

First-generation PRC migrants and social cohesion - Report launch

- Speakers:** Professor Wanning Sun, Deputy Director, UTS:ACRI; Professor of Media and Communication, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, UTS
Dr Jimmy Li, President, Chinese Community Council of Australia - Victoria Chapter (CCCAV)
Dr James O'Donnell, lecturer and demographer, College of Arts and Social Sciences, Australian National University
The Hon Professor Verity Firth AM, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Social Justice and Inclusion), UTS
- Moderator:** Professor Monica Attard OAM, Co-Director, Centre For Media Transition, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, UTS

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Dr Corey Bell:

Good afternoon members of the audience and special guests. Before we begin the proceedings, on behalf of all those present, I would like to acknowledge that this webinar is hosted on the lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. I would also like to pay respects to the Elders past, present, and emerging, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for this land. This session will now be recorded. We'll record audio, screen share, and our presenters. We'll not be recording any video or audio output from the audience.

Welcome to all UTS students, staff, and all friends of ACRI and UTS. My name is Dr Corey Bell and I'm a Project and Research officer at the Australia-China Relations Institute at the University of Technology Sydney, or UTS:ACRI. UTS:ACRI is an independent, nonpartisan research institute established in 2014 by UTS. Chinese studies centres exist in other Australian universities, but UTS:ACRI is Australia's first and only research institute devoted to studying the relationship between these two countries. UTS:ACRI seeks to inform Australia's engagement with China through research, analysis and dialogue grounded in scholarly rigour. If you would like to know more about UTS:ACRI and the Australia-China relationship, details are available on our website at australiachinarelations.org.

So today we're happy to launch a report titled *First-generation PRC migrants and social cohesion: Views on news about the PRC and Chinese-Australians*. This was authored by UTS:ACRI's Deputy Director Professor Wanning Sun. This study addresses some issues that dominate Australia media coverage of China and Chinese-Australians and the impact that this coverage has had on some first-generation Chinese-Australians or Chinese migrants.

So the event will begin with opening remarks from the Hon Professor Verity Firth, a member of the Order of Australia, who is a former Minister for Women of New South Wales, and the current Pro Vice Chancellor of UTS, driving the university's push for social justice and inclusion.

This will be followed by a panel discussion featuring the author and two distinguished guests, Mr Jimmy Li, President of the Victorian chapter of the Chinese Community Council of Australia, and Dr James O'Donnell, lecturer in the College of Arts and Social Sciences at the Australian National University. The panel will be moderated by Professor Monica Attard, a recipient of the Medal of the Order of Australia, who is now the Co-Director of the Center for Media Transition at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at UTS.

So to the audience, there will be an opportunity for you to submit questions. If you'd like to do so, please use the Q&A button on the bottom bar. So I'll now hand you over to Professor Firth.

The Hon Professor Verity Firth:

Hello, everybody. And I'd also like to acknowledge that I'm at UTS as we speak. So I'm on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. I want to pay particular respects to the Gadigal people as the traditional custodians of knowledge for the land upon which the university is built.

One of the interesting things about equity and diversity surveys is that responses vary significantly depending on who you ask. An employer will ask, 'Do you feel that your workplace provides an inclusive working environment for women?' An overwhelming amount of men will say the environment is inclusive, while significantly lesser numbers of women will feel that way. The same phenomenon is found with questions that are asked around inclusive workplaces for people with disability. And similar results too in surveys around inclusion for culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

What this reveals, of course, is that experiences differ and when you are in the majority, you can often be completely unaware of what it feels like to be in the minority, and you can be very sure of yourself and of the effectiveness of workplace policies and practices. You can pat yourself on the back about how well things are going, but until you actually ask people what they're experiencing, you know little about the truth.

In 2022, the Lowy Institute asked 2,000 Australians whether media reporting of the People's Republic of China was fair. In response, 61 percent said that it was fair and balanced. Only 26 percent said it was too negative. Lowy then asked the same question of Chinese-Australians. 42 percent of Chinese-Australian respondents said reporting about China was fair and balanced, and 42 percent said that it was too negative. By contrast, in the previous year's poll, 57 percent had said such reporting was too negative. So in yet another example, the experience of Chinese-Australians is something very different to that of the mainstream when looking at whether or not media is fair and balanced in reporting.

ACRI's new research report, which we're going to be discussing tonight, *First-generation PRC migrants and social cohesion: Views on news about the PRC and Chinese-Australians*, by Professor Wanning Sun, digs deeper into the views of Chinese-Australians and their attitudes to the Australian media.

This report is timely in that it provides a richness of detail into how Chinese-Australians feel about their portrayal in the Australian media, and it also draws a really important link between perceived bias in the Australian media and how that impacts on Chinese-Australians' sense of belonging and how that in turn impacts on how we as a nation develop social cohesion.

