

Chapter 15

Promoting 'China literacy'?

An old missionary, the Reverend WH Smith, once wrote a book saying that nobody can really be an expert on China. I have always added to that: and that is the way the Chinese prefer to keep it.¹

15.1 'China literacy' refers to a population's level of awareness of the Chinese nation—its people, culture, language, and history. China literacy can be achieved through a number of primary mechanisms: school and university-based education, public diplomacy, and cultural and sporting activities aimed at elevating broader public awareness. Evidence to this inquiry suggests that Australia's capacity to expand and capitalise on pre-existing links will depend heavily on the peoples' ability and willingness to understand and engage with China. The promotion of China literacy through education was a recurrent theme throughout the course of this inquiry and will be discussed in this chapter. Public diplomacy, culture and sport will be discussed in chapter 16.

Do Australians need to be 'China literate'?

15.2 Several organisations and witnesses to this committee underscored the need to develop China literacy as part of an overall strategy to strengthen bilateral ties. Increasing China literacy was often linked to a more general need to increase the population's knowledge of—and engagement with—Asian languages and cultures within the region and Australia. Asialink's submission to this inquiry stated that the study of Asian languages and cultures in schools is unquestionably in the national interest:

Knowledge and understanding of our nearest neighbours, our major trading partners and the growing number of Asian Australians, are essential to Australia's security, prosperity, regional relationships and the maintenance and growth of an enriched and tolerant multicultural Australia.²

15.3 The Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) advanced a number of reasons for Australia to pay particular attention to Asia literacy. It stated that interaction with Asia is an inevitable and natural part of the life experience of growing numbers of Australians, and that one in every 20 Australians comes from an Asian country. More than half of Australia's trade is with countries of Asia, and Australia's security increasingly depends on relations with the people of Asia. Australia's traditional 'Eurocentric' viewpoint also creates a need to communicate Asia's

1 G. Woodard, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2005, p. 26.

2 Asialink, *Submission P18*, p. 7.

difference and varied history, tradition and politics. These reasons combine to justify an increased emphasis on promoting Asian studies in Australia.³

15.4 The Asia Education Foundation (AEF) has links across all education sectors in Australia and China. Ms Maureen Welch, representing AEF, stated that it is in Australia's national interest to develop a coordinated, well-funded approach to the provision of Asian studies tuition:

When we are looking at engaging young Australians with Asia, it is in our national interest, in particular to engage them with China. This will ensure that we have a work force which can work effectively within and across cultures both within Australia and through the region. We can develop a sophisticated understanding of our neighbours and therefore have active citizens who can work within a rapidly changing world. There is the need for a national commitment to this issue and we are beginning that process.⁴

15.5 Dr Stephen Morgan identified the need for Australia to invest more in raising Australia's capacity to teach future generations of specialists, politicians and business leaders in Asian languages—particularly Chinese. He claimed that developing expertise in Asian languages would enable future leaders to use languages other than English in pursuing legal, economic, business, and diplomatic affairs.⁵ As noted earlier, Dr Morgan considered that this need was pressing from a number of perspectives, not least of which to protect Australia's security interests:

...my main concern is that we are struggling to maintain our existing capacity. This obviously presents difficulties if we have a major meltdown in China. For example, due to social or political disturbances creating a crisis in the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party, we may find that Australia would not have sufficient people able to provide advice to intelligence agencies, your committees and defence services, let alone provide advice to business and civilian interests wanting to work out how to deal with what is going on in China. It is important that we look at how to improve the number of Chinese-competent people coming through, but not only in language.⁶

15.6 Professor David Goodman reiterated these concerns about Australia's capacity to teach Chinese. He told the committee of his 'concerns that, given the inevitability of increased relations with China, we do not have the educational and intellectual infrastructure for dealing with China'.⁷ Professor John Fitzgerald also commented that

3 Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Submission P65*, p. 4.

4 M. Welch, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2005, p. 54.

5 S. Morgan, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2005, p. 1.

6 S. Morgan, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2005, p. 3.

7 D. Goodman, *Committee Hansard*, 29 June 2005, p. 53.

Australia needs to better understand the role and contribution of Asian and Chinese Australians and just not around a multicultural festival.⁸

15.7 Mr Reginald Little emphasised that China literacy needs to extend beyond language to knowledge of Chinese culture and philosophy. He considered that Australians doing business with the Chinese need a full appreciation of the cultural context within which they are operating—not just language skills.⁹ Chapter 13 clearly demonstrated this need.

