

Yonglin Chen's Submission to the Australian Parliament's Inquiry into national security risks affecting the Australian higher education and research sector

China's Interference in Australian Tertiary Institutions and Research Sector, and a proposal for counter-measures

December 18, 2020

I am former diplomat of the People's Republic of China. I graduated from China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing. I had worked as a career diplomat at the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs from August 1991 to May 2005. My last position was Consul for Political Affairs (First Secretary rank) at the Chinese Consulate General in Sydney allowed to access top secret files and coded telegraph documents of the Chinese Government. I left the CCG on May 26, 2005 and sought political asylum in Australia. I was granted a Permanent Protection Visa on July 8, 2005. I am now an Australian citizen and grateful to this country. Australia is the new home for my family, and to defend our home from foreign interference is my obligation. I have been watching closely the development of China's influence in Australia in the last fifteen years. I am particularly concerned about the security of the freedom of Australian future generations. I would like to brief how China has been striving to influence Australian tertiary education and research sector and offer my proposal to counter it.

Infiltration into Australian tertiary institutions was an important part of China's all-around diplomatic policy concerning Australia when China enlisted Australia in China's "Greater Periphery" at its 10th Ambassadorial Conference held in Beijing on August 25 to 29, 2004, a strategy of turning Australia into a stable supply base of high-quality natural and energy resources, a backyard of China.

In the period from March 2001 to May 2005 while working as a Consul for Political Affairs at the CCG in Sydney, I was in charge of all political sensitive issues including matters related to the so called "Five Poisonous Groups", namely Falun Gong, Democracy activists, Taiwan separatists, East Turkistan separatists and Tibetan separatists. The CCG Education Office at 19 Anzac Parade, Kensington, NSW 2033 is the main enforcer of education influence, who reports to Consul for Political Affairs, Deputy Consul General and Consul General (General Secretary of the CCP Committee of the CCG). A deputy Consul General from the Ministry of State Security, Consuls for Science and Technology, consuls for Culture, and consuls from the PLA General Staff also work on the education and technologies stealth.

China has been very successful in infiltrating NSW tertiary institutions. Its achievements are remarkable: successful in embedding the Confucius Institute (CI) into Australian top universities and Confucius Classroom in Australian public and private schools; successful running of Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSAs) in Australian universities; success in acquiring scientists and scholars of Australian tertiary institutions and research sector snatching world state-of-the-art technologies; success in compromising universities academic freedom.

- 1、 China sees the CI as its agent of soft power, an exporter of Chinese culture and influence, and an important element of the global Grand Propaganda strategy. Academic discussions related to democracy, China's military rise, issues on Tibet, Falun Gong, Uyghur, Taiwan and Tiananmen Massacre in 1989 and Hong Kong National Security Law are taboos for the CIs. All CIs have strictly followed the Chinese rule as can be seen from the servility of some CI board members in toeing the CCP party line. The CI students are seen as potential valuable assets of China in future spy operations and political influence networks. The CI Constitution and By-laws clearly state that the CI is run under instruction of the CI Headquarters (Han Ban) in Beijing. The CI is a Trojan Horse of the CCP planted in overseas tertiary education, not a treasure box delivered from Communist China.
- 2、 The Chinese CSSA system is a tool of the CCP created by Chinese missions overseas. The CCG in Sydney created and run all NSW CSSAs. I remember Consul Li Jianmin drove 6 hours to visit the University of New England in Armidale for creating a CSSA on the campus in 2003. Currently every Australian university has a CSSA. The CSSA is funded by the CCG, and its projects sponsored by China state-owned enterprises investors in Australia, some United Front organizations in NSW, and other PRC official institutions. It often holds its annual assembly or symbolic board members elections at the premises of the CCG Education office. In August 2007, Consul Bai Gang convened the first assembly of the NSW CSSA attended by representatives of most CSSAs in NSW.

As a CCP tool, the CSSA has been successful in controlling the spiritual world of the majority of Chinese students on campuses. The CSSAs follow the PRC agenda assisting the CCP "Grand Propaganda" strategy and intelligence collection operations in Australia. Students are politically mobilized to conduct counter-rally protest against anti-CCP rallies and pro-democracy lectures and forums with regard to China, especially when some Chinese leaders visiting. They are one-child policy babies spoiled by parents, having grown up in the period of economic boom, ignorant of brutality records of the CCP. Most Chinese parents' purposes to send them overseas are to acquire permanent residency or better qualifications for employment in China. In some rare cases, individual students are subjected to casual recruitment by Chinese undercover operatives. Those graduates, postgraduates and Ph.D. candidates who continue to study or obtain jobs will maintain their connections with the CCG while waiting for highly paid opportunities offered by China for their talents. China has other tools to suit them for Chinese brain drain projects.