In essence, the report is similar to the surveys I've already described. Although Chinese-Australians generally expressed more trust in the Australian media than in, say, for example, the PRC state media, in terms of professionalism and balance, they do believe that the depiction of Chinese-Australians is not fair

nor balanced. Many Chinese-Australians feel that they are portrayed either as in need of protection from prosecution by the Chinese government or as Chinese agents. Most of all, they feel their contribution to Australian society is minimised by the Australian press.

Considering that the first Chinese settlers came to Australia during the 1850s as part of the gold rush, it is an indictment on our country that 170 years later Chinese-Australian citizens report that they are still being made to feel like second-class citizens. ACRI's report also shows that despite an increased level of interest in engaging with Australia's electoral processes as voters, 76 percent of survey respondents report that they feel that they rarely or never have a say in shaping public debates.

When Professor Tim Soutphommasane was Race Discrimination Commissioner, he did a lot of work on what he termed as the bamboo ceiling for Australians of Asian heritage. In 2014 when he undertook this research – so I'm using 2014 figures, but they haven't changed too dramatically to today – but in 2014 when he undertook his research, close to 10 percent of the Australian population had Asian cultural origins or ancestry. Of the top 10 overseas birthplaces of Australians, five were countries in Asia, China, India, Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia.

China and India now represent the two largest source countries for immigrants to Australia. Of the four million people who speak a language other than English at home, close to 1.3 million speak an Asian language, including more than 650,000 who speak Chinese. However, as Professor Soutphommasane pointed out, at that time only 1.7 percent of those who sat in the federal parliament had an Asian cultural background, and I doubt that's got much better. In 2014, only one of 17 federal department heads came from an Asian cultural background. Of the 64 deputy secretaries, only two had Asian origins. So, in other words, a total of three out of 81 departmental secretaries and deputy secretaries in the public service were of Asian cultural origin.

And universities have nothing to write home about either. Professor Soutphommasane's audit of the Group of Eight universities at the Vice Chancellor, Provost, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Pro Vice Chancellor levels, showed that of the 49 senior executives at these ranks, there were two who were of Asian cultural background – three percent. A grand total of four had a non-European cultural background.

The private sector didn't fare much better. Compared to 9.6 of the Australian community with an Asian background based on a methodology using names only 1.9 percent of executive managers and 4.2 percent of directors had Asian cultural origins.

Now, whilst reaching high levels of leadership isn't the whole story when it comes to cultural belonging, it's not as simple as that, the report that we are discussing today does demonstrate the ongoing issues faced by Chinese-Australians and the deep complexities within their sense of belonging to this country. The report tells us that survey participants' responses to a number of questions indicate a high level of ambivalence, uncertainty, and even conflicted feelings towards both Australia and the PRC.

On the one hand, respondents seem to remain strongly committed to making Australia home. They want to raise their kids here. They see Australia as providing greater opportunities than China. However, 46 percent of respondents either strongly agree or are inclined to agree that reading media stories about the China threat has diminished their sense of belonging to mainstream Australian society.

And most troubling is that an overwhelming majority of respondents, 91 percent of Chinese-Australians surveyed, voiced concerns that Australia's English-language media have a tendency to engage in speculation about war with China. Chinese-Australians are disturbed by this primarily because they believe speculation has the potential to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. They are equally concerned about how Chinese-Australians would be treated should Australia find itself at war with the PRC.

Now, I'm sure I don't need to tell this audience that Australia has a conflicted history. We are a nation that was built on invasion and colonisation, and there's no doubt that this origin story infects our capacity as a nation to be inclusive and welcoming of cultures other than the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture. We are still at war with our history and having not accepted the truth of the past, we continue to make it hard for others to belong.

But reports such as this one and the discussion we are about to have is a big part of creating a more inclusive and welcoming culture in our country. It's reports like this that the university and my role as Pro Vice Chancellor of Social Justice and Inclusion, believe is really important to demonstrate the different experiences of Chinese-Australians and to give better understanding about the dynamics of modern Australia.

So I want to thank everyone for being here tonight. I'm really looking forward to the discussion. I want to thank Professor Sun for her incredible work in this groundbreaking report, and I now hand over to Monica Attard who's going to lead the discussion.

Thank you.

Professor Monica Attard:

Thank you, Verity, very, very much for that. Some very, very interesting comments, and it is a really fascinating report. Quite worrying to read, quite depressing to read in many respects, but let's look at it now.

So Wanning, essentially what you ask in this research, you posed three questions. How Australia's Chinese community see themselves and their community portrayed in the media. How they see the PRC portrayed in the media. And what impact they think these portrayals have on the Australian general public. And as I think Verity has hinted there, and as I've said myself, that the results are slightly alarming.