15.8 He argued that Australia needs to gain a greater understanding of the Confucian-Taoist underpinnings of Chinese society, economy, science, and government in order to fully appreciate the implications of our growing relationship, and achieve meaningful and productive engagement. Mr Little's submission drew attention to the different philosophical frameworks of understanding that impact on the way both nations view the policies and approaches of the other, juxtaposing the influence of Greek philosophical traditions on Western society with the Confucian-Taoist concepts underpinning Chinese society:

The Greeks always sought clarity and deductive rigour whereas Chinese sought correspondences, resonances and interrelationships...Because of our tendency to reductionist, mechanist thinking, particularly in the area of economics, we leave ourselves very vulnerable to not understanding the full implications of acts we take within an economic context...¹⁰

15.9 The committee accepts the evidence asserting the need for greater China literacy. The committee acknowledges that, given China's growing importance to our economy, society, polity and security, investing in programs designed to increase Australia's China literacy—in both the educational and broader societal context—is in the national interest.

Australia's capacity to deliver 'China literacy'

15.10 Despite the apparent need for greater China literacy, the committee has received evidence that suggests Australia's current level is inadequate. Whilst there are undoubtedly highly skilled individuals in all fields, the level of awareness of and engagement with Asia and China in the general population is unfortunately low. Moreover, evidence showed that Australia's capacity to improve China literacy through education programs at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels is declining.

15.11 The ASAA commented that Australia's capacity to teach and learn about China in its universities is weaker than it was 10 years ago.¹¹ The ASAA has been collecting annual data on enrolments in Asian languages since 2001. Professor Robin

8 J. Fitzgerald, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2005, p. 88.

9 R. Little, *Committee Hansard*, 1 August 2005, p. 44.

10 R. Little, *Committee Hansard*, 1 August 2005, p. 45.

11 Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Submission P65*, p. 1.

Jeffrey, on behalf of the ASAA, also noted that, despite a growth in the numbers of students undertaking Chinese language studies at the tertiary level, the majority of students in these programs are from Asia. These students are usually from character-based backgrounds (Chinese and Japanese), return to their homes after their studies, and do not add to Australia's foundation of knowledge or language ability.¹²

15.12 In the 2002 report *Maximising Australia's Asia Knowledge*, the ASAA identified a number of challenges to the expansion of Australia's Asia literacy. They included low rates of undergraduate study in Asia-related subjects and a 'drying up' of Australia's pool of specialist scholarly knowledge of Asia as academics age and social-science budgets within universities do not allow for their replacement. It also cited 'headhunting' of many outstanding Australian scholars by overseas institutions and political and economic upheaval in the region that has dampened popular interest.¹³

15.13 Dr Gary Sigley, Director of the Confucius Institute, outlined the difficulties experienced in convincing school principals to introduce Chinese language studies into their curricula. He attributed this reluctance to a 'not necessarily well-founded' perception that Chinese is alien to English and difficult to learn. He stated:

Just to be able to speak basic conversational Chinese is not that difficult. Also, there is a system of Romanisation—the Romanisation system—with which you can teach students Chinese very simply within a short time.¹⁴

15.14 Dr Sigley emphasised the importance of communicating in Chinese:

If you are able to speak a bit of Chinese, whether you are in business or at whatever level of activity...the Chinese people really open up. They really appreciate the effort that has been made. One thing that you notice when you go to China is the amount of energy, time and commitment that people put into learning English...They appreciate very greatly any—even minimal—effort that a non-Chinese speaker makes to learn a bit of Chinese. That you have gone out of your way to make a bit of an effort they see as respectful of Chinese culture and people.¹⁵

15.15 Dr Robert Davis, ACCI, also commented on the complacent attitude taken by Australians toward acquiring greater language skills and Asia literacy:

The incentive for us to learn a foreign language is diminishing—'Oh, they will speak English.'...I am thinking of a member who is active in Thailand, who said, 'That's all right for the short term—until you realise that, when you have a little whisper aside, they can understand you; but, when they whisper in their home tongue, you cannot understand them.' You realise

12 R. Jeffrey, *Submission P65*, p. 1.

13 Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Submission P65*, Attachment, p. 13.

14 G. Sigley, *Committee Hansard*, 1 August 2005, p. 69.

15 G. Sigley, *Committee Hansard*, 1 August 2005, p. 69.

that you are at a disadvantage after a reasonably short period of time. We have to overcome the view, 'Oh well, they'—whoever 'they' may be—'will speak English.'¹⁶

15.16 Mr Richard Tan, President of the Chung Wah Association, echoed Dr Davis' sentiments:

When countries in South East Asia started to develop, learning English became a national priority because of the legacy of British colonialism. As a consequence, English speakers, including we Australians, have no problems travelling to and doing business in these countries without the need to speak their language. There is an assumption that Chinese in China will also learn English so that they can trade with us. But that is not the case...We have to take note of that fact, if we want to be agile and mobile in the dynamic Chinese market, apart from just selling iron ore, wool and natural gas, we need to have sufficient numbers of Australians who can speak their language.¹⁷