- 3、 Australian higher education institutions are the target of China's brain drain projects. China is eager to transform its labour-intensive low-tech industries into an economy of innovation in science and technology. And Australia has world leading science and technology researches in fields of biotechnology & pharmaceuticals, superconducting materials, nano materials, solar energy and battery, Quantum computing, artificial intelligence, dual-use technology, etc., but on the whole lacks mature manufacturing industries. China has a good variety of brain drain projects including Cheung Kong Scholarship Programme, Thousand Talents

Plan, Thousand Young Talents Plan, Plan 111, Fellowship Experts Workstations, to suit different categories of talents. In the meanwhile, China sends scientists to the labs and research centres such as the CSIRO as “visiting scholars” or in the name of joint research projects nesting on university campuses. China also sends military cadets to study in Australia at military and civil fusion fields. In 2013, the University of New South Wales joined hands with Shanghai Jiao Tong University in setting up a Collaborative Research Fund to sponsor a number of sensitive technology researches potentially useful for the Chinese military. MPs are advised to read recent disclosure on Thousand Talents Plan by the Australian newspaper and writings of Alex Joske at the ASPI.

- 4、 China lures Australian higher education institutions to abandon its academic freedom to satisfy the CCP political agenda. Commercialization of tertiary education in cooperation with China may lead to the deterioration of academic freedom without restriction laws. China uses Australian tertiary institutions to create narratives favourable to the CCP. China has sent lots of propagandist scholars to study in Australia and acquired citizenship.

Political donor and United Front businessman Xiangmo Huang funded and launched the Australia-China Relations Institute (ACRI) in 2014 and the Australia-China Institute for Arts and Culture (ACIAC) at the University of Western Sydney in 2016. Both are part of the CCP propagandist programmes to control narratives on Australia-China related topics in Australia.

The CSSAs are instructed to report any event or poster hostile to China. In 2004, the CCG in Sydney instructed the University of Wollongong CSSA to pressure the University to take down a photo with a background of a Falun Gong book stall. In April 2016, Wei Wu, Tutor and PhD candidate at the Business School of the University of Sydney was forced to resign from his job due to his posts on his Weibo blog critical of the CCP, after the University of Sydney Chinese Students Association organized an internet campaign condemning him, in cooperation with CCP media, and pressured the University to expel Mr Wu. The recent incident of removal and reinstatement of an article critical of China’s human rights violation in Hong Kong from the UNSW website is disturbing.

The CCG often threatens universities with cessation of cooperation on Chinese student recruitments. In April 2013, the University of Sydney cancelled a planned speaking event by the Dalai Lama due to pressure from the CCG in Sydney.

In 2002, I once accompanied my former colleague Consul Dewen Ruan to meet a Professor of history at the University of Sydney who requested more fund from the Chinese Government for his trip to Guangdong Province in support of his research. The professor has condemned Falun Gong at his interviews by Australian media and promised to continue.

The recent statement of the CCG in Brisbane encouraging more assaults and threats on the student activist Drew Pavlou was also heard by Chinese students in NSW as having been

endorsed by the Chinese Embassy in Canberra. Incidents of hatred against Hong Kong protesters on campuses in NSW have occurred from time to time. The name of the assault victim Drew Pavlou at the University of Queensland was mentioned by the Chinese foreign affairs spokesman Zhao Lijian at his press conference on August 20, 2020, which indicates China has already marked Drew as its enemy.

MPs and Senators should be alerted to the CCP's massive interference in higher education and research sector which shall affect our future terribly. The imprudent emphasis on financial interests in tertiary education should be relinquished. Therefore, presently I propose some countermeasures as follow:

1. To pass a bill to introduce a compulsory course on Australian values for international students whose countries of origin are political autocracies. People from autocracies like China can reasonably be presumed to have suffered systematic brainwashing, and consequently need more clearly to understand the concepts of human rights, democracy and freedom. Some of them will acquire permanent residency, for which values education ought to be a presumed requirement. I believe values education will tremendously reduce foreign interference and influence.
2. To close down the CI's in tertiary institutions, and close down the CSSA's run by the CCP to rescue Chinese international students from the CCP control as many of them shall live in Australia permanently after graduation.
3. To restrict top-level cooperation with China on science, technology and innovation so as to protect our intellectual property and national security interests.
4. To urge the federal Department of Attorney General to enforce Foreign Transparency Scheme Act 2018 on some programmes sponsored by foreign principals. **//END**