So let's start with you, Wanning, can you please give us a big picture overview of what the focus groups and the surveys and the in-depth interviews told you in response to some of those issues? Broadly, in other words, what were the findings?

Professor Wanning Sun:

Thanks, Monica, for moderating this event. Can I start by thanking you? Because I think as a seasoned journalist as you are, you are probably the best person to guide us through the discussion of a fairly complex issue here. And I'm also so glad that James O'Donnell is here today to lend us his expertise on social cohesion. My report engaged quite closely with his framework in conceptual terms. And of course, this discussion would not be complete at all without the perspective of someone from the first-generation migrant cohort. And so I can't think of a better person than Li Jianming or Jimmy Li to represent their voice.

To get back to the question, Monica, I'm a media academic, and so I've been paying a lot of attention to how our media covers China and the Chinese-Australian relations, because that's part of my research. So I formed some views about this, but I've always wondered whether, am I right in having this impression? Am I too critical in my assessment? I think, I didn't know the answer to that. I accepted anecdotal evidence by talking to people. And I think, but knowing answers to these questions would be very important, because media studies research has already told us how important media is in facilitating or jeopardising social cohesion. And I thought, if it is true that a significant number of our society feels unhappy or even alienated from our mainstream media, then it is not good news from the point of view of promoting national interest. So that is what motivated to do this research.

But coming back to the key findings, if you like, yes, I started with doing focus groups in Melbourne, Sydney and Ballarat, and based on that focus group discussion, I designed a questionnaire which was participated by up to 700 people. That was a quantitative large survey. And then having seen the data from the large survey, and in order to make sense of the data, some of them surprising to me, some of them not so surprising to me, I engaged in the discussion with 12 individuals as a one-on-one kind of conversation.

And so I guess in terms of what I have found from these research activities, I guess I can say a few things. First, I think, as Verity has already sort of alluded to, there is a high level – let me start with the not-so-good news first. First, there's high level of trust from this community on our medias reporting on domestic issues, but at the same time a low level of trust regarding the accuracy, the balance and fairness of our media's international reporting, particularly on China. So that's one thing.

The other thing is that within this cohort that I studied, there seems to be a considerable degree of unhappiness, or even alienation if you like, with how they're represented in our media. As for China reporting itself, they're unhappy, but they're unhappy, not so much because it's critical, not so much because it's negative, but because they're unhappy because they think that the framing of the reporting is problematic. There seems to have this view that our media seems to be quite single-minded in pursuing an angle of reporting China. And that's not good from their point of view for two reasons.

One, they think, this is not how I experience China. I've seen China firsthand. I've come from China, I still have contact with a lot of people. This is not the China I see. China's far more complex than that. That's the first reason. The second reason is that they actually know firsthand that such reporting will lead to, and in fact has led to, increased suspicion, hostility, even blatant racism towards themselves. So for these two reasons, they are quite concerned.

As one of the interviewees, Harry Law – and he said something that I thought was quite sort of provocative, not – quite interesting and quite clever. He said, 'It's like you throw a rock at China, but actually it's too far to reach China and it lands on the heads of the Chinese-Australians.' So I thought that's quite –

Professor Monica Attard:

That's very smart. Yeah, it is interesting.

I want to pick you up on that point that you've just mentioned though, that a lot of the media coverage left Chinese-Australians feeling as though that there was an element of hostility in the reporting, which might also transfer into a feeling that that news media has a bit of an agenda when it comes to China. Can you talk a little bit more about that, Wanning, – what were people saying to you? What kind of agenda did they feel was at play, and that was being perpetrated by media, by news media in particular? Where did they see that?

Professor Wanning Sun:

I think in response to that question, we're looking at two things.

One is the coverage of China per se. The other is the coverage of the Chinese-Australian communities, particularly the PRC communities. I think they perceive a few problems, and one is what the experts call the securitisation of news. That is, it's not necessarily that the news is too negative, it's that the news about China seems to be selected, seems to be written and framed in such a way that our fear of China somehow is logical, because the threat is real. But international relations scholars have always told us there is actually a difference between perception of threat and the reality of threat. But in order for the perception of threat to get closer to the reality of threat, then we need to have what international relations scholars called securitisation actors.

And inadvertently or not, our media seems to play a role in this process of securitisation. In other words, the first generation migrants have been cast in a number of roles in this kind of problematic reporting in the sense that their activities are very often reported, usually without too much evidence. But there is a lot of free suggestions and associations about the connections and the links of this community with so-called, for instance, Chinese government or Chinese Communist Party. And that itself leads to mutual distrust of the community and media.