15.17 Professor Dennis Altman also warned against relying on the people of Asia to learn English:

The particular position of Australia in the world means it is vital we have a critical mass of scholars who are aware of Asian history, cultures and politics. It is too easy to assume that globalisation and the increasing use of English makes such knowledge less important, even as our relations with the countries of Asia become more significant (and perhaps more complex) due to the rapidity of social and economic transformations. As any real understandings of a society requires one to have an intimate knowledge of its history, culture and language, the case for expanding Asian studies...can only increase. The growing use of English as a sort of lingua franca does not mean less need to learn Asian languages; indeed, it may increase this need, or else force Australians to deal with the region through intermediaries whose interests will not coincide with ours.¹⁸

15.18 The committee shares the concerns of many commentators and submitters to this inquiry that Australians do not appreciate the importance of being 'China literate' and that Australia may not have adequate capacity within schools and universities to achieve an acceptable level of China literacy. Before reaching any conclusions, however, the committee considers the government's approach to the teaching of China language and culture in Australia.

16 R. Davis, *Committee Hansard*, 29 June 2005, p. 26.

17 R. Tan, *Committee Hansard*, 1 August 2005, p. 35.

18 D. Altman, quoted in Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Submission P65*, Attachment, p. 8.

Policy responses

15.19 The committee notes that DEST's submission does not mention the study of Chinese-related subjects in Australia. In evidence before the committee, Ms Buffinton stated that the study of Chinese languages and culture was of 'strong interest' to the department. Even so, DEST could only point to its support for a Chinese government initiative as evidence of the federal government's support for China literacy.¹⁹

15.20 The committee also notes that federal government support has been withdrawn from the major national initiative aimed at promoting greater Asia literacy amongst Australian school children. The AEF actively promotes and supports the study of Asia in Australian schools. It informed the committee that until 2002, \$A30 million was available under the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools strategy (NALSAS). The NALSAS was established through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and had been in effect for 10 years. It had provided a valuable source of funding to support initiatives aimed at promoting the teaching of Asian languages and studies—particularly Chinese. Ms Welch stated that there had been a number of negative results from the withdrawal of funding including:

- no proposed initiatives to develop curriculum for schools about China, particularly materials to engage young students (CD-ROMs, multimedia materials, etc); and
- a reduction in the professional learning opportunities available for teachers.

15.21 She stated:

My point is that we have developed a number of very useful curriculum materials for schools and resources that have been very well received by educators but, going forward, there are no funds for these types of initiatives and there are no ways in which we can introduce young Australians to China in particular.²⁰

15.22 The removal of NALSAS funding has adversely affected the ability of the AEF to deliver its programs:

When the NALSAS program was in place, we were able to draw on a lot of the funding streams that came out of NALSAS. In order to get professional development programs going, in-country experience programs going and resources produced, we could draw down on the NALSAS funding. That no longer exists, and the result is that fewer teachers are being trained, fewer teachers are going to Asia to learn about the region and fewer resources are being produced.²¹

19 F. Buffinton, *Committee Hansard*, 14 June 2005, p. 45.

20 M. Welch, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2005, p. 54.

21 J. McGregor, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2005, p. 62.

15.23 The Australia–China Council (ACC) also commented on the abolition of the NALSAS. Ms Dinah Dysart, on the behalf of the ACC, stated that it has had a big impact on the provision of language services. She gave the committee a direct example of the detrimental effect that the cancellation has had, and the subsequent need to divert already scarce funds away from other aspects of the ACC's work:

I think [the cancellation of the NALSAS] has had a big impact. In the last round of young people going to China in their gap...we ended up funding a young man who was doing extremely well in Chinese at his school, but the school stopped teaching it. In his tests he still did well, but not as well, obviously, as the others, because he had been struggling to maintain it, so we funded him anyway...we made a point of funding this young man because he just did not have the chance to keep up his Chinese.²²

15.24 Had NALSAS funding not been withdrawn, that student—and no doubt many others—would have had the resources available whereby he could have maintained Chinese language proficiency, without drawing on the scarce funds available to the ACC.

15.25 The committee considers that the cancellation of federally-funded programs aimed at the promotion of China literacy—such as the NALSAS—is unfortunate and demonstrates a failure to take a long-term strategic view of Australia's educational requirements. It would appear that, at a time when Australia should be enhancing its capacity in China literacy, the government is withdrawing support. In light of the growing body of evidence indicating China's importance to Australia, the committee would like to see increased government funding and promotion of China literacy.

Organisations promoting China literacy

15.26 In the absence of coordinated government support through a scheme such as the NALSAS, there are nonetheless several other organisations actively seeking to promote China literacy through school-based education activity. Several of these organisations provided the committee with an overview of their activities, and outlined recent advances in the promotion of China literacy.

