compares the two nations' climate change policies by applying policy development benchmarks. The essay argues that China's political structure has created a climate change framework that is better placed than Australia's framework to address the issue of climate change in the 21st century.

## Principles of Policy Development

The world is complex and intertwined, presenting unique challenges to policymakers as they try to improve economic, social and environmental well-being. Venema and Drexhage (2009) argue that to meet these challenges policy needs to be adaptive and forward looking. If society fails to properly implement a policy, the failure could in fact impede the progress of positive change as the world moves forward.

The policy cycle has essentially three stages: set up; design and implementation; and monitoring, learning and improving. The policy set-up stage is about developing a deep understanding of the issues related to the policy. Particular focus should be on local factors, including possible weaknesses and strengths. In this stage policymakers should engage with the community to build consensus on shared community values. They can achieve this goal through open communication and public dialogue about the issues and challenges being faced. Important indicators of the success of this stage of the policy should also be identified (Venema & Drexhage, 2009).

The second stage, policy design and implementation, should ensure that the policy meets identified outcomes. It should focus on creating opportunities and encourage individual freedoms. This process should utilise the best skills and knowledge about the topic, and policy should be scalable. The third stage, monitoring, learning and improvement, is integral to successful policy development. As such, improvements should be not ad hoc but part of a process designed within the policy and the benefits that will be achieved from such improvements should be made clear to the community from the outset. These improvements should be informed by rigorous analysis of data that enables policy developers to assess what the policy is achieving relative to the objectives identified in the policy set-up stage. China and Australia have taken very different approaches to development of their climate change policies

and their policies are thus vastly different. One way to compare the success of each nation's policy is to assess each policy and its development using the policy development principles outlined by Venema and Drexhage (2009).

## Challenges of Climate Change

### *Australia*

#### Past effects

Large portions of the Australian population live near the coastline where all the largest cities are located, which means there is serious vulnerability to sea level rises (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004). Monitoring of sea level rises at Australian coastal sites has shown that from 1920 to 2000, water level has risen 10cm. Additionally, the average temperature of Australia has increased 0.9°C since 1950. However there have been difficulties in developing policies to deal with these impacts. In the State of Queensland, the State Government invested billions into water pipelines and desalination plants after many local dams dried up following years of severe drought. Queensland is not alone in facing these events. In recent years, Victoria has had deadly bushfires, as well as floods. The same has occurred in New South Wales and Western Australia, and Tasmania, too, faced severe bushfires in January 2015. In the year ending June 2012, emissions per capita were estimated to be 24.4 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e) per person. Only Bahrain, Bolivia, Brunei, Kuwait and Qatar have higher levels (Carbon Neutral, 2011). These facts indicate the need for serious climate change mitigation policy to be undertaken in Australia.

#### Future challenges

The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and the Australian Bureau of Meteorology both have modelling showing that by 2030 the average temperature in Australia will have increased between 0.6 and 1.5C (CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology, 2014). They expect that rainfall patterns will continue to change with less rain in southern areas during winter, in southern and eastern areas during spring, and in south-western areas during autumn.

Another concern for the future is significant loss of the unique biodiversity that Australia currently enjoys. A report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2014) identifies concerns that include areas such as the Great Barrier Reef that is listed as one of the seven natural wonders of the world (The Seven Natural Wonders, 2011), Queensland Wet Tropics, Kakadu Wetlands, Sub-Antarctic Islands, Alpine Areas, as well as changes to the unique biodiversity in Southwest Australia. The report also raised concerns about likely reductions in Australia's agricultural output and loss of infrastructure due to extreme weather events.

### *China*

#### Past effects

The effects of climate change in China have been felt in a number of ways in the past. The average air temperature has increased by 0.5 to 0.8 degrees during the past 100 years, slightly higher than the global average, and most of the temperature rise was observed in the past 50 years. The type of weather events in China over the past 50 years has also changed, particularly in terms of extreme weather events. This is evidenced by the growing disparity of weather events throughout the country, with the northern and north eastern parts of China suffering from severe drought even while the country experiences higher than average precipitation. This is because the middle and southern areas have received large amounts of precipitation, so large they have resulted in flooding in many areas. As well as these climate changes, the rate at which sea levels along China's coastline have risen over the past 50 years, by

approximately 2.5mm/annum, is also higher than the global average (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014).

#### Future challenges

China faces a number of problems in combating climate change heading forward, particularly in light of climate change indicators revealing damaging change at a faster rate than the global average. China's population represents approximately 20 per cent of the global population, a share this is anticipated to continue growing. This situation presents a number of problems for combating climate change, particularly for trying to strike a balance between agricultural lands and preserving vital forest areas. A second challenge tied to the size of China's population is the extent of its urbanisation and city sprawl, which leads to higher density living, increased strain on surrounding resources, and heavier pollution. In particular, China's reliance on fossil fuels for energy creation will continue to play a large role in determining China's ability to combat climate change by minimising CO<sub>2</sub> levels. Lastly, as China begins to emerge as a developed country with a more affluent civilisation, the Chinese government will have to try and offset the increased energy demands and use of space often associated with higher living standards (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014).

## Climate Change Policy

### *Australia*

#### Australia's political system

Australia's system is based on the federal structure of the United States and the Westminster Parliamentary system of the United Kingdom. The Australian Federal Government (Commonwealth Government) must act in accordance with the Australian Constitution. It can legislate where it has been granted the relevant power under section 51 of the Constitution. The States have reserve powers, which means that they can legislate in any area unless expressly prohibited by the Constitution. States thus have the power to legislate in many areas where the Commonwealth does. However, if there is a conflict between State and Commonwealth Law, under s109 of the Constitution, the Commonwealth Law prevails (Ellis, 2009).

The Commonwealth has no express powers under s51. But this does not prevent the Commonwealth from taking action. The Commonwealth Government has used its taxation powers (s51[ii]), its external affairs powers (s51[xxix]) and corporations powers (s51[xx]) to advance climate change policy (Green, 2012).

#### Climate change policy

Two main parties – one within a coalition of smaller parties – operate in Australia, the centre-right Coalition made up of the Liberal and National Parties and the centre-left Labor Party. The centre-right Coalition Government led by Prime Minister John Howard was elected in 1996 and won the next three elections. The Howard Government announced that if it were to win the 2007 election it would begin work on implementing an emissions trading scheme. In this election he was up against the Labor Party led by Kevin Rudd, who stated that climate change was the greatest moral, economic and political challenge of our generation (The Australian, 2010). Rudd commissioned the *Garnaut Climate Change Review*, and after reviewing the findings of the report announced that if elected, his government would legislate an emissions trading scheme. The Rudd-led Labor Party comfortably won government from Howard at the 2007 election.

The Rudd Government brought environment policy to the forefront of public policy. Prime Minister Rudd began working on an emissions trading scheme known as the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS), but he was unable to pass the CPRS through the parliament. His deputy Julia Gillard replaced him as Prime Minister in June

2010 and did not pursue the CPRS. The 2010 election resulted in a hung parliament with both the Labor Party and the Coalition each winning 72 seats. After several days of negotiations Gillard was able to form a minority government with the support of three independents and the Australian Greens (an environmentalist party with several Senators and one seat in the House of Representatives).

As part of an agreement with the Greens, in February 2011 Prime Minister Gillard announced the Clean Energy Legislation which passed that year. However the Labor Government was defeated at the 2013 election, replaced by the Coalition Government led by Prime Minister Abbott. In July 2014, Prime Minister Abbott repealed what he called the Carbon Tax passed under the Labor government, and the Abbott government has implemented a 'direct action plan' whereby government subsidises polluters to reduce emissions.

Now only a few other climate change policies remain, since when the Abbot Government repealed what it called the carbon tax, it also repealed much of the other climate change related legislation passed under the Labor government. Renewable Energy Targets to ensure 20 per cent of Australia's energy comes from renewable sources by 2020 remain in effect, as does the Clean Energy Finance Corporation that is to provide a new source of finance to renewable energy, energy efficiency and low emissions technologies. Also, in the deal brokered by the Abbott government to legislate the direct action model, the Climate Change Authority has been reinstated to examine the viability of a future emissions trading scheme.

