

**Australia-China 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Forum, Woodward Conference Centre**  
**Speech by Vice-Chancellor Duncan Maskell, 2 December 2022**

Thanks Martine.

The University of Melbourne acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the unceded land on which we work, learn and live: the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong peoples (Burnley, Fishermans Bend, Parkville, Southbank and Werribee campuses), the Yorta Yorta Nation (Dookie and Shepparton campuses), and the Dja Dja Wurrung people (Creswick campus).

The University also acknowledges and is grateful to the Traditional Owners, Elders and Knowledge Holders of all Indigenous nations and clans who have been instrumental in our reconciliation journey.

We recognise the unique place held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and custodians of the lands and waterways across the Australian continent, with histories of continuous connection dating back more than 60,000 years. We also acknowledge their enduring cultural practices of caring for Country.

We pay respect to Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge the importance of Indigenous knowledge in the Academy. As a community of researchers, teachers, professional staff and students we are privileged to work and learn every day with indigenous colleagues and partners.

I also acknowledge:

The Acting Consul General of the Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Melbourne, Mr ZENG Jianhua  
Consul-General of the Indonesian Consulate General in Melbourne, Bapak Kuncoro Waseso < Bah-puck kun-choor-o wa-say-so >  
City of Melbourne Councillor Philip Le Liu, and  
The State Director of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Andrew Cumpston.

Welcome, everyone.

In December 2022, we celebrate and commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the Commonwealth of Australia and the People's Republic of China. That founding moment in history, back in 1972, was extremely interesting and important globally, connecting us with what was a seismic shift in power relations around the world.

The establishment of formal relations was enacted from Australia's end by the newly-elected Labor Government led by Gough Whitlam. It was one of the first actions in office by Prime Minister Whitlam, who had shown enormous diplomatic and strategic vision, as well as courage, by reaching out to the Chinese government as far back as May 1971, when Mr Whitlam was still in Opposition. The Whitlam delegation visit to Beijing in July 1971 led to high level talks between Chinese government leaders and the future Australian Prime Minister, and laid a firm foundation for the establishment of diplomatic relations the following year (1972).

It is worth recalling that though Mr Whitlam was roundly criticised by some conservative voices in Australia for undertaking this bold diplomatic mission to China in 1971, he was utterly vindicated by the 'secret' visit to Beijing made just days later by United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, which set the scene for American President Richard Nixon's historic trip to China, also in 1972, during which diplomatic relations between the US and the PRC were established for the first time. The Nixon visit to China in 1972 has long been seen as one of the truly historic power shifts of the twentieth century.

It was also, incidentally, the subject of an impressive 1987 opera by the minimalist composer John Adams; now considered an important work within the canon of American music.

On the historical record, though, it is something of which Australians can always be proud that Gough Whitlam beat Henry Kissinger to China by about five days. It was quite an international coup for the future Australian Prime Minister, and one that reflects lasting credit on his political legacy.

With a newly elected Labor government in power again in Canberra today, with a fresh ministerial team leading new diplomatic efforts for the government, we may perhaps likewise hope for further positive developments in Australia-China relations during the next few years.

This is some of the historical background to this forum, but the Forum itself will be mostly forward-looking.

Today I want to thank collectively my colleagues from a number of different parts of the university community for their efforts in putting the Forum together. In particular I acknowledge the hard work of Asialink, the Centre for Contemporary Chinese Studies and Chancellery International for working together to host this important event for the University of Melbourne. The forum is a first-of-its-kind meeting of Australia-China experts here in Victoria focused on looking ahead, discussing solutions and future collaboration in the bilateral relationship between the two nations.

I believe there cannot be a more fitting way to mark 50 years of the important connection between two significant member states of the Asia Pacific region.

As we move into a new era of Australia-China relations, I think that it is essential that we build friendships and partnerships between experts, academics, and government officials so that we can work together to address the issues facing our region and the world. In line with this Forum's title – 'Building the future together' – we may look particularly to areas such as health, environment, and regional engagement, where we can contribute significantly and positively to the needs of our own countries and our many neighbours in the world. As leading regional nations we can aim to be innovative, collaborative, cooperative and adaptive in facing new environmental, technological, and financial challenges, and do all we can to ensure that our bilateral and multilateral partnerships are in place to deliver helpful solutions.