People in the community are fearful to speak to the media because they feel that too often they have been cast in certain roles, and their voice has been taken out of the context. And the other problem is that even though they find themselves the subject of reporting, their voices are usually absent because it's the sources that's often cited are from, say, the security agencies, the think tanks who push a certain kind of security line, and they themselves feel that they don't really have much say in stating their experience and their case forward.

Professor Monica Attard:

Of course. And that narrow base of the use of sources, the narrow number of sources that are used, which create the securitisation impact, that is what in turn creates that kind of drums-of-war style of reporting. That presumably is what you are talking about, which is impacting the community?

Professor Wanning Sun:

Yes, indeed. Yes.

Professor Monica Attard:

Yes. Okay.

Jimmy, I'll come to you now as someone who's intimately engaged with the community, the Australian-Chinese community in Victoria. Is there a sense in that community that there is one narrative which is hostile, or at the very least fearful, that is kind of permeating Australian news media?

Dr Jimmy Li:

Okay, first I'll just thank Professor Wanning Sun for conducting such a comprehensive, in-depth, and I'll call it a clinical review of how the Australian English-media are reporting about the Chinese-Australians.

Regarding this general feeling, personally, I would not use 'hostile', but I would say that it makes us or myself feel alienated, how the report is kind of biased, and with pre-assumption, and less balanced, less objective. It creates a fear and uneasiness.

Maybe I'll take two examples. One example is in late 2019, there's a case about allegation of a spy. His name is Lee Chang Juan. There's a huge amount of reporting about this case. But when you search ABC News, there were about eight articles related to this case. But a few years later, in 2000 – to earlier this year when Mr Juan's case application for refugee, asylum application was refused or rejected by a tribunal, there's no report. Yeah. So eight versus zero, yeah.

Professor Monica Attard:

Yeah.

Dr Jimmy Li:

That's not balanced. You can report, right? But it should be more balanced.

Professor Monica Attard:

Okay. And the community feels that, right? You're saying that that's a message that you are getting.

Dr Jimmy Li:

Yes. You can report, but it needs to be based on facts, and not just make the sensational. And of course, there's other examples. Yeah.

Professor Monica Attard:

And of course, media thrives on an element of sensationalism, I suppose is one way of putting it. But there are always factors which are behind the selection of news stories and that clearly is problematic in this case as well.

James O'Donnell, I want to come to you at this point because you run a regular poll on social cohesion for the Scanlon Foundation. So you are really the go-to person when it comes to social cohesion. From what you can gather, what implications do you see from the point of view of Australia's social cohesion goals when you see some of the findings that Wanning has come up within this report?

Dr James O'Donnell:

Thanks, Monica. And so many implications. And congratulations to Wanning and her team on the study and its critical depth and richness.

I'm coming to you from the lands of the Nunga people. I'm just visiting Perth at the moment on the land of the Nunga peoples, and I pay my respects for their Elders past and present.

And the study is an incredible compliment to the Mapping Social Cohesion study. So this is the study that I've been involved with just for the last couple of years. So this is something that's been running since 2007. It's set up by the Scanlon Foundation, and Professor Andrew Marcus of Monash University.

Andrew retired last year. So that's how I've come to be involved. Been working with the data for many years but only now, just recently come to help in managing the survey. But it's an incredible resource now in tracking the attitudes of Australians to issues of social cohesion, to connectedness, to migration, to all these issues. And it's always been a powerful resource to reflect on the attitudes of all Australians, but it involves an annual survey that's run every year. It has been running every year since 2009, but we historically haven't had the ability to say much about specific groups in society, such as China-born migrants, and not to be able to delve deeply into these really critical issues about the influence of an interaction between media and these groups.

And it's been touched on before, but trust is so fundamental and critical, and also belonging. And that's two things that came out so clearly in this report. And when I say trust, meaning trust in other people, trust in our communities, trust in government, trust in our institutions. And that includes trust in media, because the media is such a critical source of the information flow. It's how we understand and learn about the world and the country around us, particularly outside our own social networks. How we find out about information about others, and then people coming to Australia and people who, they've been living in Australia and moved to Australia over the years.

And so it's been picked up before, but one of the things that was really striking to me was that almost 60 percent of people in Wanning's study believe that media reporting on China leads to hostility. And so that's directly detrimental to social cohesion. But between 40 and 50 percent of people think media reporting diminishes their sense of belonging, their faith in Australian democracy, their hope for multicultural harmony.

We'd hope that the sense of belonging of people that have moved to Australia will increase in time as they build their social networks, as they build their social roots, as they come to feel a part of Australia. And they come to familiarise themselves with Australian society and culture. So it was disturbing to me also that 38 percent of people, almost four in 10 people in Wanning's study, their belonging hadn't increased over the last five years. And that belonging is so critical, not just so that – as I said, trust and belonging, they're so foundational, because if we don't trust people, if we don't feel a sense of place, of belonging, we're not going to engage or interact in our communities. We're not going to, especially, make friends across social and cultural and ethnic divides. We sort of hunker down a little bit in almost fear of the other. And that goes for both the China-born population that's key to Wanning's study, but also the general population that we've been studying over time.