The Clean Energy Finance Corporation's purpose is to enhance the clean energy sector by creating commercial investment into viable projects. Its powers therefore include power to issue loans, loan guarantees and equity investments, seeking not to crowd out private investment but to provide extra assistance where private investment is too expensive or not available at all. The Corporation cannot provide grants and cannot invest in carbon capture and storage or in nuclear energy. A large focus of the Corporation's investment will be in the renewable energy sector, and its other investment areas include energy efficiency and low emissions technology. The Corporation's overarching purpose is to transform how the business sector views the green technology sector.

The Renewable Energy Target is legislated to reduce pollution levels from those of 2000 by 5 per cent by 2020 and by 80 per cent by 2050, primarily by producing electricity from renewable sources. However the Coalition government is considering changes to these targets.

## *China*

### Chinese political system

The People's Republic of China is, according to the Chinese Constitution, a socialist state under the people's democratic dictatorship led by the working class and based on the alliance of workers and peasants. The fundamental framework of China's political system is made up of four parts: the systems of people's congresses, multi-party cooperation, regional ethnic autonomy, and self-governance at the primary level of society.

China is a developing country with a territory of 9.6 million square kilometres, 1.3 billion people and 56 ethnic groups. To push forward modernisation in such a populous country with such a vast landmass, it is imperative to have a strong leadership core. To maintain this essential strong core of leadership, the Chinese political system has a number of key features. These include a monopoly of power for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) along with a hierarchical pattern in Party and government structure that is highly bureaucratic. The relationship between the Party and the government has a parallel structure and creates a dual bureaucracy.

The central legislative structures of the Chinese state are the National People's Congress (NPC) and its Standing Committee. Both are empowered to create legislation and make major decisions. One of NPC's major functions is to examine and approve national economic and social development plans. Similar to the government system in Australia, there are territorial layers of state administration in China, which has one central government and numerous local governments. These governments are elected by people's congresses.

The political party system is known as the system of multi-party cooperation and political consultation and operates under the leadership of the CCP. Under this system, the CCP rules the country and the democratic parties participate in state affairs to ensure that the people are the masters of the state. The strong leadership of the CCP is the fundamental guarantee for China's socialist modernisation, social harmony and stability. The CCP has exclusive right to legitimise and control political organisations, which means it has supreme authority.

### Climate change policy

The National Development and Reform Commission released a report in 2013 that laid out the Chinese Government's response to climate change over the five year development period. The policy is multi-faceted. It includes improving top-level planning and management systems, introducing mitigation measures and adaption measures, developing pilot projects and improving monitoring, as well as plans to participate at an international level.

To improve top-level planning and management systems, the Chinese government is improving governing bodies by appointing people with expertise in climate change. It is strengthening strategic studies and climate change planning. It has also begun to promote legislation on climate change.

The Chinese Government's mitigation policies include drastically adjusting and upgrading traditional industries. To replace emission intensive industries the government will support 'strategic and newly emerging industries' and 'vigorously develop the service industry'. The Government plans to optimise the energy structure by promoting cleaner ways to use current fossil fuel plants and by developing non-fossil fuel. This is complemented by the development of an energy efficiency program to release pressure from the energy sector. Other parts of the mitigation strategy include creating forest carbon sinks and controlling emissions from agriculture (The People's Republic of China, 2013).

On the adaption side, the Government is utilising several agencies to prevent and mitigate natural disasters that arise from climate change, including a monitoring and early warning system. It is also endeavouring to enhance agriculture by developing effective water usage processes. Since climate change will place a strain on China's water resources, the government is revising planning on water usage of the country's seven main water basins. The government is also implementing strategies for coastal areas and ecosystems, as well as for public health. China plans to play a constructive role in international negotiations by being a proactive participant in UN negotiations. China has also begun to engage in extensive bilateral and multilateral climate change dialogues and consultations (The People's Republic of China, 2013).

## Comparison

The political systems of Australia and China have produced very different climate change policies. To determine how successful these two policies are we can apply the principles that Venema and Drexhage outlined for adaptive policies, according to the three stages discussed above. In the first stage, 'policy set up', Australia has failed to build community consensus using shared community values. This is evidenced by the

divisive campaign between then Prime Minister Julia Gillard and then Opposition Leader Tony Abbott. There is still? not yet agreement amongst the community in Australia about how to proceed and deal with the complex and important challenges that climate change presents.

In comparison, engagement with the community is a part of China's large and multifaceted climate change policy. The Government is engaging with industry to reduce pollution levels and engaging with communities to improve energy efficiency. These moves improve the likelihood that China will be able to successfully reduce its emissions.

The second stage of adaptive policy is 'policy design and implementation'. Australia's remaining policy is the Renewable Energy Targets and the Clean Finance Corporation. While these two are important in addressing climate change, on their own they will not meet the targets that Australia has set for itself. China on the other hand has given its self the best chance of dealing with climate change by enacting a policy that deals with both mitigation of climate change by reducing emissions, and adapting to climate change by developing strategies to deal with climate change related disasters. The Government is also talking about the issue on a global level by participating in global, bilateral and multilateral climate change discussions. These steps are in addition to plans to transform industries from old emission intensive industries to new cleaner industries.

The last stage is 'monitoring, learning and improvement'. The current Australian Climate Change policy does not contain any monitoring and improvement mechanisms to deal with changing situations. China's policy has implemented these changes to its government bodies to include expertise in climate change issues, so that future government decisions can reflect the goals highlighted in the Government's climate change policy. Through its political system, China has implemented a comprehensive climate change policy that will transform industry and is capable of meeting future changes. Australia's climate change policy response is weak by comparison with China's. Australia has no long term systems in place to ensure that the county will meet its emission reduction targets.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Australia and China have very different political systems and very different climate change policies. The Australian government has not been able to commit to a policy that has bipartisan support from the two major parties and climate change policy has been changed repeatedly. This has undermined any real benefits of policies aimed at addressing the effects of climate change. It has also eroded confidence in the business community as the regulatory environment in which they are operating continues to change. In contrast, China has maintained fairly consistent climate change policy settings, with a gradual shift towards greater action. In China's stable political environment, business has been able to operate with certainty and policies have been allowed to operate for long enough to have an impact. Despite this benefit of stability in policy and government, China still has a very long way to go before its climate change policy is stringent enough to effect any substantial change in carbon emission levels and the related effects of climate change. Australia's policies have in the most part been more ambitious than those pursued in China. If the two major parties in Australia can agree on an effective policy, such as in the lead up to the 2007 federal election when both parties were proposing an emissions trading scheme, then Australia could still take a leading role in addressing climate change globally. However without a similar level of stability as has been seen in the Chinese approach to this policy area, Australia will continue to lag behind much of the world in addressing one of this century's most important policy areas.

