AAH Policy

SHAPING THE NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR AUSTRALIA-CHINA RELATIONS

The Australian Academy of the Humanities welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's consultation on the scope and programming of the new National Foundation for Australia-China Relations.

The Academy is the peak national body for the humanities in Australia and one of the nation's four Learned Academies. Established by Royal Charter in 1969, the Academy has over 600 elected Fellows who are leaders and experts in the fields of education and research that investigate human cultures, values and beliefs.

The Academy periodically undertakes independent reviews of national capabilities in the humanities and arts with a view to informing strategic planning and investment decisions at the institutional level in the national higher education system. See ***Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in Australia*** and ***Humanities in the Asia Region*** (forthcoming).

In association with the Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA), the Academy also contributes to reports on emerging issues for Australian public policy consideration. Several of these have dealt explicitly with Australia-China relations including ***SAF03: Smart Engagement with Asia*** and its set of contributing reports, and ***SAF 11:*** *Australia's Diaspora Advantage.*

In addition, the Academy is currently developing ***A New Approach*** to championing effective investment and return in Australian arts and culture under a three-year program funded by three philanthropic organisations. The ambition of ***A New Approach*** is to strengthen bipartisan, business and wider community support for arts and culture through a research and advocacy program, and ensure opportunities are seized for the better realisation of the economic, social, cultural and personal benefits that Australian arts and cultural activities provide.

Drawing on its experience, expertise and completed research reports, the Academy proposes three recommendations for consideration by the National Foundation for Australia-China Relations:

1. Review into Australia's research and training capacity in China studies.
2. Support for Chinese-Australian/China community-to-community engagement in arts and culture.
3. Support for building independent Chinese-Australian business and professional networks as a national resource for business and government dealing with China.

1. Review into Australia's research and training capacity in China studies

The ability of Australia's private sector, non-profits, cultural organisations, state and federal agencies and diaspora communities to engage effectively with China depends in part on the capacity of Australia's higher education system to train personnel, conduct research and

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communicate evidence-based findings for the benefit of these sectors and the general public. How well are Australia's universities equipped to meet their needs?

It is the responsibility of Australian universities and research funding agencies such as the Australian Research Council to support teaching, research, and research training in the Australian higher education system. Strategic judgements on resource allocation are informed at the macro level by national research priorities and periodic reviews. At the micro level of disciplines and areas of study such as China or Asian studies, however, there are no comparable mechanisms of review to guide institutional resource allocations.

In light of the current state of the Australia-China relationship, the Academy has identified a demonstrable need for a review of Australia's research and training capabilities in China studies with a view to identifying changing stakeholder requirements and current capacities in research, education and training, and assessing whether they are fit for purpose and sufficiently robust to support a successful engagement strategy with China.

A timely review of Australia's research and research training in China studies would identify and prioritise areas of national need, undertake a stock-take of current national capacity to meet identified needs, and set out what needs to be done to develop integrated national capacity in a limited number of priority areas across the country over time.

This is not a quick fix. The purpose of the review would be to assist institutional leaders in the higher education sector to make strategic decisions for the long term relating to their investments in teaching, research and communications across all disciplines with a stake in China studies.

2. Chinese-Australian/China community-to-community engagement in arts and culture

The Academy has been an outspoken voice on the important role of Chinese-Australian communities in cultural diplomacy, academic exchange, and business relations linking Australia and China. The ***Smart Engagement with Asia*** project reported on the contribution of Chinese-Australian researchers in establishing research linkages between key centres in Australia and China, and on the importance of reciprocity, collaboration, and diaspora linkages for promoting long-term people-to-people ties through cultural diplomacy. The linked sub-report on ***International Cultural Engagements*** surveyed Chinese-Australian artists and performers for their insights and perspectives on how Australian governments could help them to realise their potential as cultural ambassadors for Australia. The *Australia's Diaspora Advantage* report showed that Asian-Australia business diasporas are an important source of innovation, enterprise and entrepreneurialism in bilateral and multilateral industry and commerce.

All three reports concur that Australian governments, business, universities and mainstream community organisations have yet to fully recognise how the linguistic skills, cultural knowledge and global networks that Chinese-Australians bring to the relationship can serve Australia well in navigating successful business, cultural and research pathways with counterparts in China.

Arising from these reports, the Academy has identified a need for targeted funding and logistical support for Chinese-Australian artists and performers to participate more fully in formal bilateral arts and culture programs. This need could be met by a program that:

- specified targets or quotas for Chinese-Australian performers and artists;

- placed equal weight on the quality of work and the potential impact of work on people-to-people ties;
- recognised that professional Chinese-Australian artists and performers wish to be judged on the quality of their work rather than simply their cultural or ethnic identities;
- recognised that community artists and performers can be as impactful as their professional counterparts;
- defined 'Chinese-Australian' as a person of Chinese ancestry who is a resident or citizen of Australia; and
- took advantage of/incorporated into existing mechanisms for arts and culture exchanges with China.

3. Support for building independent Chinese-Australian business and professional networks as a national resource for business and government dealing with China

In order for Australia to take full advantage of the capacity for innovation, enterprise and entrepreneurialism among Chinese Australians identified in ***SAF 11:*** *Australia's Diaspora **Advantage***, the Academy believes there is an urgent need for greater participation by Chinese Australians in mainstream business and professional relations with China, and for greater Chinese-Australian representation in the leadership of Australian business and community organisations more broadly.

The National Foundation for Australia-China Relations could assist in meeting this need by supporting creation of certifiably independent Chinese-Australian business and professional networks that were tasked to:

- Periodically measure participation and representation of Chinese Australians in Australian business and community organisations and communicate findings.
- Annually monitor the state of Australia-China relations from a Chinese-Australian community perspective, and communicate findings.
- Convene regular gatherings in all capitals and major regional centres for interested business, community and government agencies dealings with China.
- Assist local business and community agencies in their dealings with China.
- Assist state governments and their agencies in managing complex relations with China.

The Academy would be willing to discuss these proposals and assist in developing implementation strategies on request. In particular, it should be noted that the Academy is uniquely equipped to ensure the independence and integrity of its Chinese-Australian diaspora initiatives through its expertise, experience, community networks and outstanding Chinese-Australian academicians.

This submission has been prepared by Immediate-Past President John Fitzgerald FAHA with assistance from sitting members of the AAH Council on behalf of the Academy Fellowship.