Professor Monica Attard:

Yeah, we're particularly good at othering in Australia though, as we've discovered over many, many long years.

Wanning, I want to come back to you at this point because it seems interesting to me that people's sense of belonging and their trust is so intimately tied up with the way media portrays. And your study found that, as has been mentioned before, that there is a high degree of faith in the way the Australian media operates in relation to many issues, but not this one, but not this particular issue.

And I wonder whether you were picking up an expectation or a sense that there was agenda setting or that, apart from the securitisation issue, but that there was an agenda setting at play that was particularly aimed at harming the community, or at framing the China problem as something that was insurmountable?

Professor Wanning Sun:

That's really a good question, Monica, but as probably a media person, you probably have the better answer than me. I certainly see there is an agenda, but I would be very careful to subscribe to any kind of conspiracy theory about the collusion of some actors or such things.

What I actually see is probably the interaction or intersection of a number of independent forces coming together to shape the public narrative. For instance, from the point of view of media as institution, financially speaking, they've got to worry about the bottom line. They've got to keep subscriptions and audience readership, and they have to worry about that. And then the health report on China may actually have some bearing on whether they can turn a profit or not. So this is one thing. And with digital media and social media becoming so prevalent, journalism, the quality of journalism and the way of doing journalism has also come under a lot of threat and you'll know this better than me.

And then on top of that, you look at other forces such as geopolitical forces. You've got the bigger pictures of China and the US being increasingly at odds. And the fact that Australia as a middle power has been caught in the middle, yet it's being forced to make a choice. So that itself is one of the sources of tension that's probably not going to go away for a while.

And on top of that, you've got the fact that Australia is one of the favorite destinations for the China-born migrants. We have a large percentage of China-born migrants in a way that, for instance, the UK or European countries, you don't have. So they are more visible, if you like, or in your face, so to speak. And not to mention

the fact that Australia finds itself in a position where it's kind of worried about China, but at the same time just cannot function without Chinese economic connection. So we're so dependent on China, but at the same time we are allies with the US.

So that kind of very, very tricky situation make us more sensitive to that. I think all these factors come together to, sort of, interact to shape the public discourse, rather than having someone behind the scenes manipulating everything. So that's how I see it.

Professor Monica Attard:

Yeah, it is a very difficult one.

Jimmy, is that how you see it as well? Is that what you are seeing in the communities within which you operate?

Dr Jimmy Li:

You mean Chinese-Australians caught in...

Professor Monica Attard:

So they see it less as a conspiracy, but they're seeing more that there are multiple factors that are interacting to create a media narrative that is a negative one.

Dr Jimmy Li:

Yes. I think maybe it's some media organisations or some journalists, they have this pre-assumption that we are closer to China or China would invade Australia someday or imminently. Just look at the latter example of, earlier this year, the Red Alert, that reporting, the splash on the front page with a map of the earth and the fighters flying from red China towards Australia. And that's really create that sense of fear to us, to Chinese-Australians.

Professor Monica Attard:

I was actually going to bring that up with you.

So can you talk to us a little bit more about what the attitude was when Red Alert was published as a series? What were people saying?

Dr Jimmy Li:

Actually, quite shocking that image because it's fine, academics can do research then the newspaper media reports objectively. But while they've created that image, and if you link this image with what politicians say, for example, one former prime minister said 1.2 million Chinese-Australians could be used by China to influence Australia, so this will cause the people, other Australians think we potentially could be spies and they will look at us with a sense that's suspicious. So yeah, it's fearful.

Professor Monica Attard:

James, how damaging can one-off pieces of journalism like that which kind of get to the – really impact the way a community feels about itself and its place in Australian society, how damaging can it be? What impact can it have?

Dr James O'Donnell:

Well, it's diverse and people are resilient and many people can separate out what they're hearing on the media from their experiences in their everyday lives. And that was borne out in the report too, that people do feel a sense of place and belonging in Australia. But at the same time, in response to this media reporting, they feel helpless, they feel fearful. So it definitely has an impact.

And if it's a one-off, then we can improve. There doesn't need to be a permanent effect if you think about what happens next and how we improve relations. But it can accumulate as we go on. And it's not just for those communities, but also for the wider population as well.

So one of the things we track in the Mapping Social Cohesion study is whether people have negative or positive attitudes to people of different groups. And so 40 percent of people in 2022 across Australia said they had a negative view of people born in China. Now, to be fair, that's come down a little bit. So that was about 50 percent during the height of COVID-19, but that was another event. And so these events can accumulate and shape the attitudes of both – I wouldn't put it as these polar communities, but it shapes wider society and how people themselves view it.

