



Australia-China Friendship Society

Victorian Branch (Inc). ABN 39 746 574 225

Newsletter

4TH FLOOR, ROSS HOUSE, 247 FLINDERS LANE, MELBOURNE VIC 3000

E-MAIL: ACFS.VIC@GMAIL.COM WEB: WWW.ACFS.COM.AU

FOLLOW US ON  TWITTER @ACFSVIC AND  FACEBOOK @ACFSLTD.

December 2020



President's Report

Hi Everyone, I think we can safely say we are pleased to see the end of 2020! It has been a dreadful year of fires, floods and the pandemic, which brought with it new challenges for us as an organisation. We have seen the rise of vicious racism which I admit I've not seen for a long time. A second Cold War has arisen, with the constant fuelling of anti-Chinese sentiments fanned by a Federal Government bent on following the will of a beleaguered, waning superpower.

As an organisation we have seen attacks at personal as well as organisational levels, with the Secretary and I bearing the brunt of criticism, lies and abuse. It has not been a good year for fostering friendly relations between our two peoples when inflammatory rhetoric has outstripped truth and insults and bigotry have replaced dialogue and mutual respect. That Australia now finds itself in a trade and political miasma with China is a self-inflicted impost and China, in its own defence, will not back down. There are ways to break this seeming impasse, but it will take a change on behalf of the hawk side of Australian politics to de-escalate the situation. Frankly and sadly, I don't see this happening in the short term.

As always, we must remain committed to the task of quelling the flames of discord and attempting to regenerate the seeds of friendship and trust, which will be no easy feat.

We have several new members of the committee, whom I congratulate on their appointment, whilst thanking those of the previous committee who worked so very hard especially this year.

Finally, on a bright note, congratulations to the birthdays in September and November of our oldest and founding members, Maurice and Eunice Leong,

who turned 101 and 100 respectively! We are indeed privileged to have them aboard.

For the rest of you younger people, I hope you all have a very happy, peaceful and restful festive season and a productive, prosperous and healthy 2021.

Best wishes on behalf of the Executive and Committee.

Anthony Leong

ACFS Vic Branch AGM Report

The Victorian Branch conducted our annual general meeting on 8 December 2020 at Ross House, Melbourne. Considering the COVID-19 situation, the meeting was well attended.

The Chair noted that the ACFS bank account was severely depleted because of the lack of activities and hoped this will be rectified in next year. The meeting was informed that because of our poor financial position, Ross House has waived four months rent for our office, and this is greatly appreciated.

The new Committee is:

President:	Anthony Leong
Vice President: x2	Tower Liu and Damon Feng
Secretary:	Robin Matthews
Treasurer:	Douglas Chen
Committee members:	Lia Cross, Darell Egan and Joe Montero



New committee L to R: Douglas Chen, Tower Liu, Anthony Leong, Robin Matthews, Darell Egan, Lia Cross, Damon Feng and Joe Montero

The Chair informed the meeting that he had just attended the book launch of “China’s grand strategy and Australia’s future in the new global order” by Geoff Raby. This set the scene for discussion throughout the meeting about the relationship between Australia and China and the resulting increase in racism. Members were reminded that there are many on-line articles condemning the current anti China sentiment and that it is everyone’s responsibility (if they can) to speak out about the negative and bigoted diatribe. Members were reminded that the aims of the ACFS are to promote greater understanding and friendship between the peoples of Australia and China.

Darell Egan, our new Committee member won the door prize of a specially selected bottle of 2012 Horvat Estate shiraz.

At the conclusion of the meeting, members then enjoyed a meal at a nearby Chinese restaurant.

President’s Report, ACFS AGM, Tuesday 8 December 2020

2020 has turned out to be the year we would all rather forget, especially from the point of view of an organisation whose primary function is to promote friendship and understanding between the people of Australia and China.