## References

- ABC News 2013, 'China taking the lead on climate change: study', ABC News, World, [www.abc.net.au/news/2013-04-29/an-china-global-climate-change-leader/4657300](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-04-29/an-china-global-climate-change-leader/4657300) accessed 2 September 2014.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004, 'Regional population growth, Australia and New Zealand, 2001–02', *Year Book 2004*, [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/1301.0Feature%20Article32004?opendocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/1301.0Feature%20Article32004?opendocument)
- Carbon Neutral 2011, 'Australia's greenhouse gas emissions', *Climate Change*, [www.carbonneutral.com.au/climate-change/australian-emissions.html](http://www.carbonneutral.com.au/climate-change/australian-emissions.html)
- CSIRO & Bureau of Meteorology 2014, 'State of the climate 2014', [www.csiro.au/State-of-the-Climate-2014](http://www.csiro.au/State-of-the-Climate-2014)
- Ellis, E, 2009, *Principles and Practice of Australian Law* (2nd edition), Lawbook Co, Sydney.
- Green, F 2012, 'Why Clive's carbon challenge should fail', *Business Spectator*, *Climate*, [www.businessspectator.com.au/article/2012/3/28/policy-politics/why-clives-carbon-challenge-should-fail](http://www.businessspectator.com.au/article/2012/3/28/policy-politics/why-clives-carbon-challenge-should-fail)
- Hall, A 2014, 'US and China's climate change agreement prompts calls for Australia to follow suit', ABC News, World, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-11-13/calls-for-australia-to-reduce-emissions-after-us-china-deal/5887474>
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2014, 'Chapter 24', *Fifth Assessment Report (AR5)*, [ipcc-wg2.gov/AR5/images/uploads/WGIAR5-Chap24\\_FGDall.pdf](http://ipcc-wg2.gov/AR5/images/uploads/WGIAR5-Chap24_FGDall.pdf) accessed 18 September 2014.
- The Australia Institute, 2014 'Coalition's direct action plan expensive and ineffective', The Australia Institute Research, <http://www.tai.org.au/node/341> accessed 20 November 2014.
- The Australian* 2010, 'Politics trumps a moral challenge', *The Australian*, [www.theaustralian.com.au/news/features/politics-trumps-a-moral-challenge/story-e6frg6z6-1225859592923?nk=c0dcdb794b1689a33fe9e0f9f2d0b718](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/features/politics-trumps-a-moral-challenge/story-e6frg6z6-1225859592923?nk=c0dcdb794b1689a33fe9e0f9f2d0b718) accessed 22 September 2014.
- The People's Republic of China 2013, 'China's policies and action for assessing climate change', *The National Development and Reform Commission*, <http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201311/P020131108611533042884.pdf>
- a
- The Seven Natural Wonders 2011, *Oceania*, [sevensnaturalwonders.org/category/oceania/](http://sevensnaturalwonders.org/category/oceania/)
- Venema H & Drexhage J 2009, 'The need for adaptive policies', in D Swanson & S Bhadwal (eds), *Creating Adaptive Policies. A guide for policy-making in an uncertain world*. Sage, New Delhi.



# 4. Comparison of Attrition in Education in Australia and China – Causes and Solutions

Monique FILET, Branden ROWE, LIU Wen Xin and SHANG Fei

Australian and Chinese citizens are fortunate that education is a fundamental right, provided under and protected by the rule of law. Although the two countries' systems are very different from each other, they both allow for and enforce fundamental education beginning for children at a young age. Importantly, Zhang and Zhu (2009) assert that the depth and breadth of a country's education system reveal the degree of civilisation within that country. For many in the twenty-first century, education is seen as the pivotal driver in reducing classic societal class differences through promoting academic and professional development and thereby increasing the opportunities available to society as a whole. However, modern societies continue to face a variety of barriers in their quest for a universal standard of education. This paper highlights and analyses the significance of geography in relation to Chinese student retention. It then critically contrasts these retention indicators with Australia's dominant educational barriers, which are students identifying with low socioeconomic status and belonging to at-risk cultural groups.

## Dropout in China

After the vast economic, political and policy reform in China during the 1950s, overall retention rates in Chinese schools have continually improved. The attrition rate in rural areas, where more than half the Chinese population lives, has however, remained persistently high. According to the Statistical Communique of Development of the Chinese Educational Ministry, in 2003 the national attrition rate for middle school students in China was 2.84 per cent, but in rural areas this figure was between 5 per cent and 15 per cent. Investigations of three provinces in western and central China in 2015 found the attrition rate in rural areas is almost 23 per cent and sometimes even more than 50 per cent (Wang 2005). Thus it can be seen that the countryside accounts for the main body of Chinese attrition. Attrition in rural areas have obvious characteristics. First, a surge occurs when rural students from different areas are in Grade 8 (Chen, 2010). Second is a trend in group attrition, meaning once a few students drop out, others will follow more quickly (Chen, 2010). Third, in poor areas the dropout rate for girls is commonly higher than for boys (Chen, 2010), with female illiteracy accounting for more than two-thirds of the total number illiterate school-aged youth (Chen, 2010). Students in rural areas drop out of school for diverse reasons, ranging from their personal attitudes, to traditional family values, underfunded schools and poorly enforced policy.

With China's economic and social development in recent decades, the rate of rural dropouts because of poverty, labour opportunities and indifference from their parents is sharply decreasing (Zhang and Zhao, 2009). However, students' attitudes may create personal barriers towards maintaining study. Shi (2007) reported findings of a study conducted in remote mountainous areas that found 30 per cent of the student population felt drained by study, and 50 per cent were influenced by ideas that 'knowledge is useless'. This research suggests that in recent years, students' personal reasons and their belief that 'knowledge is useless' are the main reasons for school dropout in remote places.

Yet many rural children expect that their income will be proportional to their educational level (Zhang and Zhu, 2009). Surveys of students in the countryside around the city of Zhumadian in Henan province found that 65 per cent considered university education will give them the opportunity for a greater salary and stable income, 25 per cent believed university education will enhance the quality of their cultural life; and 10 per cent pursue university studies for other reasons (Yao, 2010). It can be seen that many students link knowledge to money and think that high education level equals higher living standards. However, once students face the frustrations of daily life, suggestions that 'education is useless' and 'knowledge is useless' may influence their decision to pursue traditional work such as farming. These kinds of utilitarian values can hinder the ability of rural students to accept education positively, ultimately harming the ability of many to improve their lives through better education.

Next we look at the results of unintentional pressures that families in rural areas may place upon their children to improve their wealth. First, families suffering economic hardship often cannot afford their children's education fees, forcing the children to drop out of school (Wang, 2006). Children who live in these kinds of conditions often need to help with heavy housework while also taking on the burden of making money for the family (Wang, 2006). Consequently, as Wang's research demonstrates, these students cannot enjoy educational resources like children from families in more favourable financial circumstances. Second, many rural parents believe that unless their child is performing well in the education system, then 'education is useless'. If children have good grades, these parents push their children to be a top student. Conversely, if a child performs poorly at school, parents often insist that their child can do farm work well without knowledge and so make a living without education, leading to their children dropping out. Third, some parents still have a 'preference of boys over girls' (Jin, 2011). Even if they have financial security, these families will send only boys to school, believing that education for their daughters is a waste of money (Jin, 2011). This gender discrimination means many Chinese girls in rural areas will not have education and will instead be forced to stay home. Jiang, Chen and Chen (2014) found the enrolment rate for females was 5 per cent lower than for their male peers in rural schools.

After reform of the 1950s, the condition of education in Chinese rural areas improved considerably. Compared to urban areas, however, in rural areas many severe problems still exist. On the one hand, meagre conditions and dull school life make students lose interest in learning, leaving them to favour work. Often in rural areas, school life is boring and students' interests and integrated development are restrained. This may not be surprising when these children are usually presented with outdated and outmoded knowledge and information (Yao, 2010). Students' creative spirit and practical ability are restrained, so their enthusiasm remains low. The traditional model of school management requires students to unconditionally accept education provided by the school and obey the rules completely. Students who listen to teachers are set up as good models, while those who challenge authority are punished. This model suppresses students' interests, hobbies and lively nature. As Chen (2010) observed, 'An examination-oriented education system makes the curriculum singular and filled with subjects designed to simply be passed in examination ... Many schools lack classrooms and educational equipment, and are crowded with students'.

It is obvious that these backward educational conditions are restraining children's development in rural areas. In addition, due to their undeveloped economy and limited education resources, rural areas often find it difficult to attract outstanding teachers. This leads directly to a lower level of teaching, as teachers do not have effective teaching methods, and negative interaction between teachers and students makes their relationship tense. Some teachers treat students with corporal punishment in any shape or form, especially when students have bad grades. Poor student-teacher relationships often cause hatred and fear, which can directly result in dropout of middle school students in remote places (Li, 2004).