15.27 The AEF was established by DEST in 1993 to promote and support the study of Asia across all curriculum areas in primary and secondary schools. Its budget is very small—only \$1.3 million per annum—and alternative sources of funding previously available under the NALSAS have ceased. It is worthy to note that the AEF's budget has been set at the same level for over 13 years now. The AEF works with government and non-government education providers and promotes the study of Asia through curriculum and materials development, teacher professional development, and schools development.²³

22 D. Dysart, *Committee Hansard*, 29 June 2005, p. 38.

23 Asia Education Foundation, *Submission P21*, p. 2.

15.28 Ms Welch, representing the AEF, told the committee that the inclusion of content on Asia is a complex task, as 'change in education is fairly glacial...we are only making a small dent in learning and teaching about Chinese languages in Australian schools.'²⁴ She stated that the need for Asia education is becoming pressing. At a recent national forum in Canberra, 140 key educators representing parents, principals, professional associations, teachers and all education systems singled China out as requiring particular focus:

Not only because of its growing economic and political influence across the world but also because of the contributions of Chinese culture, arts, science et cetera to our society and to our world generally. The national forum believed it was very important for Australia's future to equip young Australians with skills to interact within our region in a local and in a global context. There was a call for a greater sophistication of that knowledge and understanding and therefore a greater investment in education.²⁵

15.29 AEF indicated that it is currently lobbying the State, Territory and Federal governments to obtain a national statement affirming the various governments' commitment to actively promote the study of Chinese culture, history and languages. Ms Welch informed the committee that the governments have collaboratively agreed to national statements in the past, but these statements have not required any action. Ms Welch stated that whilst there is definitely 'in principle' support from the various governments the AEF has lobbied, this has not translated into a cohesive national strategy, or increased funding.²⁶ Moreover:

In the development of that statement there is no implementation plan and, at the moment, no funding to support any actions that could and should emerge as a result of developing a national statement.²⁷

15.30 The AEF is now seeking a statement that would require DEST to take carriage of an implementation strategy to increase teaching and learning about China.²⁸ The committee supports this initiative.

15.31 The ASAA is a professional organisation for research and teaching about Asia in Australia.²⁹ Its submission to the inquiry lists a number of recent positive developments towards greater Asia literacy, including:

24 M. Welch, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2005, p. 53.

25 M. Welch, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2005, p. 53.

26 M. Welch, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2005, p. 58.

27 M. Welch, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2005, p. 54.

28 M. Welch, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2005, pp. 60–61.

- the establishment of an International Centre for Excellence in Asia–Pacific Studies (ICEAPS) at the Australian National University that offers prospects for national coordination of Asia-related activities;
- the establishment of a National Centre for Language Training at the University of NSW, that aims to provide short practical beginners courses through to more advanced courses, which will be targeted to the needs of Australian business;
- an Asia–Pacific Futures Network (APFN), funded by the Australian Research Council, providing a five-year capacity to network research scholars and the wider community of professionals who work in countries of Asia; and
- an expanded scheme of Endeavour scholarships, increasing opportunities for research scholars from Australia to work in Asia and vice versa.³⁰

15.32 The Australia–China Council's (ACC) main contribution through education-related programs—as distinct from the public diplomacy and cultural exchange activities outlined below in Chapter 16—involves supporting students whilst they undertake 'in country' training.

15.33 Ms Dysart on behalf of the ACC informed the committee that there are three tiers to its youth program. The first is the 'China Experience program', where the ACC sends young students studying Chinese in years 10 and 11 to China. The ACC also has a 'Year in China' program, for young people in their gap year who have studied Chinese through school. Students participating in this program go to a foreign language university in Beijing for a year. The third tier to the program is the 'Young Business Scholars in China' program, designed for postgraduates who are reasonably fluent in Mandarin. Students go to Beijing, undergo a month of brush-up language skills concentrating on business language, and then undertake a Chinese business course. Students are then expected to look for an internship with an Australian, Chinese or foreign company in Beijing.³¹

15.34 The ACC has also begun an initiative for the promotion of Chinese language skills, in conjunction with the Chinese Language Teacher's Federation of Australia, and is now funding a national Chinese language speaking competition. Under the

29 Asian Studies Association Website, <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/ASAA/> (accessed 23 August 2005). The objects of the ASAA are: to promote the study of Asian languages, societies, cultures, and polities in Australia; to support teaching and research in Asian studies; to encourage the exchange of information through publications, conferences and seminars, and to act as publishers of periodicals and monographs; to contribute towards an understanding of Asia in the community at large; and to facilitate contacts between scholars and teachers in the field of Asian studies and to serve as a professional body representing their interests to governments and the community.

30 Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Submission P65*, p. 5.

31 D. Dysart, *Committee Hansard*, 29 June 2005, p. 38.

initiative, the ACC meets the cost of the finalists' accommodation and airfares to Sydney.³²

15.35 The Western Australian (WA) government also actively promotes China literacy. The WA Department of Education and Training informed the committee that WA's sister state arrangement with Zhejiang Province led to a Memorandum of Understanding being signed in 1987 between the two government's respective departments of education. This MOU facilitates educator exchanges focussing on schools, TAFEWA, and teachers of the Chinese language. The MOU has also enabled the creation of several sister-school relationships between schools located in Perth and Hangzhou, leading to teacher and student exchanges.