Evidence is now coming to light that the COVID-19 virus had appeared in Italy and France prior to the outbreak in Wuhan. Once the Chinese had realised it was a novel coronavirus around Christmas 2019, it took a mere 10 days for their scientists to map the genome and inform the world. There was no coverup or prevarication – Chinese scientists and medical experts got straight to the problem, and sadly the West then dithered for the best part of 2 months or longer following that.

For us, the task of keeping civil and out of the fray was difficult, as hatred of China and things Chinese began growing at an unbearable pace. We endured hate mail, vilification, countless abuse and proliferation of lies and half-truths. Brazen racists were encouraged by the Australian Government’s purple prose and constant attacks on China and supposed wrongs, following America’s lead.

Ironically, following Wuhan’s lead in locking down the state (which was vilified as well with abuse hurled at Victoria’s Premier Andrews), we were unable to meet in person bar once, which was to change the banking arrangements

and also once via Zoom. Basically, our work ground to a halt, apart from the notable distribution of masks generously donated by our Chinese friends of the CPAFFC and Shanghai People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.

One bright light was the 100th birthday of our second-oldest and founding member, Eunice Leong, who, at 100 on November 24th, is only eclipsed by her husband Maurice at 101 in September! Our congratulations to them and best wishes for a happy and long life.

Let's hope 2021 brings happiness, a lifting of spirits and prosperity and good health to you all. Thank you for your patience, your remaining true to our ideals and continued support.

May you all have a wonderful festive season and a bountiful 2021.

Anthony Leong

Our ignorance of China is a disgrace

By Emer. Prof COLIN MACKERRAS Griffith university On 28 October 2020



It's a disgrace that after half a century or so of multiculturalism, it is still possible that Australian Chinese can be made to feel disloyal merely on the basis of their ethnic background. That's exactly what happened when right-wing Senator Eric Abetz asked three Chinese-heritage Australians before a Senate committee whether they were willing unconditionally to condemn the Chinese Communist Party.

The three took Abetz's interrogation as questioning their loyalty to Australia, which it was. Prime Minister Scott Morrison has on occasion stated that he distinguishes between the Chinese Communist Party and Chinese Australians, praising the latter. However, when asked on 16 October about his attitude to Senator Abetz's performance he refused to criticize it directly, in effect contributing to anxiety among concerned Australians that being Chinese means your loyalty is under suspicion.

There is plenty of evidence that anti-Chinese racism has increased along with the rising tensions in Australia-China relations. One survey with results published in the Sydney Morning Herald (7 June 2020) "documented 386 racist incidents, including abuse, physical intimidation and spitting" against

Chinese in Australia and the situation has probably worsened since then. Chinese authorities used this racism to argue against sending Chinese to Australia. It's all very well to sneer at this attitude, as many have done. However, it is reasonable if you look at the situation from China's point of view.

Surveys tell us that images of China have worsened greatly. A recent Pew Research Center poll found 81 per cent of Australians viewed China unfavourably, a 24 per cent increase in a year. And the Lowy Institute poll of 2020 found trust in China (23 per cent) at the lowest in history.

I'm not denying that the situation in China itself contributes to how Australians (or anybody else) view it. But politics in the West itself is also crucial. The mainstream media rarely has anything good to say about China. The Murdoch media is generally hostile (and to judge from the blogs on articles about China, most of its readers obsessively so), while the Fairfax stable is not much better. Even the ABC tends to focus on the bad things, and a couple of "Four Corners" programmes have done quite a lot to stoke negative views.

While aware that knowing a lot about a country doesn't necessarily mean a positive view, it's my strong impression that ignorance means less wish to engage. As one involved for decades in trying to promote Asian and especially China studies, I find it alarming and horrifying that knowledge and appreciation of China, its people, its language and its culture are so low.

As early as 1994 the federal, state and territory governments set up a body with some decent funding to promote Asian languages and studies in Australian schools. There have been various iterations of this work, though none as well funded or carried out with such enthusiasm as that early attempt. These programmes made a difference, and Asian languages and studies are more prevalent in the Australian education system than they were in the old days.