In addition to the factors discussed above, the high attrition rate in undeveloped districts is also related to lack of support from the government and society. The current Chinese education policy does not pay enough attention to rural education. Education in rural areas still faces a huge problem of insufficient funding and resources (Chen, 2010). Education appropriations are often allocated in fixed ways, diverted and held back. Furthermore, under the current system education departments fail to acknowledge the difference between urban and suburban students in educational conditions and resources. National teaching programs are formulated according to the development character of middle school students in the city, as are curriculum standards and teaching content. These do not take into account the characteristics of rural students, instead reflecting the influence of 'city centre theory' (Wang, 2011). Cities and rural areas have been treated separately for a long time in China, with cities always enjoying the priority of strategic planning (Wang, 2011). Consequently, this approach often leads to social resources favouring cities, and causing areas of undeveloped suburban districts to gradually increase. In addition, the *Education Act*, the *Law for the Protection of Juveniles* and the *Compulsory Education Law*, which dictate the educational rights and opportunities that should be given to youth, are not only not carried out in some rural areas, but citizens in these areas fail to recognise the failure to carry out these laws (Zhang, 2007).

### Attrition in Australia

Research suggests that one of the largest inhibitors to student success and retention in Australian schools is student identification with a low socioeconomic status or background (Ramburuth & Hartel, 2010). Ramburuth and Hartel (2010) broadly describe socioeconomic status as combined measure of a person's individual, or their family's, economic and social standing in relation to society as a whole. As such, these authors assert that individuals with higher socioeconomic backgrounds have significantly more access to educational and professional opportunities and as a result are often more successful than their low status counterparts. Matthews (2006) reveals that in Australia students from the lower fifth percentile are six times more likely to drop out than those from the upper fifth percentile due to a multitude of factors. These include lack of institution or home-based support mechanisms or lack of available finance, as well as the overall importance attributed to education by the individual and their wider family.

Ramburuth and Hartel's (2010) research found that similar to the situation faced by students in rural China, in Australia it is low socioeconomic students who are at greater risk of dropping out, due to the socioeconomic makeup of the institution itself. These researchers contend that since the majority of students in higher learning institutions have medium to high levels of socioeconomic status, those with low status or backgrounds were at a much higher risk of becoming disenfranchised and dropping out due to their inability to create and sustain friendships and support networks.

Reynolds (2005) contends that in terms of poor retention rates within higher education, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are one of the most at-risk groups. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that only 49 per cent of these students complete their high school education, compared to 81 per cent of non-indigenous students (ABS, 2010). Reynolds (2005) asserts that this is due to a variety of factors including cultural differences and lack of support, as well as a lack of adequate educational facilities. But Reynolds contends that this is also due to the fragmented history of Australia; in terms of recognition and basic rights, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are only now beginning to have full access to facilities and the support networks necessary to succeed with their education. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are therefore often the first member of their family to move up the education system so they lack the personal networks and advice that is often associated with student success. Reynolds contends that consequently, a wide

variety of support mechanisms is necessary to address the high dropout rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

## Solutions

Although this serious problem exists in remote China and throughout Australia, there are a number of solutions that can assist in alleviating the problem. First we look at government initiatives offered by both nations. We then consider how, without support from a student's family or personal development of a student's attitude, these initiatives may be inadequate.

To combat the poor retention rates of low socioeconomic students in Australia, a number of reforms and initiatives have been pursued by the Australian government and by a variety of academic institutions and other interested parties (Lim, Gemici, Rice & Karmel, 2011). These initiatives include support for low-income students and families, a wide variety of scholarships, and importantly on-campus support mechanisms such as counselling and mentoring services (Lim et al., 2011). A number of government and university-wide initiatives have also been put in place to address the poor rates of retention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. These initiatives include academic and equity scholarships, financial aid programs, and various mentoring and tutoring services.

Importantly these programs aim to overcome educational barriers through providing students with the tools necessary to succeed in what is for them a new and often difficult environment. These programs are aided by strategic targets that are set by academic and government organisations and aim to foster a strong culture of education and opportunity. However, these programs are often contingent on regular government funding, which in the case of programs such as the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme are under review and subject to change (Hare, 2014). Consequently, Reynolds (2005) contends, there is a lack of continuity within these schemes and therefore they often fail to meet their potential, instead providing only a short-term fix rather than the fundamental changes required to combat poor retention rates. Young (2004) draws attention to the fact that whilst the Australian government offers some services, the effectiveness of these services in mitigating the poor retention rates of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds still requires attention. Young explains this is often due to poor promotion and management of these institutional support programs.

In China, various considerations should inform moves to decrease the rate of dropout in rural areas. First it is necessary to ensure that the *Education Act*, *the Compulsory Education Law* and *the Law for Protection of Juveniles* are all implemented comprehensively. By local governments strengthening their supervision, these governments are better able to ensure that all laws and regulations are implemented properly. Without proper implementation of these laws, increased investment by the Chinese government in education in the countryside will be futile. It must be ensured that access to good quality education is protected under law.

Investment should focus on ensuring that compulsory education in rural areas is implemented, that school conditions in rural areas are improved, and that appropriate educational resources are available in rural areas. Working conditions and rewards for teachers in rural areas need to be improved to enhance rural teachers' enthusiasm for education. Rural schools also need to be better equipped with up-to-date technology and learning resources to ensure education for all-round development is achieved.

Schools should optimise their campus environment, to enhance school appeal to students and to raise student's enthusiasm and initiative. Schools should concentrate on cultivating students who can establish a positive outlook on life and appropriate values, and can set achievable targets for study and life. To achieve this, schools need to concentrate on executing quality-oriented education and reducing students'

academic burden. Teachers need to improve their ideological and moral qualities and sense of responsibility, and strengthen communication with students to help establish democratic, equal and harmonious relationships between students and teachers. Yao (2010) suggests that teachers should improve their academic level, transfer old concepts, optimise lesson structures and explore new teaching methods.

It is clear that governments' quality investment in education plays a significant role in enhancing not only access to education, but also students' motivation and support for keeping students interested in study. Beyond direct funding for education, by increasing poverty alleviation efforts regional governments will also be able to assist in preventing school dropout through poverty.

There are shortcomings in implementation and effectiveness of government services to support students from lower socio-economic backgrounds due to internal policy inadequacies. However, Young (2004) suggests these may also be due to the unwillingness of students to self-identify and seek assistance. And James (2001) argues that since many of these support mechanisms are contingent on government support, students are less likely to feel supported by an ever changing funding situation, as is currently the case in Australia. Further, James contends, these factors impact not only on students from a low socioeconomic background, but also on a wide variety of disadvantaged students.

In both rural China and Australia, students can focus on changing their personal attitude towards study. By developing a healthy attitude to learning and discovering the fulfilment of study, rural students may begin to change their preference for work over school. Additionally, if we want to solve the root cause of the high attrition rate, students' family, school and society should provide appropriate guidance and support. They should help students develop a healthy and positive attitude towards knowledge, letting them experience the fun of discovering new knowledge, and self-actualisation and continuous enrichment in the process of studying. This can help change the utilitarian mindset found in Chinese students, or the lack of confidence and motivation faced by some Indigenous Australian students and inspire them to begin enjoy studying.

Unique to China is the immense pressure placed on students to achieve best possible grades. By letting go of the attitude that grades are everything, families of rural Chinese students are able to alleviate pressure that this belief creates and better support their children. Parents are usually considered to be the first teachers of their children, so the ideas and guidance of parents have great influence over their future. In family life, parents ought to communicate more with children, treat children equally and foster a harmonious atmosphere in the family. Parents should not judge their child's ability according to scores; instead, they should create a relaxing atmosphere, which enables the child to feel a greater sense of fulfilment and achievement. Moreover, parents should not insist that boys are better than girls, nor stop children from leaving school. Society should judge a school from a range of aspects, instead of only its enrolment rate and rank of grades. Attention needs to be paid to students' integrated development and to providing students in rural areas with more comprehensive guidance for their individual development.