15.36 Eight WA State schools currently teach Chinese language as part of their curriculum, and State teachers are also encouraged to take up short-term contracts in China teaching English as a second language.³³ Mr Jeff Gunningham told the committee that, given the strategic importance of China to Australia, and WA in particular, the further promotion of China and Chinese language studies 'is certainly an area I believe the Department of Education and Training is looking at.'³⁴

15.37 Similarly, the Queensland Government has a number of programs to promote China literacy. In October 2003, an MOU on Education was signed between Queensland and its sister-province Shanghai. This MOU aims to establish collaborative projects of mutual interest in schools and other educational institutions in order to further mutual understanding and cooperation between the parties. Queensland has a similar MOU with Hubei Province. Under the 2005-07 sister-state agreement with Shanghai, English and Chinese language competitions have also been established in each jurisdiction.³⁵

The Confucius Institute

15.38 The Chinese government has undertaken to establish a global network of 100 Confucius Institutes. The committee is aware that the Chinese Government has begun collaborating with two Australian universities for the establishment of two institutes based in Western Australia and Victoria.

15.39 Australia's first Confucius Institute—based at the University of Western Australia (UWA)—opened on 20 May 2005. The committee also notes that the University of Melbourne has announced that it has recently signed a letter of intent to establish a Confucius Institute with the Chinese Consul-General in Melbourne.³⁶

32 D. Dysart, *Committee Hansard*, 29 June 2005, p. 38.

33 WA Government, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, *Submission P45*, p. 3.

34 J. Gunningham, *Committee Hansard*, 1 August 2005, p. 27.

35 *Submission P1A*, p. 4.

36 University of Melbourne *Uninews* vol 14. No. 13, 25 July- 8 August, http://uninews.unimelb.edu.au/articleid_2572.html (accessed: 23 August 2005).

15.40 In addition to teaching, learning and promoting Chinese language studies, the Institute will engage in cultural activities. It is hoped that the Institute will form 'an important bridge to government, the local community, the ethnic Chinese community, the broader community and the business community as well.'³⁷

15.41 The UWA Confucius Institute is funded under a partnership agreement by the National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language and UWA. Dr Gary Sigley, Director of the newly-opened UWA Confucius Institute, stated that the establishment of the Confucius Institute program in Australia is:

An indication of the efforts which the Chinese government is making to reach out to the broader world, especially, in this case, in its understanding and desire to promote the learning of Chinese language abroad...It is something that I think is very important for Australia's own future and the future relationship with China.³⁸

15.42 He told the committee that UWA's decision to host a Confucius Institute was part of the university's broader internationalisation strategy, and reflected a trend in recent years for faculties to increase their collaboration with Chinese universities.³⁹ Between 140 and 160 UWA undergraduates receive Chinese language tuition, and approximately eight postgraduate students are currently undertaking research on China.⁴⁰ UWA has also developed an in-country program, whereby students are sent from Australia to China and undertake Chinese language courses.⁴¹ UWA's international centre provides a limited number of bursaries to support students participating in this program.⁴²

15.43 UWA has recently expanded its in-country program through the establishment of closer links with Zhejiang University. Zhejiang University is located in Western Australia's sister-province, and is now the partner university of the Confucius Institute. UWA will begin to host Chinese exchange students in 2005, and has also recently signed an agreement with the National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, gaining accreditation to administer the Chinese proficiency test.

15.44 Dr Sigley stated that the UWA Confucius Institute would provide full-fee paying short-term classes. The classes 'will basically be based on Pinyin and some basic conversational etiquette for business people, government workers and so forth.'⁴³

37 G. Sigley, *Committee Hansard*, 1 August 2005, p. 67.

38 G. Sigley, *Committee Hansard*, 1 August 2005, p. 67.

39 G. Sigley, *Committee Hansard*, 1 August 2005, p. 66.

40 G. Sigley, *Committee Hansard*, 1 August 2005, p. 71.

41 G. Sigley, *Committee Hansard*, 1 August 2005, p. 67.

42 G. Sigley, *Committee Hansard*, 1 August 2005, p. 72.

43 G. Sigley, *Committee Hansard*, 1 August 2005, p. 67.

In the preliminary stages, the courses will be offered as a part of the UWA's outreach public adult education program.⁴⁴

15.45 Although recognising that the UWA Confucius Institute is in its early days, the committee commends the initiative and the work the UWA Institute has undertaken to date. It considers that the establishment of more institutes around Australia will assist to raise the level of China awareness and China literacy throughout Australia at the tertiary level.

