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There are several reasons why Australia's interactions with the People's Republic of China [PRC] are likely to be of concern during the next ten years:

Economically, the continued growth of the PRC will present both opportunities for trade and investment, as our business community already fully appreciates, and also challenges to Australia's domestic economic development. These latter include not only the necessary restructuring of Australia-based economic activity as these continue to move China-wards, but also to competition for natural resources and semi-finished products.

Politically, East and Southeast Asia, and the area of the Pacific will see an increased diplomatic and cultural push by the government of the PRC to position itself as a regional, if not a world superpower. This process is already well underway, through PRC actions in regional forums, as well as through new outreach programs being initiated by its government. Since the government of the PRC knows its military limitations it will attempt to reach its (nationalistic) goals through politics and diplomacy on international stages.

Culturally, Australia is a migrant country with a substantial minority of people who consider themselves to be of a Chinese background. Though the PRC Government usually holds no brief for Australian citizens who are Chinese, this is not always unambiguously the case. Moreover, Australian citizens of Chinese background may well be expected to evince different attitudes towards the PRC and its government than other Australians. Most of the time, this may not cause problems for Australian government and society. At the same time, there is potential for friction as changes in the PRC place pressures on its government and possibly even relations with Australia. The activities of the Falungong in Australia are one clear example of such potential. Another might be local instabilities in the PRC that attend continued democratisation.

The negative aspects of these changes are easily overstated and it is clearly the case that Australia can and should engage constructively with both the government and the people of the PRC for our mutual benefit.

At the same time it is necessary for us to realise, if we are to engage constructively with the PRC, that we need the human resource base to support that engagement. We need school, college and university graduates who know about China, its society, culture, economics, history, and politics, and who speak its languages. While Australia is clearly well ahead of other European societies in this regard, current achievements by no means match aspirations.

Despite the increasing importance of the PRC economically since 1990, there has been almost no growth in the numbers of students learning Chinese language or

engaged in Chinese Studies during the last fifteen years. The number of Australian undergraduates spending a year at a university in China barely exceeds the number of Australian universities. Even the UK does better than this: with a much larger population but only six universities teaching programs about contemporary China.

On the contrary, over this same period there has been a loss of teaching staff and research capacities related to China, both through natural attrition, and as universities in other countries have hired away highly qualified and able staff. Unfortunately there has been almost no replacement within Australia, and little of prospect of that occurring with extremely low research student enrolments in China Studies.

Support for Chinese language programs in Australia would be a start but not all teaching of and about China should be seen in terms of acquiring language proficiency. If engagement with China is to proceed to meet aspirations there is a need for a more comprehensive Australian China Studies program to provide guidance and support to schools, colleges and universities. In addition to language acquisition this should consider integration of knowledge about China in other subject and discipline programs; programs of education dedicated to increasing understanding of Chinese society and development; as well as the development of research and research training related to China and the PRC.