Yet I have to say that the results are overall disappointing in the extreme. I never imagined that in 2020 Australia would be back to the situation where for an Australian to be Chinese could make their loyalty suspect. Have people like Eric Abetz remained so immune to multiculturalism, at least as it concerns Chinese?

In a report by Anne McLaren of 22 November 2019 and published by the Asian Studies of Australia the next year, one unnamed "seasoned" academic was reported to have said the following: "We have seen the gradual hollowing out of the deep language and cultural expertise on China in Australia.

Increasingly those Australians who speak to us about China don't know the language, nor have they spent extended time studying its history, culture and politics" (<http://asaa.asn.au/chinese-studies-in-australian-universities-a-problem-of-balance/>).

That comment accords with my own impressions. Just at the time of China's rise when we need expertise most, the country doesn't have the will to invest in knowledge of our biggest trading partner. That is not only stupid but verging on suicidal.

As for the sub-tertiary level, the situation is mixed. In Victoria, which has long been the main centre for Chinese language learning at primary and secondary level, there has been a rise in the number of schools offering the language and the number of students taking it.

Obviously, that is positive. Most of the students, however, are themselves background speakers of Chinese. Of course, it is good that they learn their own language. But it is very unfortunate that so few whose background language is not Chinese want to learn the language. One 2016 report found "an overall drop over the past eight years of some 20% in the number of [students] taking Chinese as a second language" (<https://www.crikey.com.au/2019/06/25/fact-check-mandarin-speakers-china/>). If young people think there are no jobs in Chinese, obviously they are not going to learn it.

The number of second-language learners who can use Chinese at a really professional level is extremely small. This impacts on mutual trust. I regard this as very important, because trust has now completely disappeared in Australia-China relations and that is a disaster. Trust takes years to build, but can be destroyed in minutes.

The deterioration of Australia-China relations and the decline of China literacy in Australia are both unfortunate trends that reinforce each other. Our government is focusing less on China and allowing reactionary trends in the United States and elsewhere to undermine not only relations with China but even understanding and knowledge about it. Just when China is most important, we are least in a position to deal with it.

I remain an advocate and lover of Western culture, especially music. However, I also believe passionately that Australia must study China, its language, people, history and culture not only because they are also worth study and appreciation, but because they matter more and more in our contemporary world. The cost of ignorance of China could be high.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

Family Name (Mr /Mrs/Ms/Other)

Given Names

Address P/code.....

Phone Email

VICTORIAN MEMBERSHIP RATES

Family \$40.00 Single \$30.00 Concession \$15.00

Corporate on Application

I/We support the Society's aims: Signature/s

I/We enclose the sum of \$ for my/our membership subscription.

Pay directly into the ACFS Victoria Branch Account,

Commonwealth Bank BSB: 063-019, Account number: 10040625

Please put your name in the subject line & email REFERENCE to

acfs.vic@gmail.com

You may send cheques to the Treasurer at the ACFS office address

YOUR DONATION WOULD BE GRATEFULLY RECEIVED

Promoting Friendship and Understanding Between the
Australian and Chinese People

THE AUSTRALIA-CHINA FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY'S AIMS

Cultivate friendly relations with the people of China by fostering the study of China's history, language, culture, social and political structure.

Promote mutual understanding through friendly exchanges between the people of China and Australia. Strengthening ties with travel, the exchange of ideas, information and trade between the two countries.

To seek to clarify misunderstandings between the peoples of China and Australia, which may arise from the misrepresentation of information.

The ACFS Victorian Branch

PRESIDENT: Anthony Leong

SECRETARY: Robin Matthews

VICE PRESIDENT: Damon Feng
Tower Liu

TREASURER: Dong Chen

COMMITTEE: Lia Cross, Darell Egan and Joe Montero

We are always looking for interesting stories and articles to share with our members. Any members who have great stories to tell please contact ACFS office or e-mail to acfs.vic@gmail.com