## Conclusion

It is evident that students from both rural China and lower socio economic areas in Australia face serious challenges in finishing their compulsory education. This often results in students dropping out of the education system in favour of work. Although these challenges appear to be various and vast, the solutions available are equally so. With better economic, cultural and personal support, schools and students in both China and Australia will have the opportunity to ensure they are better equipped to maintain student retention and personal satisfaction with their education. Greater investment in school resources and implementation of educational policies is needed

to make sure schools stay as interesting and engaging as possible. By placing value on education no matter the results, students will feel more confident within themselves and supported by their community to finish their schooling. The most marginalised and disadvantaged in our society should not be further disadvantaged by lack of access to quality education. The cycles of class differences and marginalisation should not be perpetrated by any barriers in society, including barriers to education. Accessible, high quality education is the building block of every great nation. It is the responsibility of all parties to ensure that no child feels undue pressure to drop out from their studies, but rather feels supported through the whole education journey.

It is quite easy to comment from a position of privilege on the plight of the disadvantaged and suggest methods to combat these issues. However, real fundamental and effective change stems from the opening up of quality, transparent dialogue between all parties, whereby viable solutions can be created from a cooperative stance. Critically, this will enable a more holistic representation of society than the traditional, and largely unsuccessful, method of the privileged representing and directing the less fortunate, and in ways that require much more than a 'one size fits all' approach. In this, both nations have a long way to go to ensure that educational gaps are addressed to ultimately ensure overall national prosperity.

## References

- Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010, 'The health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples',  
<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/lookup/4704.0Chapter350Oct+2010>
- Chen Yinzheng 2010, Research on dropout students during compulsory education in poverty-stricken areas, Masters thesis at Shandong Normal University.
- Hare, J 2014, 'Key indigenous tuition program disbanded',  
<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/key-indigenous-tuition-program-disbanded/story-e6frqjx-1227048080456>
- Jiang Wenning, Chen Zhenzhong & Chen Weili 2014, 'Investigation and outlet of rural girls' school dropout', Education Observation.
- Jin Jianzhou, 2011, 'Research on rural middle school dropout problem', Law and Social.
- Li Kaiqi 2006, 'Reasons and solutions for dropout students in rural areas', School Newspaper of Yuncheng Academy.
- Li Zhongshuang 2004, Analysis and discussions of the current dropout phenomenon among rural middle school students, Masters thesis of Northeast Normal University.
- Patrick Lim, Sinan Gemici, John Rice, Tom Karmel, (2011) "Socioeconomic status and the allocation of government resources in Australia: How well do geographic measures perform?", Education + Training, Vol. 53 No: 7, pp. 570–586
- Ramburuth P; Härtel CEJ, 2010, 'Understanding and meeting the needs of students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds', *Multicultural Education and Technology Journal*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 153 – 162, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/17504971011075156>
- Shi Youqing 2007, 'Reasons and solutions for dropout in remote mountainous areas', Guangxi Education.
- Wang Anquan 2011, 'Adminstrating city and countryside schools separately is the main reason for rural students' dropout', School Newspaper of Hebei Normal.
- Wang Jinghong 2006, 'Investigation and countermeasures on rural middle school students' dropout from school', Aspect Social Sciences.
- Wang Jingying 2005, 'Causes and Countermeasures of rural junior high school students drop out', Northeast Normal University
- Xiao Hua 2013, The influence of the rural mother's educational level on her children's education, Masters thesis of Hunan University.

- Yao Jinzan 2010, An analysis of the current dropout phenomenon of rural middle school students, Masters thesis of Henan University.
- Zhang Li & Zhu Weihua 2009, 'Summary of reasons for the dropout of rural students', School Newspaper of Chuxiong Teachers Academy.
- Zhang Xiaoling & Zhao Yuan 2009, 'Analysis and countermeasures concerning rural middle school dropouts', Chinese school education.
- Zhang Xueqin 2007, 'Discussions about dropout students in rural areas', Education Research.
- Zhang Zhengbo & Zhu Teng 2009, 'The crux of rural students' dropout: A perspective on the driving force of education', Chinese school education.

# 5. Youth Political Participation in Australia and China: A Comparative Analysis

Giverny ATKINS, Inez BOTTA-STANWELL, ZHANG Yiyao and WANG Wen Chao

## I: Introduction

Participation in politics is an important concept in democratic political theories and perspectives on the 'rights and responsibilities of citizens' (Collin 2008b, p. 8). Youth participation in politics now takes many different forms, and is no longer limited to voting in both China and Australia (Fyfe, 2009, p. 39). Youth are now often involved in individual activism or in student politics at their university, and may choose to become an election candidate. They may also participate in a student representative council, as well as advocacy groups, and community organisations (Fyfe, 2009, p. 39). It is true that joining a political party and voting in elections are still popular and conventional forms of political participation for young people, however non-conventional political participation seems to be becoming increasingly favoured (Fyfe, 2009, pp. 40–41). Young people can feel excluded from the democratic process, and therefore the methods that youth employ to have their say are important to youth inclusion in the political process (Fyfe, 2009, p. 41). This essay considers youth as people aged between 15 and 25, and discusses both conventional and unconventional methods of youth political participation. It considers youth's voting behaviour, their tendency to join a political party, and their discussion and protests both offline and online. Through this discussion the similarities and differences between the political culture for youth in China and Australia are identified.

## II: Conventional Methods

Focusing on individual methods of political participation, the conventional or traditional modes include voting behaviour (Vromen, 2007, p. 50) and joining or participating in a political party (Fyfe, 2009, p. 40).

### *A: Voting behaviour*

#### (i) China

The right to vote is one of the basic political rights of citizens. According to the constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in article 34: citizens over the age of 18 have the right to vote and the right to be voted for regardless of their nationality, race, sex, occupation, family background, religious belief, education, or property status except persons deprived of political rights (The Legislative Affairs Office of the State Council, 2012, p. 121). Elections are divided into direct elections and indirect elections, and involve an equal voting and multi-candidate election.

A survey conducted by Huang Yonghong (cited in Fang, 2012, p. 207) found that when respondents could participate in the election of People's Congress at the county level, only 28.5 per cent took the initiative to vote. The actual overall turnout is higher however, but as this is influenced by activists, the true situation is not reflected by some statistics. It was found that college students often do not vote; 23.9 per cent thought 'the result has [been] decided by [the] leader', 5.3 per cent thought 'the



national People's Congress has less power', and 13.2 per cent thought 'the result has nothing [to do] with them' (Fang, 2012, p. 208).

The survey also showed that 14.5 per cent of students 'know a lot about the election process, the meaning, the candidates'; 32.6 per cent 'know some'; 49.3 per cent are 'not very clear'; and 3.6 per cent 'know nothing'. In terms of opinions on the value of elections, the survey found that 31.2 per cent thought the election had nothing to do with them, 47.8 per cent thought the election was just a form, 21.1 per cent said they are 'indifferent about voting', and only 18.9 per cent believed that elections are the embodiment of political rights. With regard to election results, 9.7 per cent said they focussed on the result of the election, 26.6 per cent said they would not concentrate on the result but would be aware of it, and 63.7 per cent said they did not care about the result (Yonghong cited in Fang, 2012, p. 207).

#### (ii) Australia

Voting in Australia is compulsory, and Australian youth aged 17 must register on the Australian Electoral Role and then take part in voting in State, Territory, or Federal elections from the age of 18 (Edwards, 2007, p. 540). If youth refuse to enrol, or alternatively refuse to vote, they may receive a fine (Edwards, 2007, p. 540). Young Australians in particular participate less in voting as it is estimated that only 80 per cent of eligible young Australians between the ages of 18 and 25 are actually enrolled to vote, compared to 95 per cent of the general population (Edwards, 2007, p. 540). Other authors have put the estimated percentage of youth voting in an election at 85 per cent (Fyfe, 2009, p. 39), which is generally lower than the population as a whole. Most young people vote because it is compulsory, but they do not see the efficacy in voting (Collin, 2008b, p. 6). It was found in a study that if voting were not compulsory, only 50 per cent would enrol to vote (Collin, 2008b, p. 13).

