

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



Institute for
Australian and Chinese
Arts and Culture

澳英艺术文化研究院

ENGAGING WITH CHINA THROUGH SYMPOSIUM AND CONFERENCE

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The recent Australia-China Transcultural Studies Symposium (ACTS) and Foundation for Australian Studies in China (FASIC) Conference held on the Parramatta City Campus on 3-6 October were an enormous success. The back-to-back events were jointly organised by the Institute for Australian and Chinese Arts and Culture (IAC) and the Foundation for Australian Studies in China and greatly lifted the profile of those two institutions as well as Western Sydney University. This was the 10th ACTS meeting in a series held alternately in China and Australia (when it is convened in China it is titled the China-Australia Transcultural Symposium or CATS), and the 9th FASIC conference, held for the first time in Australia. Bringing the two conferences together was an experiment that was widely seen as giving both events extra impact and significance.

More than 80 speakers and panellists attended the event from seven universities in Australia and 15 in mainland China and Taiwan. For most of the visitors from China, this was the first time they had been able to attend an academic conference in Australia since before the pandemic. They were infectiously enthusiastic, and many declared that they were moved by the warm welcome that they received. Most were connected with Australian Studies centres and already had an international reputation through their research and publications, while some were early-stage researchers and students. The Australian cohort included eminent scholars from China Studies, Australian Studies and other relevant transcultural and international studies fields.

For all participants, the symposium and conference represented a unique opportunity to exchange information and contact details with a view to continuing scholarly collaboration in the future. That Western Sydney University hosted these events can be credited to many years of fruitful exchanges with China under the auspices of the present Vice-Chancellor Distinguished Professor George Williams AO and his predecessor Professor Barney Glover AO, and to the particular contribution to transcultural studies of IAC and its Director Professor Jing Han.

Professor Barney Glover, now Commissioner of Jobs and Skills Australia, opened the two conferences at a reception on the evening of 3rd October which was attended by over 100 invited guests. He recalled his many trips to China, Hong Kong and Taiwan while he was Vice-Chancellor, including several visits to Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) and their Australian Studies Centre. He said that he was pleased to note that the efforts he and his

colleagues had put into establishing good relationships in the region were now bearing fruit. He was confident that this work would continue in the future. Western Sydney University was represented by Pro Vice-Chancellor for Global Partnerships and Transnational Education, Dr Nicolene Murdoch, Distinguished Professors Anthony Uhlmann and Ian Ang, a number of other professors from various Schools and Institutes and WSU International and many HDR students, including Indigenous student Nicholas Howie, who gave a very thoughtful and relevant Welcome to Country. The President of BFSU, Professor Jia Wenjian, sent his good wishes to conference participants via video .

The breadth and scope of presentations illustrated the continuing development of Australian Studies in China. When first founded in the 1980s, most Australian Studies Centres grew out of departments of foreign languages so that scholars were generally specialised in language and literature. That stream remains important and there were interesting papers at the conferences on a range of subjects such as Professor Tony Hughes-d'Aeth's comparison of the writing of Australian author Alexis Wright and Tibetan Chinese author Alai, and Professor Chunjuan Zhan's study of the work of Peter Carey.

The scope of Australian Studies in China has widened to include Media Studies, Translation and other aspects of communication. Conference papers included Dr Lu Jiang on the media construction of Australian multicultural identity and Emeritus Professor Joe Lo Bianco on the recent report to the Australian Academy of the Humanities on Australia's China Knowledge Capacity. Both Australian and Chinese scholars are focusing on the contributions of Chinese Australians. Wenche Ommundsen described their recent literary work as "brilliant". Dr Lipan Lyu is researching Chinese literary work from 19th century Gold Rush times. Dr Jennifer Hsu is researching trends in contemporary Chinese Australian communities.

These days Australian Indigenous culture always features in discussions about cultural exchanges between Australia and China. A panel on Aboriginal-Chinese connections in the FASIC conference included Indigenous artist Jason Wing, historian Distinguished Professor Mark Finnane and literature scholar Dr Daozhi Xu. Politics, trade, education, the economy and security studies were also on the agenda. In a panel of the ACTS symposium, Professor James Laurenceson, Director of the Australia China Relations Institute at UTS Sydney, spoke about the current "stabilised" state of bilateral relations, PhD candidate Chen Xi discussed important collaboration in various fields of science and technology, and Dr Wen-Chi Yang introduced Taiwan's new "south-bound" diplomatic strategies.

Emeritus Professor Nicholas Jose of the University of Adelaide set the tone for all these and other discussions with his keynote address at the opening reception, which he titled "Famous Last Words". Reflecting on the past 40 years of exchanges, he wondered what Australia-China relations would be like in another 40 years and said,

"For 2064 let me speak in generalities. I trust that China and Australia will both survive in some sort of recognisable form, although no doubt much changed. To get there I hope for peace, achieved through the harmony and balance that comes with good management, and for the good relations that come with dialogue and exchange. And that we'll be well-informed. That may sound utopian, but it is really not much more than a continuation of what we are trying to do in the present. It's

about maintenance, about keeping things going in an unpredictable and threatening world. I put my faith in that, in the continuance of gatherings such as this.”

Surely the success of these two conferences is cause for optimism.