

22 September 2019

To:
Chair
Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee

The Federation of Chinese Associations of Australian Capital Territory (FCA-ACT) Inc wish to thank you for inviting us to make a submission to the inquiry into nationhood, national identity and democracy.

We understood that the committee has published a discussion paper to guide submitters and has encouraged the community to response to the discussion paper °

FCA-ACT wish to raise the following issues that the Chinese community living in Australia felt that the current social media portraying the lack of trust targeting certain community groups; the continuing decline to hold clear and meaningful communications between the elective representatives and the community, causing increasing tensions as well as political divisions amongst the community needs to be addressed. This has greatly impacted on our community, especially with the increasingly baseless smear campaign against the Chinese community for their heritage based on so called “threats against national security”.

The Federation of Chinese Associations of Australian Capital Territory (FCA-ACT) in the ACT is the peak Chinese community organisation, representing the diverse Chinese community organisations made up of various organisations representing the community, business, students, academic and young entrepreneurs groups.

Our purpose is to form a united voice for the Chinese community, to advocate and speak up for the community on issues that of interests and benefits to the wider Chinese community at local and national levels.

In response to the discussion paper, we would like to submit the following issues for the committee’s consideration:

1. What is the meaning of democracy to Chinese- Australian?

To our understanding, the Australian democracy has the following core defining values: freedom of election and being elected, freedom of assembly and political participation, freedom of speech, expression and religious belief, rule of law and other basic human rights °
(<https://www.moadoph.gov.au/about/>).

Chinese-Australian has over 200 years of history in Australia. We are considered as one of the earliest settlers and the largest ethnic group that have carried the essence of China's civilization for 5000 years combined with modern Australia culture and value, which is a rare positive element in the development and progress of Australia.

Many of us in the Chinese community used to enjoy how the democratic system works in Australia, which partially lead our decision to immigrate into this wonderful country, with the pledge of making our best efforts, with the pledge of our loyalty to this country as we make Australia our home.

Indeed, there have been many notable Chinese-Australians such as Victor Chang, Billy Sing, Yew-Kwang Ng, Ian Goodenough, Martia Cheng, and recently, with the elected new federal parliamentarian Gladys Liu, to name a few, has continuously making contributions to Australia from different domains since the founding of the country. These outstanding people together with many other Chinese-Australians are the bridge for the cooperation between China and Australia and they contribute significantly to the development and progress of Australia in economic, technology, social and other areas.

2. The question of decline trust by the Government and the lack of genuine community dialogue between elected representatives with Chinese Australian community

Unfortunately, our Chinese community here in Australia now believe that there are declining levels of public trust and satisfaction with democracy in Australia especially in term of freedom of speech, freedom of expression and religious belief; the lack of understanding of the culture, the declining levels of civil engagements has undermine the resilience and the continuing contributions of Chinese people to Australian civil society.

“For Chinese-Australians, we’ve unfortunately experienced a history of discrimination and bigotry for a long time and what we’ve seen with the foreign interference debate is a whole new level of Sinophobia and anti-China

sentiment that we haven't seen since the White Australia policy days...The current environment of hyper-anxiety in some quarters about baleful Chinese, and particularly Chinese Communist Party influence, is making it harder than it has ever been for Chinese-Australians to aspire to leadership positions, or indeed any positions at all in fields that are seen as even remotely security sensitive, not least in the public service...It's an environment of anxiety and fear that has to stop, and stop fast, or we will all be diminished by it" (SBS news <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/guilty-by-association-Chinese-Australians-slam-anti-China-rhetoric>)"

3. The question of increasing political division and "Anti-China intensity" based on false accusation of " Foreign threat to National security interest"

Indeed, in recent two or three years, many of us in the Chinese community here in Australia are feeling a sense of 'tense and fears' for the following three primary reasons:

Firstly, there have been growing number of populist, conservative nationalist, and nativist in Australia who often attack others with different values, beliefs and/or religions in public. We advocate these irresponsible actions need to be controlled as they shift away from the political centre per se.

Secondly, some mainstream Australian media keep on reporting on negative news on Chinese-Australians and the Chinese community here in Australia, but they could not provide solid evidence proving what they claimed to be the truth despite there are suspicions that these media are influenced by foreign party for political purpose. In fact, these negative news turned out to be false rumour. Nevertheless, these rumour have severely damaged the reputation of many Chinese- Australians and undermined their contributions to Australia. So, we advocate the Australian government to establish some regulations to better regulate this industry and provide support to the development and expression of ideas by other non-mainstream media.

Thirdly, we feel that many Australian politicians do not have a 'fair' attitude on Chinese-Australians. With such unfairness, any free expression of ideas and opinions are futile as it would not only significantly hinder Chinese-Australians to make better contributions to Australia, but also disrupt the core values of

freedom of assembly and political participation and freedom of speech, expression and religious belief that underpin Australia's democratic system. This reminds us of the history that clearly pointed to the "western phobia in China before its reform and opening up to Modern China"; which has sadly brought disastrous consequences to China. Now, this history seems to be reversed but surprisingly similar. We see Australia's Sinophobia (arguably influenced by other countries); with a series of policies and actions have been taken to close the door for co-operation and mutual benefits that was well established until now.

This sense of 'tense and fears' permeated among the Chinese-Australians together with a set of policies and actions have severely hindered the Chinese-Australians' willingness and capability to contribute to the prosperity of Australia, which may eventually will hurt Australia's own interest.

FCA-ACT strongly recommend the Australia government to arrest the fear and invest on the opportunity to provide more support to the academics who has continuously making criticism and planting the fear of the threat of arising "Chinese Communist Party Influence" in Australia, including those Australians scholars with the Chinese ethnicity to conduct 'objective' research on the impacts of 'tense and fears' among the Chinese community on Australia's economy and social welfare and integration of Chinese community in the Australian civil society.

4. The question of nationhood and its impact to Chinese Australians and its identity as Australian citizens ?

FCA-ACT is confident to state the fact that it is our belief that the majority of Australian people and business communities from other ethnical / countries understand and appreciate the importance of Chinese-Australians contributions to the Australian society and economics. They are willing to continuously work with Chinese-Australians to further contribute to the technology, economic and social development of Australia. Without the prosperity of technology, economics and social welfare as the base, public trust in democratic parties, institutions and systems are hard to sustain.

FCA-ACT appreciate and acknowledge are that the Senate has recognised the concerns expressed in the discussion paper and the impacts may have to the Chinese community.

We thank the Senate reference group for the opportunity to address the submitters raised in our submission.

On behalf of the Chinese Australian Community, FCA-ACT call upon the Senate Reference Committee to consider our submission and the suggested actions to be incorporated to improve the current 'tense and fears' amongst the Chinese communities and the recognition that the Chinese-Australians can and will better contribute to Australia – both in improving the relationship between China and Australia as well as contribute to Australian's economics, cultural exchange, education and international development.

Australia is the country we choose to call home and the country we all love!

Submitted by

The Federation of Chinese Associations of Australian Capital Territory