15.46 The committee welcomes the Chinese government's interest in creating the Confucius Institutes. It notes, however, that where the Chinese government has sought to establish Confucius Institutes, it would seem to have done so through direct contact with the relevant host institution, rather than through DEST.⁴⁵

Suggestions for improvement

15.47 Various witnesses and submitters to this inquiry made suggestions to remedy Australia's lack of China literacy. A recurrent theme in all submissions was the need for greater government funding and support to promote China literacy programs.

Broader government strategy

15.48 A number of submitters advocated broad-based reform of current policy frameworks and institutional structures. The ASAA made four broad recommendations aimed at improving Australia's Asia literacy. It suggested the creation of:

- 10 nationally funded chairs of language to oversee the teaching and promotion of key languages;
- a nationally funded and nationally available method for teaching languages of lower demand;
- 15 entry-level positions to reposition and renew Australian expertise on Asia; and
- an Australian fellowship scheme for distinguished young scholars to come to Australia.⁴⁶

15.49 The ASAA emphasised that these suggestions must be part of a longer-term strategy to increase Australia's Asia literacy. The central features of this longer-term strategy are found in the ASAA's report *Maximising Australia's Asia Knowledge*. They include:

44 G. Sigley, *Committee Hansard*, 1 August 2005, p. 67.

45 The Confucius Institutes are discussed in more detail below in chapter 16, paragraph 16.24.

46 Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Submission P65*, p. 8.

- establishing a Council for Maximising Australia's Asia Knowledge and Skills. This council would:
 - develop and promote Australia as a knowledge centre for the study of Asia and for activities relating to Asia;
 - link Australia's knowledge and resources about Australia in government, education, business, media, and non-government organisations (NGOs);
 - promote the deepening and diffusion of Asia expertise in primary, secondary and tertiary education systems; and
 - initiate Asia 'education programs' to renew and reposition Australia's Asia knowledge.⁴⁷
- creating a website linking Asia-related to sites to form an 'Asia-Australia Knowledge Portal';⁴⁸
- creating a range of web-based Asia-related units of study to enable people to extend and deepen their knowledge of Asia;⁴⁹
- creating undergraduate degree structures that encourage students to easily incorporate study of Asia and international experience into their courses of study;⁵⁰
- improving the provision of language tuition to teachers;⁵¹
- establishing fieldwork and language fellowships;⁵² and
- promoting the provision of Asian studies in Year 11 & 12 curricula.⁵³

15.50 The ASAA also suggest the convening of a 'Language Summit' to coordinate government and academic programs, and engage the wider community in a discussion about how best to address Australia's ongoing language development needs.⁵⁴

15.51 Going beyond specific recommendations, Professor David Goodman highlighted the need for firmer political commitment from the federal government to the advancement of Asian studies. Although agreeing that providing adequate funding is important, Professor Goodman emphasised that the message emanating from government is imperative in creating a desire within the general population to learn more about China:

47 Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Submission P65*, Attachment, p. 47.

48 Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Submission P65*, Attachment, p. 50.

49 Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Submission P65*, Attachment, p. 51.

50 Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Submission P65*, Attachment, p. 52.

51 Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Submission P65*, Attachment, pp. 57 and 63.

52 Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Submission P65*, Attachment, pp. 58–59 and 62.

53 Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Submission P65*, Attachment, p. 64.

54 Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Submission P65*, p. 10.

It is the political message which is crucial. When this particular [federal] government published its first white paper in 1996 or 1997...and essentially sent out signals, 'We are going to reconsider our commitment to Asia,' our enrolments in Asian languages plummeted. Our enrolments in European languages rose...That is all it takes. Money is not unimportant, but I am more concerned in one sense about the symbols that government puts forward. If government came out and said, uncategorically, 'You have got to go and do China,' that would be enough on one level...But it is not giving out those messages.⁵⁵

15.52 The political messages emanating from government must, however, be backed by financial support. Ms Welch commented that, despite the work being done by several organisations to promote China literacy, budgets remain tight, with little indication that greater funding to support China literacy will be forthcoming. In particular, she noted that, whilst in principle support had been given for the AEF's initiative to produce a national statement affirming the need for enhanced Asia literacy:

There are no guarantees that we will be successful in putting this on the national agenda. There needs to be funding for this area. There needs to be a very long-term commitment. It is something that you need to seed and it needs to grow over time. We are talking about introducing new knowledge and understanding, and it is something that you cannot do in the short term.⁵⁶

Sector-specific suggestions

15.53 In addition to suggesting broader government commitment to advancing Asia and China literacy, many submissions also made recommendations specific to particular education sectors.

Primary and secondary schools

15.54 The importance of introducing Asian content into primary and secondary education as early as possible was frequently raised. Several submitters also affirmed the benefit of 'in country' training—particularly at the secondary level.