Around half of young people who were surveyed did not think they had enough knowledge of political issues, parties and voting (Collin, 2008b, p. 13). Another factor that affected enrolment among young people was housing instability, which impacts negatively on intention to enrol and to vote (Collin, 2008b, p. 13). Young people's intention to vote is increased if they have participated in civic activities or have been involved in activism such as contacting the media, elected representatives or attending demonstrations (Saha et al., 2005, p. 21). It has been suggested that the issue is not that young people are necessarily disengaged from the political process; it could be an issue of disenfranchisement (Edwards, 2007, p. 540). When discussing whether or not young people thought that their vote could be meaningful, there were numerous responses, which spoke to their feelings of 'powerlessness' and 'marginalisation' (Edwards, 2007, p. 545). Considering that many young people think democracy is important and they have interest in political issues, there are further explanations for unenthusiastic participation (Edwards, 2007, p. 552). Specifically, barriers such as political marginalisation of youth, laws that make it more difficult for youth to vote, and housing policies that affect young people may result in disenfranchisement, and therefore the State has a role in ensuring youth are able to be effectively involved in the political process (Edwards, 2007, p. 552).

### *B: Joining a political party*

#### (i) China

China has nine political parties, with the Communist Party of China (CCP) the largest and most predominant. At the end of June 2003, the number of college students joining the CCP had reached 700,000, which is 8 per cent of the total number of Chinese college students. More than 50 per cent of young people who apply to join the CCP are college students (Sun et al., 2010, p. 92). According to the CCP constitution, any citizen above 18 years old who holds a strong willingness to join the CCP has an equal right to be recruited (The Central Government of the People's Republic of China (CGPC) 2002, p. 2). Youth who enter the CCP do not necessarily

have to be senior members of the Communist Youth League (CYL) but it is essential that all members undertake a complex political investigation. The excerpt of political rights of CCP members is as below:

- 1) To attend relevant Party meetings, read relevant Party documents, and benefit from the Party's education and training.
- 2) To participate in the discussion of questions concerning the Party's policies at Party meetings and in Party newspapers and journals.
- 3) To make suggestions and proposals regarding the work of the Party.
- 4) To make well-grounded criticism of any Party organisation or member at Party meetings, to present information or charges against any Party organisation or member concerning violations of discipline or the law to the Party in a responsible way, to demand disciplinary measures against such a member, or call for dismissal or replacement of any incompetent cadre.
- 5) To participate in voting and elections and to stand for election.
- 6) To attend, with the right of self-defence, discussions held by Party organisations to decide on disciplinary measures to be taken against themselves or to appraise their work and behaviour; other Party members may also bear witness or argue on their behalf.
- 7) In case of disagreement with a Party resolution or policy, to make reservations and present their views to Party organisations at higher levels even up to the Central Committee, provided that they resolutely carry out the resolution or policy while it is in force.
- 8) To put forward any request, appeal, or complaint to higher Party organisations even up to the Central Committee and ask the organisations concerned for a responsible reply.

(CGPC, 2002, pp. 3–4).

A noteworthy truth is that although clear rights are regulated in the Constitution, the specific means of achieving these rights are not outlined in the Constitution. This may explain why joining the CCP is not regarded as a broadly effective method of political participation for youth in China. According to a survey conducted in four universities in Fujian province by Xing Jianhua in 2010, 72.9 per cent of college students had submitted their application to join the Party (cited in Fang 2012, p. 205). Their motivations include 'benefits for obtaining employment' (66.7 per cent), 'seeking better development in their official political career' (49.1 per cent), 'promoting self development' (41.2 per cent), 'making devotion to the society' (20.9 per cent), 'pursuing dreams and ideals' (19.5 per cent) and 'getting trust from others as a CCP member' (15.7 per cent) (Xing cited in Fang 2012, p. 205). Therefore, although there is a strong willingness of college students to join the CCP, most of their motivations are somewhat self-interested, as they tend to relate joining the CCP to their future career. This trend could very likely lead to inactive participation of college students in political actions in the CCP, because for them what matters is not their political rights and responsibilities as a CCP member, but the title itself.

#### (ii) Australia

One of the most traditional forms of political participation in Australia is becoming a member of a political party. However, currently Australian youth do not significantly engage in this form of political participation, with research showing a significant alteration in the number of youth members in present political parties. The number of youth in political parties is dropping whilst the age of existing members is increasing (Huntley, 2006, p. 131). A representative sample of youth aged from 18–34 found that more than one third were members of a union, whilst only 3 per cent were members of a political party (Vromen, 2003, p. 86). Despite this small representation of youth in political parties, this essay recognises that it is not necessarily an indication of 'broad levels of apathy or disengagement, but a generational change in common forms of political participation' (Collin 2008b, p. 8). These forms are discussed further in the essay, however Australian youth do have the opportunity to join political parties and many are involved in the youth sectors of prominent Australian political parties. In

August 2014, the Australian Democrats re-elected the youngest president of a political party in Australia at 21 years old.

Such low numbers of youth entering political parties have been attributed to a variety of causes. Some have argued that the lack of choice and variety of political parties has been a trigger for such low levels and has resulted in young Australians' reluctance to join a political party, as they may not always support the values and policies of one party (Beresford & Phillips, 1997, p. 14). This is supported by research finding that 72 per cent of Australian youth were not committed to the values or ideals of any political party (Beresford & Phillips, 1997, p. 14). Other youth have stated that it is their distrust in the government and political parties that hinders their desire to become a member, believing that their opinions would not influence the policies or actions of parties (Saulwick & Muller, 2006, p. 9). Another cause is the belief that political parties are not interested in representing the views and opinions of Australian youth, nor are they interested in creating policies concerning issues that affect young people (Collin, 2008b, p. 17). Further research has found that youth often consider politicians to be 'insincere and inaccessible' (Collin, 2007, p. 13).

In conclusion, there has been a significant decrease in the popularity of youth participation in politics by means of joining a political party. This can be attributed to a lack of diversity in political parties, and lack of policy directed towards youth issues. However, this does not mean youth are not interested in politics, as they have become increasingly engaged in non-traditional forms of political participation such as engaging through discussion and signing petitions both online and offline.

### III: Unconventional Methods

Unconventional methods of political participation are especially important for youth engagement, and the Internet has contributed to the development of these modes (Vromen, 2007, p. 49). They are facilitated by technology such as petitions, blogging and chain email letters (Fyfe, 2009, p. 41; Vromen, 2007, p. 49).

#### *A: Political discussion*

##### (i) China

A glimpse of other means of political participation for youth in China indicates that most youth limit their expression of political opinions in some way. Therefore, online political discussion becomes a vital way of political participation for youth. Online political activity refers to 'the awareness and behaviour of college students participating in and releasing political information on the Internet, online election, online voting, online discussion, online comment, and online petitions etc. in order to influence the political situation' (Fang, 2012, p. 208).

In 2009 Song Zhiguo conducted a survey on college students' online political participation, and found that 46.7 per cent of respondents believe the Internet is the major field of college students' political participation. 32.2 per cent regard online advocating as the best way to express their political opinions (cited in Fang, 2012, p. 208). The most popular platforms for participation in political issues among college students are e-mail (2.8 per cent), chat rooms (3.7 per cent), blogs (1.6 per cent), political websites (10.3 per cent), political forums (23.2 per cent), Baidu Tieba<sup>2</sup> (22.5 per cent), college bulletin board systems (BBS) (34.3 per cent) and others (1.6 per cent). Also, according to the survey conducted by Gao Wang in 2008, 11 per cent of college students air their opinions and articles online frequently; 49.2 per cent do this occasionally, 15.3 per cent have only done this once or twice and 23.8 per cent have never expressed their opinions on political issues online (cited in Fang, 2012, p. 209).