So if 40 percent of people are having negative views of people born in China, then that also then translates into discrimination. And so I don't have the exact figure for the Chinese population, but one third of people say they feel discriminated against who come from a non-English speaking background every year. That's not just the Chinese-born population that faces prejudice and discrimination, it's lots of other basically non-European groups.

So there's still deep-seated problems of racism that have to be confronted. But if you look at some of those other groups that we asked about like whether people have negative views of people from Sudan and Lebanon and other countries, they're also ones that have this historic negative stereotype that's been perpetuated through media.

Professor Monica Attard:

And does the impact on them peak when there is something in the media that is talking about their communities?

Dr James O'Donnell:

It's hard to measure it quantitatively, but certainly qualitatively from what I can understand and from just talking to people and asking them about their experiences.

We run this survey every year and it's getting to be a big survey and we do pick up year-to-year differences. It is challenging, especially in the current climate where you've got war and cost of living pressures and all these other things impacting on people's lives at the same time.

Professor Monica Attard:

And I just want to remind the audience that we will come to questions probably at about a quarter past six. So if you want to ask a question, you can pop it in the Q&A box.

But I want to come to both you, Jimmy, and you, Wanning, on this issue of whether, and Jimmy in particular, you're seeing more members of the diaspora looking to alternative news sources now. In other words, moving away from Australian mainstream media because it's not the China that reflects their experience.

Dr Jimmy Li:

I think to some extent, yes, some members of the community would start looking at the alternative sources. And even in Australia, you have various sources, left or right or middle.

Also, for first generations of migrants, they have waves of migrations. Maybe from '80s, around 1989, they have 40,000 migrants and the mid-90s, they are more professional, skilled migrants. And then after 2000, more business migrants. So different waves may have different news consumption habits. For more recent ones probably, it will look a bit more Chinese-language news, but different.

Professor Monica Attard:

Okay. Well, sticking with that issue of differences between generations, Wanning, I might come to you on this one, because another interesting finding in your research is that first generation migrants from the PRC are less trustful than non-PRC born Chinese-Australians that Australian-language media reporting on China is fair and balanced, which kind of indicates a generational shift, right? Is that what you picked up?

Professor Wanning Sun:

I think it is a little bit more complex than that, Monica.

What we see is that we've got the general Australian cohort on this side and they've got the PRC China-born, first generation on this side, and in terms of the general Australian-Chinese population in the middle. But if you look at actually the points of view of the first generation China-born, their view is closer to the Chinese-Australians in general than to the other side. So in other words, there is a little bit of a discrepancy, but they're on a whole, their assessment of the Australian media's reporting is still quite similar. They're a little bit more critical, but similar. And I would not see that as so much a generational kind of difference, as Jimmy was pointed out, there's diversity, there's complexity within the community. There [are] people who have lived here longer than people who are more recent arrivals. And there are people who are what we call ABCs, Australian-born Chinese, who have no experience with China whatsoever. And there are people who come from Malaysia or Singapore and there are people from Taiwan and Hong Kong. And so you can see there's a whole spectrum of political point of views and the whole spectrum of the migration experience.

So if we actually – because I am a little bit hesitant about talking about this in terms of generational stuff, because I think, for instance, would this China-born generation tend to become less critical of our media coverage as they live here a bit longer? I don't necessarily think that's the case because I think the difference between them and the other cohort of Australian-Chinese is that they are more critical because they believe that they are more directly involved with Chinese experience. They have firsthand experience with China, that they know better than the mainstream people as well as the other form of Chinese communities. And also, they think that they're in between in terms of their media consumption.

On one hand they can access English-language mainstream media, so they have a set of perspective from that body of journalism. On the other hand, they can make use of the Chinese language news media, as Jimmy just alluded to. And on top of that, if they really like, they can also look at the state Chinese media. So they can, what's the word, triangulate.

A lot of people increasingly when they first came to Australia, they knew that Chinese state media is a lot of propaganda. They knew that's the reality. And they came to Australia, they think this is a democracy, this is about the democratic way of doing journalism, it is more professional and objective. And indeed, this is more or less what they see in the reporting of domestic news. But however, when it comes to reporting of other countries, especially some countries including China, it's a different picture. So they started to question that

and say, where is the credibility in this? Where is the democratic standard? Where is the objectivity? What are the code of conduct involved in reporting?

So I think there's a certain level of questioning, or even disillusionment crept in.

Professor Monica Attard:

Which is not, as you are saying, not necessarily generational. It is –

Professor Wanning Sun:

Personally, I think it's because they think they're better positioned to judge the accuracy and the level of fairness and a balance because they bring wisdom, a diverse range of perspectives, and they're able to judge perspectives, and they are able to judge better than anyone, for instance, than the people who live in China, because the people in China do not necessarily have different – the kind of point of view that they are exposed to. So I think it's a matter of perspective.