In line with these goals, I would like to point to some specific ways in which the University of Melbourne is constantly working towards building stronger friendships and partnerships between China and Australia.

This also gives me the chance to thank a number of colleagues for the great work they are doing towards our China relationship.

First, the work of Chancellery International, overseen by my colleague the Deputy Vice-Chancellor International, Professor Michael Wesley. This is a terrific team of people who work to build and maintain University relationships with partner institutions and to support international students and research collaborations. These colleagues also work closely with other teams across the University community, such as at Asialink and the Centre for Contemporary Chinese Studies, to deliver on the University's key strategic aspirations in the international arena.

Our second University of Melbourne host today, the Centre for Contemporary Chinese Studies, is one of the top few China Studies Research centres in Australia.

The Centre is a hub which actively encourages and facilitates the University's China-related research, teaching, and engagement. Some examples of its work are:

- Leading Chinese studies at the University of Melbourne by drawing together and highlighting the China-related expertise of colleagues from the Asia Institute, the Faculty of Arts, and across the University;
- Actively collaborating with leading Chinese and international institutions, conducting interdisciplinary research, research training, teaching and engagement activities, and providing support for the development of new China-related initiatives; and
- Providing strategic support to the University by actively assisting with the development and realisation of our *Engaging with China Plan 2020-2024*.

Our third University host today is Asialink, Australia's leading centre for creative engagement with Asia. Asialink continues to transform the way Australia engages with Asia. With over 30 years' experience in the field, Asialink's reach, connections, and reputation are unmatched in this space.

Asialink takes a holistic approach to strengthening Australia's relationship with China through its four pillars:

- The first is Asialink Arts, which elevates the agency and capability of the Australian arts sector to engage with Asia through sharing insights, creating connections, and building capability.
- The second pillar is Asialink Business. Asialink Business is Australia's National Centre for Asia Capability. It provides tailored solutions to help businesses seize the potential of the many different Asian and Indo-Pacific markets.
- Pillar number three is the Asia Education Foundation, which honours the enormous power of education to build connections between countries. The Asia Education Foundation empowers teachers to shape informed and compassionate, globally engaged future leaders.
- The fourth pillar of Asialink's work into China is Asialink Diplomacy – which is the team behind this Forum.

I thank all of my colleagues from all these areas of the University for their excellent work in supporting our institution's and nation's engagement with China.

I would like to close by saying a few words about our aspirations for the international arena, of which a flourishing relationship with Chinese students, academics and universities is one.

Great universities exist, in my opinion, to be part of the national and international conversations of their time, and to help lead conversations about the future. We see this in many domains: right now, for example, in relation to the pressing demands of climate change. As nations and governments struggle to agree at momentous global summit meetings like the recent COP-27 in Egypt, day to day in universities like this one, researchers, students and staff work hard to show leadership to others about working towards a sustainable future for the planet. The recent University of Melbourne Sustainability Plan 2030, for example, commits this large organisation to become not only carbon neutral by 2025 in all its operations, but also to become a net 'climate positive' contributor

by 2030; this commitment includes accounting for the net effect of the University's investment portfolio.

This is one small but significant example of a university acting in a leadership role, in response to the real demands of the time.

Though the issues are separate, the need for strong, positive relationships between Australia and China is another area where the University of Melbourne can and will play a productive role in years to come. Though we have all been challenged by COVID-19, the resilience of people in both our countries – including many of our international students in China who continued to work hard towards their Melbourne degrees despite restrictions on travel – is a strong sign of hope for the future.

Above all, both countries – China and Australia alike – are places in which the value of education, scholarship, research and academic excellence are well understood by many people throughout society. We will continue to hunger for knowledge, and to reach out wherever we can across borders to share this knowledge, translate it for the good of society, and build person-to-person and university-to-university connections that will stand both nations in good stead during the next 50 years.

It is great to mark the historic landmark of 50 years in the Australia China formal relationship, through this forum today. Thank you to everyone for attending – it is inspiring to see such a diverse cohort come together in this way. I look forward to hearing more about the insights and discussions that will emerge from this meeting devoted to the theme of 'Building the Future Together'.

It is now my pleasure to introduce the Deputy Vice-Chancellor International, Michael Wesley, to commence the opening plenary.

Thank you!