15.55 Ms Welch from the AEF noted that the China literacy of primary and secondary teachers needs to be addressed. She claimed that there is a significant need for teacher professional development and increased teacher knowledge and understanding about Asia. She stated that the greatest barrier for teaching about Asia is a lack of teacher knowledge:

Unless there is a determined strategy put forward, it will be the case that we will miss, yet again, another generation of teachers for whom Asia will be

55 D. Goodman, *Committee Hansard*, 29 June 2005, p. 61.

56 M. Welch, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2005, p. 54.

foreign and perhaps Asia will not be a focus within their classrooms. That has a flow-on effect with young students as well.⁵⁷

15.56 Ms Welch also stressed the importance of providing teaching materials and developing curricula with Asian content.

Tertiary education

15.57 The need for greater support for in-country training was the most persistent theme to emerge in the tertiary education context. Professor Goodman stated:

The lack of funding is serious in one area of language learning: very few Australian universities send their students overseas to continue their language studies. The reason is that it is twice as expensive as educating them here. It is much less than half as efficient—it is woefully inefficient—to teach people Chinese in Sydney when you could teach them Chinese in Beijing, Guangzhou or wherever, yet the funding model that we have from the government kneecaps us because we do not get enough funding to teach the students properly in that way and we are not allowed to be free of fees.⁵⁸

15.58 Dr Morgan noted that in the UK, and many European universities, students are required to study in China for a period of time as part of their undergraduate major in Chinese. According to Dr Morgan, students are given support to undertake in-country training, so that they do not have to bear the full burden of the considerable costs involved. He stated:

It is that sort of training which not only improves their language capability—that is important—but improves their social and cultural understanding, which gives them the means to communicate much more effectively.⁵⁹

Dr Morgan claims that this is certainly an area to which the government could contribute in terms of raising Australia's level of China awareness.⁶⁰

15.59 Likewise, Dr Sigley emphasised the need for greater support for in-country training and affirmed the importance of in-country training for the establishment of personal networks.⁶¹ He also underscored the need for greater financial support for these schemes.⁶²

15.60 Dr Morgan, whilst supporting in-country training, also suggested that greater emphasis needs to be placed on developing language skills in concert with other skills

57 M. Welch, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2005, pp. 54–55.

58 D. Goodman, *Committee Hansard*, 29 June 2005, p. 56.

59 S. Morgan, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2005, p. 8.

60 S. Morgan, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2005, p. 8.

61 G. Sigley, *Committee Hansard*, 1 August 2005, p. 74.

62 G. Sigley, *Committee Hansard*, 1 August 2005, p. 74.

sets—for broader discipline areas to be married with competency in Asian languages.⁶³ He would like to see more people trained in disciplines such as law, economics, business, engineering and architecture that can competently use the Chinese language and conduct themselves effectively in the Chinese cultural context. He does not think Australia has been able to develop the required capacity to provide individuals with these skills. Dr Morgan's fundamental point is that competence in broader disciplinary areas needs to be complemented with proficiency and understanding in Asian languages and cultures—particularly Chinese.⁶⁴

Findings and recommendations

15.61 The committee considers that far higher priority should be accorded to the promotion of Asia and China literacy. It is imperative that Australia equips its children and young adults with the tools to engage meaningfully with its neighbours into the future—particularly China. The federal government should assume a leadership role in this regard, and send a clear and unequivocal message to Australians that Asia is important: we want and need to engage.

15.62 The Federal government should actively work with the States and Territories to promote the uptake of Asian studies and the incorporation of Asian content at the primary and secondary level. At the tertiary level, students should be encouraged to undertake Asian studies and gain vital in-country experience as part of their degrees. In short, the government needs to adopt a far more proactive stance, and invest more in enhancing China literacy.

Chinese students in Australia

15.63 One perhaps overlooked aspect of education is the role that Chinese students studying in Australia play in promoting bilateral linkages. As noted earlier, Dr Sigley stressed that in-country training enables Australians to build personal networks. The same could also be said of Chinese students studying in Australia. Ms Valerie Kelly commented on the relationship networks forged by Chinese students during their stay in Australia that could be used as a bridge for Australian businesses wishing to operate in China:

There were at least three or four companies that had started up by going through trade missions, finding a product, deciding they could value-add and then marketing it in Australia. Some of them are successful, but a number of them fall by the wayside. That is becoming quite apparent. Interestingly enough, the most successful ones are those that have had Chinese students in Australia who then link to an Australian business and provide the networks. As I mentioned in my summary, I think education is

63 S. Morgan, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2005, p. 3.

64 S. Morgan, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2005, p. 3.

critical because, in addition to the actual education, the long-lasting personal rapport that is built up through education is critical.⁶⁵

15.64 Australia should seek to maintain contact with Chinese students who have studied in Australia. The committee notes that a number of countries have active alumni programs, whereby they seek to preserve the link between a guest student and the host nation. The UK has a particularly active program through the British Council, whereby UK alumni are invited along to sporting, cultural, educational and networking events aimed at promoting the UK.⁶⁶

