

Media Statement

Re: Global Times, 5 June 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

On 5 June 2017, the Global Times (Chinese edition) published an article by myself on the phenomenon of 'Sinophobic' fear-mongering in the Australian media and popular discourse, in light of the Four Corners/Fairfax report on Chinese influence in Australia.

That report claims to uncover 'how China's Communist Party is secretly infiltrating Australia', by 'tracking the activities of Beijing-backed organisations and the efforts made to intimidate opponents of the Chinese Communist party'.

The argument is made that 'China' acts to control Chinese language media in Australia, bullies those that dare to dissent into compliance or silence through surveillance operations disguised as student associations, and influences Australian politics and foreign policy through donations that come with allegedly pro-Chinese agendas.

Following the publication of my article, and the broadcast of the Four Corners report, I have been invited to expand upon and clarify my writing. I am pleased to do that here:

1. The allegations that Chinese students are involved in espionage activities seem anachronistic and unsophisticated in an 'information age', one in which Russian hackers allegedly influence US elections and have access to the private emails of presidential candidates.
2. From my experience, many Chinese-Australians and expatriates are proud of their heritage, and have a strong sense of community. It's not surprising that we see this on display. Recipients of scholarships under the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan are selected as 'young ambassadors' that represent Australian values in their place of study, and are assets for creating stronger links between our nation and others. Many Chinese students act similarly.
3. Last night's report revealed that one representative from the Chinese Students and Scholars Association would report students organising a protest, on the grounds of security concerns for other pro-China students. I have not come across such actions in my personal dealings, and would never condone the use of a student association as a surveillance tool or vehicle for the silencing of dissenting opinions.
4. We live in a democratic nation, one in which we celebrate diversity of opinion. It is hardly surprising that some Australian-Chinese or Chinese expatriates in Australia hold positive views towards China. This does not make them foreign agents. Such fear-mongering only serves to exacerbate existing social tensions between and within the Australian-Chinese community.
5. The revelation that some Chinese media outlets in Australia hold positive views towards China is hardly surprising, and is not evidence that Beijing is 'controlling' public opinion in Australia. Few media outlets are free of bias, however opaque. The notion that the media is an impartial fourth estate is an idealistic but unrealistic one. Rupert Murdoch and his media empire are widely considered to have influenced the outcome of Australian elections, yet

News Limited remains a respected media outlet. It's naïve to position the Chinese media as an exceptional source of influential bias.

6. The report singled out Huang Xiangmo and Chau Chak Wing as potential agents of pro-CCP influence in Australia, citing their political donations and the withdrawal of Huang's promised AUD\$400,000 when the Labor party made a statement that conflicted with his 'pro-China/pro-CCP' views on the South China Sea arbitration. The report acknowledges that *guanxi* is an important part of Chinese business, and indeed, building positive relationships is a key part of any business. Again, it is naïve to think that these successful businessmen make large investments — like any political donor — without an alignment of agenda or values. It is also a giant leap to imply that they are doing this on behalf of the Chinese government. The report does highlight an important issue, but it is not China exclusive. Political parties should not allow their votes to be 'bought' by anyone, domestic or foreign.
7. It's no secret that China, its enterprises and its citizens are looking for more influence abroad — in fact, this aim is stated pretty much verbatim in the broader One Belt One Road policy, which aims to strengthen relationships and dependence on China among the nations that it spans across. Australia is already substantially economically dependent on China. The extent to which our nation allows foreign cash — Chinese, American, or whatever your preferred variant, pick your poison — to influence its politics, economy, public opinion and foreign policy is a matter that the report brings into the public arena for constructive debate. It's a question that falls under the broader context of Hugh White's 'China Choice', one which will perhaps form the most pertinent foreign policy question for Australia in the 21st century.

The report raises legitimate concerns to do with the way our current democracy functions, and there should be serious public debate on these issues. The report paints China as having a sinister, secret agenda; an 'Operation Australia'. In fact, there is very little secret about China's Australia policy, and indeed, its foreign policies more broadly. Australia doesn't need more fear-mongering, we need a better understanding of China and rational, independent assessment of how Australia should deal with that China, to develop a productive bilateral relationship that reflects the values Australia would like to see in the world.

I hope this clarifies any questions you might have regarding my writing.

Callum Smith
6 June 2017
Shanghai, PRC