

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Issues Facing Diaspora Communities in Australia

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Introduction

I am Professor of Chinese Studies at the University of Adelaide. I am making this submission as an individual.

Let me first introduce my background so as to set the scene for my submission concerning two issues listed in the Term of References in this inquiry: 1) *barriers to the full participation of diaspora communities in Australia's democratic and social institutions* and 2) *support offered to diaspora community associations and similar organisations*.

I was born and brought in a poor family from a very poor village in China. When I left the village at age of 20 there was still no electricity in the village. I was able to go to university and then to study in the UK for three years at the Chinese government's expense. After working for five years to repay my "debt" to China I went to the UK again as a self-sponsored PhD student. After another five years of study and work in the UK I was fortunate enough to migrate to Australia where I have worked and lived since. My daughter with my first marriage now works as an eye surgeon in Hobart. My two daughters with my second marriage to my ex-wife, an Australia-born Australian of Anglo-German extraction, are now at university and high school.

I still have brothers and sisters and their extended families in China. Two of the extended family members came to study in Australia because of my connection. One of them settled down as skilled migrant in Adelaide, married with a Hong Konger and has a son.

My teaching at various universities in Australia and my publications (For instance, *Gao Village: Rural Life in Modern China*, (London: C. Hurst & Co. 1999, *Gao Village Revisited: Life of Rural People in Contemporary China*, The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press 2018, *The Battle for China's Past: Mao and the Cultural Revolution*, London: Pluto, 2008 and *Constructing China: Clashing Views of the People's Republic*, London: Pluto, 2018) aim at providing with a different perspective so that a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of China can be approached.

The above brief discussion aims to show how incredibly globally connected we are and how complex the Chinese diaspora community is.

It is within this context that I am making a submission to express my deep concern for how the current tension between Australia and China impacts the Chinese diaspora community badly, in two issues listed in the term of references. My concern is that the securitization of relationship with China might have consequences from which the diaspora Chinese community may fare poorly, as expressed below.

Support offered to diaspora community associations and similar organisations

Students from the PRC used to have what they call Chinese Student and Scholar Associations at universities. Like other student associations they used to get financial and institutional support from the Student Union. The feedback I get from some students now is that they dare not form such an association and even if they do exist they do not dare to have activities. My concern for treating associations and organizations formed by the Chinese diaspora community with automatic suspicion is also expressed elsewhere for instance in MOBO GAO, "The Chinese United Front Strategy: Its History and Present, *Pearl and Irritation*, <https://johnmenadue.com/mobo-gao-the-chinese-united-front-strategy-its-history-and-present/>.

Barriers to the full participation of diaspora communities in Australia's democratic and social institutions,

This fear is related the second issue listed in the term of references of this inquiry. This fear builds barriers to the full participation of diaspora communities in Australia's democratic and social institutions. For instance, it builds barriers for freedom of associations because, for instance, fear by the business sector of the Chinese diaspora community to donate to political parties, an activity not only allowed but supposed to be part of democratic exercise. To the field closer to my profession fear has been built up for academic and scholarly exchange with China. Some have already started to have self-censorship which is a barrier to freedom of expression. There has been speculation that the US may ban the Chinese app Wechat and that Australia might follow the USA in doing that. Wechat is the most popular, cheapest and most convenient way for the Chinese diaspora community here in Australia to communicate with their friends and relatives in China.

What to Suggest?

There is no practical and concrete suggestion that I can make. But I would like to convey some general thoughts to the committee of this Senate inquiry, in dot points for easy digestion:

- Australia should not go to war with anyone unless it is invaded.
- If Australia does go to war, the diaspora community related to the war target country should not be treated with automatic suspicion
- Politicians are supposed to lead the community for Australia's long term interest, not just for short term gain of election
- What are Australian values are not only characterized by but also made by the members of the community. This community includes the Chinese diaspora, and of course others, not to mention the aboriginals
- Value and belief conviction by politicians is supposed to be admirable, but conviction without a broad understanding of the big and long term picture and conviction based on ignorance of different perspectives may turn out to be bigotry.

History never ends. We will be judged by our offspring.