Since the microblogging site Weibo, and especially Sina Weibo has sprung up, college students have paid increasingly more attention to political issues discussed online and

have had the opportunity to become more involved (Bei, 2012, pp. 29–31). According to Tang Jiayi, more than 60 per cent of college students have an opinion on the ‘hot topics’ of Weibo, among which 44 per cent ‘pay close attention and participate in discussion actively’ (Tang, 2013, p. 229). The results of surveys discussed above depict young people in China as active and enthusiastic in online political discussion. But some scholars point out that these discussions, in which most of the youth are ‘onlookers’, tend to be irrational and disordered and are widening the gap between the virtual and realistic political situation (Wang, 2014, p. 102). Others recognise that, by working as a free channel to express young people’s political views, the Internet may weaken youth’s desire for participating in political activities in the real world (Wang, 2012, p. 21).

(ii) Australia

Political discussion among youth in Australia takes different forms, but particularly for youth these avenues can include participation in adult-organised decision making processes in schools and governments, and ‘everyday’ forms of discussion and participation, which include discussions in class, with families and friends, and particularly online (Collin, 2008b, pp. 14–16). Involving youth in decisions through ‘managed forms of participation’ is becoming more popular, however literature does not tend to focus on results and is adult focused (Collin, 2008b, p. 14).

At the Federal level of government, different initiatives have been utilised to involve young people in policy decisions such as the National Youth Roundtable, and National Indigenous Youth Leadership Group (Collin, 2008b, p. 14). In local governments there is more likely to be a mechanism for youth to participate in policy, however it is elitist and not necessarily representative of young people’s views (Collin, 2008b, p. 15). Informal or unstructured modes of participation like online chat, consultation and emails have been used by State governments, to improve youth connections with policy, and government initiatives (Collin, 2008b, p. 15). Informal methods of participation that encourage youth-led discussion on everyday issues affecting youth are considered to be more effective in encouraging participation and achieving positive outcomes (Vromen & Collin, 2010, p. 97).

For young people, discussion and being able to ‘have a say’ in their home and school life is especially important as they are able to see change directly (Collin, 2008b, p. 16). This theme is also present for online activities or discussion forums where the results of their participation can be observed (Collin, 2008b, p. 16). Young people use the Internet to interact with issues that they identify with and to gain knowledge, and it can make participation through discussion easier (Collin, 2008a, p. 539). Young people are likely to reject government online strategies, whilst informal strategies that can be used for ‘autonomous’ participation such as online spaces and nongovernmental organisations are favoured (Collin, 2008a, p. 539). Collin recognises the significance of the Internet for allowing youth to participate in politics in ‘their own time and on their own terms’ (Collin, 2007). Thus this form of political participation creates autonomy for youth in regard to their interest in political issues (Vromen, 2007). In 2012 it was found that 97 per cent of Australians under the age of 25 use Facebook (Chen & Vromen, 2012, p. 9). Politicians have recognised young Australians’ political use of social media, with the number of social media sites used by politicians doubling, and the number of politicians using Facebook rising from 8 to 146 from 2007 to 2011 (Macnamara & Kenning, 2010, p. 12). The Internet is an important forum for discussion especially for youth, as are other unconventional forms of participation such as protests (Walsh, 2012, p. 4).

*B: Protests*

(i) China

A survey by Gao Wang (cited in Fang, 2012, p. 210) shows that when it comes to the interests of the State, social justice, and public interests, students are more likely to

take action. With regard to protests, 63.2 per cent of students 'are willing to take action to protest', 21.1 per cent of students are not clear, and 14.9 per cent choose not to protest. As found by a survey of whether a number of college students had participated in protests, only 7.6 per cent had participated, 11.2 per cent were 'neutral', and 80.1 per cent had not participated (Wang cited in Fang, 2012, p. 210). This result shows that the proportion of students who have participated in protests is low, but students do choose street politics under certain conditions.

Offline political protest for Chinese youth is limited; online protest is more common. A typical online protest was in relation to the Diaoyu islands event. A Chinese fishing boat collided with two Japanese patrol boats in the waters off the Diaoyu islands on 7 September 2010. After this incident, there were a number of actions taken by Japan, such as inspecting the Diaoyu islands. Japanese lawmakers patrolled the islands, which caused tensions between China and Japan. On 11 September 2012, the so-called 'nationalisation' behaviour towards the Diaoyu islands by the Japanese government increased the gravity of the situation. Chinese young people conveyed online protest information to each other over the Internet, and QQ, Weibo and BBS came to be important instruments in allowing young people to participate in the activities of defending the Diaoyu islands. The number of articles related to this political protest was 18,598 (Yang & Zhang, 2014, p. 47), and on one day, the number of posts in BBS was 7485.

#### (ii) Australia

Contemporary forms of youth political participation in Australia have revealed a radical increase in non-electoral forms of participation. This includes participation in politics by means of protest, petitions, attending demonstrations, and through online social media pages such as Facebook. According to Collins, research has suggested 'young people value processes and experiences that are culturally relevant, fun, flexible, efficacious and where they personally get something out of it' (Collin, 2008b, p. 6). Of course, the development in technology and social media has had a significant effect on the culture of youth in Australia, and thus on the increase of non-electoral forms of political participation.

A youth survey revealed that 55 per cent of respondents said they had signed a petition. According to Earl and Schussman, online petition signing represents a culturally orientated political participation, as the process of signing is relatively relaxed, whilst supplying youth with satisfaction that their actions and opinions do make a difference (Earl & Schussman, 2008, p. 89). Another youth survey found that only 15 per cent of respondents had participated in a rally (Saha et al., 2005, p. 6). However, 47 per cent of students said 'they would "likely" or "very likely" join a protest in support of the peace/anti-war movement and 29 per cent would join a protest in support of the green movement' (Saha et al., 2005, p. 11). In Australia, recent protests against cuts to university funding have seen large numbers of youth gather to demonstrate and oppose government action. Australian youth have commented that participating in protests makes them feel 'empowered', as if they could make a difference, and as a way to learn more about a political issue (Saha et al., 2005, p. 13).

Demonstrations and other political activities are now often facilitated through communication over the Internet, and within online social media forums (Vromen, 2007, p. 61). Collin argues that this is due to the ability of youth to engage with online opportunities to discuss and take action on political issues that are important to them, and they are able to do so in a way that 'fits in with their lifestyles and their need for choice and flexibility' (2007, p. 16). Further, Collin noted that youth are motivated and inspired by being able to see how their online political participation has made a difference in relation to the changes in attitudes, or alterations in organisations' decisions (2008b, p. 16). The Internet and social media networks such as Facebook allow youth to easily access information about political events, discussions, or protests. Whilst social media has been a growing sphere for youth

participation, it is questionable whether what some have deemed 'slactivism' is actually participation (Walsh, 2012, p. 3). Campaigns such as 'Kony 2012' and 'Occupy' have drawn much negative commentary, however this overlooks and 'infantilises' young people and contributes to marginalising them from the political sphere (Walsh, 2012, pp. 3–4).

#### IV: Discussion

Youth participation in the political process is a complex issue, and not one that can (or should) be reduced to simple comparison. However, this essay aims to identify common themes in both conventional and non-conventional political participation by youth in Australia and China.

With regard to voting behaviour, in both China and Australia the right to vote is considered a key political right (Constitution of the People's Republic of China; Edwards, 2007, p. 540), despite differences in its implementation. In terms of voting behaviour, a much smaller percentage of Chinese college students vote than do Australian youth (Fang, 2012, p. 207; Fyfe, 2009, p. 39). Despite this seeming to indicate a higher participation in conventional forms of politics in Australia than in China, in Australia just under half of the youth also do not feel they have enough knowledge about political issues, parties and voting, and if voting were not compulsory it is likely that only half would enrol to vote (Collin, 2008, p. 13). The reasons for these low turnouts in both China and Australia may be complex, however it seems evident that youth in both nations at times feel that either they do not have an impact on the election results, or that they are not affected by them (Edwards, 2007, p. 552; Fang, 2012). Australian research shows feelings of powerlessness and marginalisation, which suggests that disenfranchisement could be a main issue, and both Chinese and Australian youth seem to doubt the efficacy of voting (Edwards, 2007, p. 552).