Professor Monica Attard:

James, can I get your take on that? What did you make of that particular finding of Wanning's?

Dr James O'Donnell:

Yeah, so I do agree with Wanning there.

I think there is an important generational element, for reasons that Wanning's talked about as well. But the population is very diverse. And in Australia, in 2021, at the last census, only about 40 percent of people who described themselves as Chinese, having Chinese ancestry, were born in China. And so large populations were born in Australia, and that's going to include some children. So I think that's over 400,000 now. So that's going to include some children of recently arrived migrants, but then a whole diverse population as well.

Then we have big populations as well, as Wanning touched on, from Malaysia, from Hong Kong, from Taiwan, from Indonesia. And they've come across at various points in time. We've had populations of people that were born in Vietnam that came over in the '80s. And so it's politically a very diverse group, a socially very diverse group. Also economically as well. Some of the, including the Chinese-born ones that came in the early '90s, were more likely to come on humanitarian visas and have particular attitudes, especially if they were escaping after Tiananmen Square.

But certainly language is a big one here. So of course most China-born migrants speak Mandarin Chinese, or at least Cantonese. I think Cantonese – about 15 percent at the moment. But on the census, at least almost 50 percent of those born in Australia that say they've got Chinese ancestry say that they just speak English at home. And so of course they're going to be less able to engage in Chinese-language media as well. And so the messaging that comes through to us, well, it's similar to other Australian-born people that have to rely on the English-language media.

Professor Monica Attard:

So James, I mean, that would seem to me at least to indicate that as time goes on, with Mandarin or Cantonese not becoming the dominant language at home with people born here who grow up kind of acculturated, that some of the kind of social cohesion problems might lessen? Is that what you are saying? Is that a phenomenon or is it something that simply can be triggered by one-off events where hostility is encountered or felt?

Dr James O'Donnell:

So it's certainly true that this is an acculturation process, right? Especially for people born in Australia, that they might still have those connections to China through their parents and through their grandparents perhaps. But they've gone to school in Australia, their language, their friends, perhaps increasingly mixed, drawing from people from different backgrounds. But most importantly, the media they're getting is coming from English-language mainstream media.

And so whether it's good or not for social cohesion really depends on the quality of that messaging. Because social cohesion is not about homogenisation or having us all believe the same thing or all believing in the China threat hypothesis, for example. It should be a robust democracy. And something that came through really strongly in Wanning's study was the fact that people that have moved here from China, many of them want to be in Australia, they have a home here, they have a sense of belonging. And for them it's not even so much about defending the motherland, it's partly about what's good for Australian democracy and by implication, Australian social cohesion.

Professor Monica Attard:

Yes, yes. I mean that brings me to the point, presumably though even in the minds of democracists like yourself, there are limits to social cohesion, are there not? I mean, are there limits to social cohesion? Should the broader Australian community, for example, simply accept that some Chinese who've come here have been beneficiaries of the Chinese system and that for them criticising China in the way that we are seeing is offensive?

Dr James O'Donnell:

There's always going to be some of those people that will think that and will be offended by that. But as I say, as we can read in Wanning's report, there are people that come to Australia, they like the standard of living, and that's what we hear as well. They like life in Australia. They value those sorts of freedoms and that ability to provide for yourselves and your families in a way that they perhaps couldn't have done elsewhere.

And they develop this sense of belonging and they've developed those friendship networks and those social connections, and they do develop a sense of belonging in place, but that's then interrupted by these media narratives and experiences of stereotyping and prejudice and discrimination. And that's true, and the longer that we create this conducive and harmonious environment in which people do feel welcome, people will continue to feel that sense of belonging and identity. But that relies on us not othering.

So the key thing that I always emphasise with social cohesion is it should never be about, as I say, the idea that we all have the same ideas or same beliefs and we can't criticise each other or other things or other people or other countries because it might hurt other people's feelings. It should be a robust democracy in which we're free to debate and discuss and criticise, but in a sense in which there's balance and fairness and people feel that things are being reported fairly.

Professor Wanning Sun:

Monica, if I can just follow up on what James has said, I really want to strongly echo that. I think it's important to realise that it's the messaging itself that's important. Of course, I would hate to see that as time goes by, there's more acculturation, so there's less complaints, less unhappiness, simply because people just become less interested in critical but different perspectives.

If that's the case, I don't think that's social cohesion. I just think, as James said, we need to have a public domain, the public sphere that is for the whole range of different points of view, rather than just aiming

exclusively for an overriding message that hopefully more and more people will subscribe to and less and less people question it.