15.65 DEST informed the committee that it views engagement with alumni as very important, and told the committee that every two years there is a major Australian alumni event in Asia. The last one was held in Hong Kong in December 2004 and there was strong representation from China. DEST stated, however, that although it does play a role and accepts that there is scope for government activity, ultimately the establishment of alumni networks is the responsibility of tertiary institutions. It recognised the importance of alumni networks:

Of all the countries where I would suggest Australian universities are particularly developing alumni, China is probably in the top couple, if not the key one. A lot of institutions run quite strong alumni arrangements with China. When we have done studies more broadly about why a student chose Australia, we have found it is usually because of a referral from a friend or family. That is by far and away the No. 1 reason and why I would suggest that we have had the sort of growth that we have had.⁶⁷

15.66 Ms Dysart advised the committee that the ACC tries to keep 'some kinds of alumni connections.'⁶⁸ It does not, however, have a specific alumni program. Ms Dysart agreed that developing alumni programs is one of the most effective ways of strengthening linkages with China, especially if students have had a positive study experience and have formed a favourable impression of Australia. She indicated that, whilst it was certainly of value and something that could be developed, the funding was simply not available to allow the ACC to undertake these activities.⁶⁹ The ACC suggested that with greater funding it could take a more proactive role in developing alumni associations for Chinese students that had studied in Australia.⁷⁰

15.67 Another element of the positive aspect of hosting Chinese students—especially in tertiary education—arises from the student's exposure to, and tuition within, a liberal democratic system. Commentators have noted the capacity to exert

65 V. Kelly, *Committee Hansard*, 1 August 2005, pp. 20–21.

66 See <http://www.britishcouncil.org>.

67 F. Buffinton, *Committee Hansard*, 14 June 2005, pp. 31–32.

68 D. Dysart, *Committee Hansard*, 29 June 2005, p. 37.

69 D. Dysart, *Committee Hansard*, 29 June 2005, p. 37.

70 D. Dysart, *Committee Hansard*, 29 June 2005, p. 37.

intellectual influence over students, which in turn can assist China to move towards a more democratic society. Edmund Fung has written, however:

If Australia wants to influence the Chinese intellectually and to encourage them to move in a more liberal and democratic direction, we must try to get a better mix of students to come here, including more of those in the humanities and social sciences, law and education. Modern Chinese history has shown that political reformers were most likely those who had studied politics, constitutional law, philosophy and the liberal arts in the West and/or Japan. In contemporary times the Taiwanese and South Korean cases have also demonstrated that returned students who have done humanities, social sciences and law in the West are more likely to espouse Western liberal democratic values and to demand political and legal reforms. When they become political and business leaders, they are better prepared to make change along Western lines. Engineers and scientists are very important people, but they are rarely the ones to initiate political and social change...it is easy to understand why the Chinese government is reluctant to sponsor humanities and social science students to go overseas. But it is possible for Australian universities to change that to some extent by setting up post graduate scholarship schemes whereby a certain number of awards would be allocated to applicants in those areas every year.⁷¹

Recommendation 22

15.68 The committee recommends that the Australian government place a high priority on encouraging China literacy in Australia by;

- **working with the state and territory governments to reinvigorate the NALSAS to promote the study of Asia across subject areas and at both the primary and tertiary level and to support and encourage teachers to develop their Asia literacy;**
- **providing more support for in-country language training for undergraduates and post graduates—grants/scholarships/encourage and supporting universities to create degree programs that incorporate in-country experience.**
- **promoting 'double degrees' for example by setting up scholarships in a discipline combined with Asian language/cultural studies; and**
- **introducing incentives, such as scholarships and sponsorship to encourage Chinese students to apply for courses in the humanities and social sciences.**

71 Edmund S.K.Fung 'Education, Science and Culture', Colin Mackerras (ed.), *Australia and China: Partners in Asia*, Melbourne, 1996, p. 129.

Recommendation 23

15.69 The committee recommends that DEST take a more active role in working with Australian educational institutions to develop an effective alumni program.

Conclusion

15.70 Education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels provides an effective means through which 'China literacy' can be formally promoted, equipping Australian children with the language skills and knowledge base to interact successfully with China.

15.71 The committee recognises the vital role that education plays in promoting greater understanding and affinity between the Chinese and Australian people. Federal and State governments of all political persuasions should support and encourage the uptake of Asian studies in schools and universities, and should more actively engage with Chinese students who are or have studied in Australia. The committee urges the federal government to adopt a more proactive stance in encouraging the development of greater China literacy. If we are to gain the most from our growing relationship with China, Australia needs the capacity to understand and identify how, where and when opportunities to draw closer to China arise.

15.72 It is to that broader level of cultural awareness—achieving understanding outside of formal education delivered at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels—that the committee now turns.