The participation figures for youth who join a political party are also low. Approximately 8 per cent of Chinese college students joined the Communist Party of China (Sun et al., 2010), whilst only about 3 per cent of Australians aged 18–34 are members of any political party (Vromen, 2003, p. 86). An important difference to note here is that while China has nine different parties, the Communist Party of China is the dominant party. In Australia there are two major parties that form the majority government, and a host of minor parties. In China, joining a political party is often not considered an effective way to participate politically, and college students may consider it more from a career point of view (Xing cited in Fang 2012, p. 205). Similarly, to some extent there is disinterest in joining a political party in Australia, with most youth not having values aligned to any party (Beresford & Phillips, 1997, p. 14). Australian youth have made comments regarding a lack of choice and variety of political parties (Beresford & Phillips, 1997, p. 14), and it is possible that a similar theme may be present among Chinese college students. In any case, dissatisfaction with conventional methods has led to greater participation in non-conventional methods.

Online political discussion is a vital method of political participation for Chinese youth, allowing them to influence the political climate (Fang, 2012). It is a more indirect method of participation, however the majority of youth do express themselves on the Internet and participate in discussions (Song cited in Fang, 2012, p. 208). While there are almost one in four college students who do not express political opinion online, Weibo has become an increasingly popular method of participation, with over 500 million registered users (Gao cited in Fang, 2012, p. 209; Tang, 2013, p. 229; Bei, 2012, p. 32). Similarly in Australia, online participation is preferred to organised mechanisms for youth participation that are generally run by adults (Collin, 2008b, pp. 14–16). Autonomous participation particularly through social media is growing, and Australian politicians have recognised this and increased their use of the same forums (Macnamara & Kenning, 2010, p. 12). Informal and unstructured modes of

communication are certainly preferred in both Australia and China, and in the current situation are the more effective methods for youth-led discussion (Collin, 2008b).

Taking discussion a step further and considering action – protests and petitions – youth in China and Australia do seem to be close to equally willing to participate in a protest (Gao cited in Fang, 2012, p. 210; Saha et al., 2005, p. 11). In terms of actual participation though, the number is much lower, although it is important to note that the Australian statistics concern school-aged children, rather than university-aged students (Gao cited in Fang, 2012, p. 210; Saha et al., 2005, p. 6). Offline protest is limited in China, but in Australia it has recently gained traction, especially concerning topical issues. Online protest for Chinese students has become a way to participate in current issues and to voice opinions (Yang & Zhang, 2014, p. 47). Similarly, the Internet and particularly Facebook allow easy access for Australian youth to share information about political events and protest, as well as to sign and share petitions (Collin, 2007). With the majority of young people saying they had signed a petition (Earl & Schussman, 2008, p. 89), this may now be one of the preferred forms of political participation in Australia. There has been some negative media attention to primarily youth-driven campaigns, contributing to marginalisation in this sphere (Walsh, 2012, pp. 3–4). Nevertheless, it seems that online forms in general are more flexible options for youth in Australia and China (Collin, 2008b, p. 6).

## V: Conclusion

This essay has considered how youth in China and Australia compare in terms of their political participation. The main findings from researchers suggest there has been a generational shift away from conventional forms of political participation and voting to online discussion and protest in both Australia and China. Various similarities and differences between Chinese and Australian youth participation have been identified, and suggest that some of the differences reflect the respective political systems and cultures. Notwithstanding these differences, similar themes of disenfranchisement and lack of belief in the efficacy of certain means of participation seem to be the key to understanding the shift from conventional to non-conventional methods. These themes, which underlie a preference for non-conventional methods and Internet use, also present challenges to encouraging youth participation through formal means. Further research is required to overcome these challenges and to identify how to best enable the younger generation in both China and Australia to be able to participate in the political system without inadvertently creating further barriers (see Edwards, 2007, p. 552).

## References

- Bei, J 2012, 'How Chinese journalists use Weibo microblogging for investigative reporting', Reuters Insitute Fellowship Paper, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University Of Oxford, Oxford.
- Beresford, Q & Phillips, H 1997, 'Spectators in Australian politics? Young voters' interest in politics and political issues', *Youth Studies Australia*, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 11–16.
- Chen, PJ & Vromen, A 2012, 'Social media, youth participation and Australian elections' *AEC Electoral Research Forum*, Australian Electoral Commission, Canberra.
- Collin, P 2007, 'Policies for youth participation and the development of new political identities', *Are we there yet? National Youth Conference Proceedings: Peer Reviewed Papers*, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Melbourne.
- Collin, P 2008a, 'The internet, youth participation policies, and the development of young people's political identities in Australia', *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 11, no. 5, pp. 527–42.

- Collin, P 2008b, 'Young people imagining a new democracy: Literature review', Literature Review, Whitlam Institute, University of Western Sydney, 9781741081787, Foundation For Young Australians, Sydney.
- Earl, J & Schussman, A 2008, 'Contesting cultural control: Youth culture and online petitioning', in *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth*, MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Edwards, K 2007, 'From deceit to disenfranchisement: reframing youth electoral participation', *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 10, no. 5, pp. 539–55.
- Fang, N 2012, *Blue Book of Political Participation*, Publishing House of China's Social Sciences, Beijing.
- Fyfe, J 2009, 'Researching youth political participation in Australia', *Youth Studies Australia*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 37–45.
- Huntley, R 2006, 'Gen Y and politics', *The Sydney Papers*, vol.1, no. 1, pp. 128–35.
- Macnamara, J & Kenning, G 2010, 'E-electioneering 2010: Trends in social media use in Australian political communication', *Media International Australia (Incorporating Culture & Policy)*, vol. 139, no. 1, pp. 7–22.
- Saha, LJ, Print, M & Edwards, K 2005, 'Report 2: Youth, political engagement and voting', Youth Electoral Study, University of Sydney, Australian Electoral Commission, Sydney.
- Saulwick, I & Muller, D 2006, 'Fearless and flexible: views of genY', Research Report, Saulwick Muller Social Research, Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Melbourne.
- Sun, Y, Xue, D, Xie, T, Tian, J & Xia, H 2010, 'Research on the political participation awareness of "Post-90s generation" in college students', *School Party Construction and Ideological Education*, vol. 400, pp. 92–94.
- Tang, J 2013, 'Analysis on the current situation of Chinese college students' political participation through Weibo', *Science and Education Herald*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 229–30.
- The Central Government of the People's Republic of China 2002, *The Party Constitution of the Communist Party of China*, [http://www.gov.cn/test/2008-08/01/content\\_1061476.htm](http://www.gov.cn/test/2008-08/01/content_1061476.htm)
- The Legislative Affairs Council of the State Council 2012, *The Constitution of The People's Republic Of China*, China Legal Publishing House, Beijing.
- Vromen, A & Collin, P 2010, 'Everyday youth participation? Contrasting views from Australian policymakers and young people', *Young*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 97–112.
- Vromen, A 2003, "'People try to put us down": Participatory citizenship of generation "X"', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 79–99.
- Vromen, A 2007, 'Australian young people's participatory practises and internet use', *Information, Communication and Society*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 48–68.
- Walsh, L 2012, 'More mixed messages about youth participation', *Youth Studies Australia*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 3–4.
- Wang, H 2012, 'Empirical study on the online political participation of contemporary university students', *Beijing Education*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 21–24.
- Wang, Y 2014, "'The dilemma of college students" – online political participation based on the example of ten universities of Zhejiang Province', *Chinese Youth Research*, vol. 618, no. 1, pp. 102–11.
- Yang, X & Zhang, Y 2014, 'Comparison and inspiration between youth from China and western countries based on a case study', *e-Government Affairs*, vol. 138, no. 1, pp. 46–55.

<sup>2</sup> Baidu is an online community bound closely with internet search services. As China's largest communication platform, it is provided by Baidu, the Chinese search engine company.