Professor Monica Attard:

And how hopeful are you, Wanning, given what we've seen particularly this year with the Red Alert series and that particular media outlet being absolutely impervious to the criticism, the enormous criticism that came its way. What hope do you have that the public discourse might at some stage improve on particular issue, if you like?

Professor Wanning Sun:

Well, I would like to say –

Professor Monica Attard:

As a media scholar.

Professor Wanning Sun:

I would like to say I'm an optimist and I'm hopeful, but I've got to be realistic as well. Because I don't really think there is much we can do about what our commercial media want to do. And they'll continue to be worried about the bottom line. And they will continue, probably continue to see China reporting as an important business strategy in keeping the media business afloat.

So there is not much we can do about that apart from just saying we're not happy with that. But having said that, I do think that our public funded broadcasters, they're funded by the taxpayers' money and they have the responsibility to play a leadership role in providing points of view that are not just to reproduce or echo what's being said in the commercial media, but rather actually to lead sort of a debate by providing critical voices and points of views.

That comes really strongly in my conversation with people. People say, 'I'm a taxpayer, I think I should have the reason to expect our media to do better, to serve us better.'

Professor Monica Attard:

There are a few questions here from members of the audience. We might just quickly go to them because I do see that at 6.25, we've only got five minutes left of this panel discussion. If I could take you there.

So one of the questions is that, 'Thank you for the presentation from all of you. I'm also a first generation PRC immigrant. I'm not sure whether you read the report from the Pew Research Center, which talks about Asian-American views on their homelands. The report remarks that Chinese-Americans are less favorable to the PRC.' Which is an interesting one. Wanning, I wouldn't mind getting your take on that. 'Over Chinese social media, there are also comments from young people who have overseas studies/immigration experiences arguing that old overseas Chinese immigrants who immigrated to foreign countries before the 2010s are very unfriendly towards mainland Chinese'. So the question is, 'do you think this reverse racism phenomenon within the overseas Chinese communities is a result of Western mainstream media coverage?'

Wanning, I think that's probably one for you.

Professor Wanning Sun:

I think that we need to do further research on that to speak more meaningfully to that question. That was about the American context. And it would be interesting to see how that insights resonate with our Australian experience.

But what I can say is that the so-called Chinese community here is not a monolithic kind of entity. And there is generational differences and all other kind of difference depending on what – and certainly sometimes even tension and conflict within the communities. And sometimes there's prejudice and from one cohort against another. But that's anecdotal.

Jimmy can speak probably to that question too, but I think I need to do more research to actually to speak, to say more confidently.

Professor Monica Attard:

Yep. Jimmy, could you add anything there?

Dr Jimmy Li:

I think it's quite diverse. Again, even within Chinese-Australian community. I mean, individuals have different views of other individuals. They're all normal. So yeah, that's all I can comment.

Professor Monica Attard:

Okay. Look, we have one person here, Francis Lee, who wishes to speak about bias in the media, but I don't think we have the capacity to actually put anybody's voice to this webinar. So Francis, if you'd like to write your question, we'd be happy to ask it, but you'd need to do it pretty fast.

And there appear to be quite a few other comments, kinds of questions that were being asked here. One of them relates to the so-called double-faced double standards that the CPP also uses to criticise Western media. But let's take that as a comment for the moment, and some references to US-driven Australian puppetry by targeting PRC as a threat war invader with no evidence, which very much has a negative impact, which is of course what we've been discussing here today.

But I think, look at this point, in the absence of any other questions, unless somebody does have a particular question that they wish to put pretty fast, we might actually wind it up there because we've got one minute before we actually need to do that.

But Wanning, thank you for the research, thank you for publishing such a comprehensive report. It really is an extraordinary read, a very worrying read for many.

James, I thank you as well for being here today and good luck with –

Professor Wanning Sun:

Yes, thank you James.

Professor Monica Attard:

– the compilation of your index.

And Jimmy Lee, Dr Jimmy Lee, as it turns out, thank you very, very much for being with us in this forum today.

And on that note, I think we're going to hand back to Corey Bell, if you are there, Corey?

Dr Corey Bell:

Yep. Hello, can everyone see me? Yep. Hi.

Okay, so thank you. Thank you very much to our eminent speakers and thank you very much to our moderator.

So to members of the audience, we'll be sending an email to everyone here asking for your thoughts on how this webinar went. So if you could please fill out the feedback form, we'd really appreciate it. It will help us make the future UTS:ACRI events a better experience for everyone involved.

So if you'd like to know more about the Australia-China relationship, and about our research, more details are available on our website at australiachinarelations.org. So the discussion today should also be available there.

Please follow us on Twitter for the latest news, which is at [@acri_uts](https://twitter.com/acri_uts).

Thanks again to our speakers and all our attendees and see you next time.

Thank you.