

AUSTRALIA-CHINA AGENDA 2013



JANUARY 一月

FEBRUARY 二月

MARCH 三月

APRIL 四月

MAY 五月

JUNE 六月

JULY 七月

AUGUST 八月

SEPTEMBER 九月

OCTOBER 十月

NOVEMBER 十一月

DECEMBER 十二月

二〇一四年

Levelling the Playing Field – Sport and the Future of Australia-China Engagement

TOM PARKER

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THE AUSTRALIAN Centre on China in the World engages with the public and policy discussion of relations with the People's Republic of China and the Chinese world. Australia-China Agenda 2013 is our contribution to this important election year and the on-going consideration of the bilateral relationship.

This is a relationship that touches on virtually every aspect of our national life. A mature and beneficial engagement of such breadth and depth requires the leadership and support of government at all levels, as well as public stewardship, media understanding, educational enhancement and the strategic involvement of the business community.

Australia-China exchanges are also profoundly influenced by regional and bilateral relationships. Australia and China trade in goods as well as culture, politics and people, ideas and education, community and personalities.

Australia-China Agenda: 2013 brings to the attention of the public and the media, politicians and specialists some reflections and policy ideas authored by specialists with a professional interest and involvement in the relationship.

—Geremie R. Barmé
Founding Director, CIW

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AUSTRALIAN CENTRE ON
CHINA IN THE WORLD



Australian
National
University

ANU College of Asia & the Pacific
Canberra, Australia

THE SUCCESS of the Beijing Olympics and opulence of the opening ceremony prior to the Global Financial Crisis provided an exceptional platform for sport to reinforce China's growing global identity.

The Olympics provide nations with a benchmark of success on a world stage, a de facto foreign policy that provides international bragging rights to domestic audiences.

Australia loves sport.

Sporting success provides this new world nation with a ready-made narrative of rivalries, villains and national heroes that other countries have created through myths, martyrs and conflict.

Poor performances in Australian sport demands action, and failure at the Montreal Olympic Games in 1976 (one silver and four bronze medals) was the catalyst for the creation of the Australian Institute of Sport. The idea became a reality after Bob Ellicott, the Minister for Home Affairs and Environment, visited China in 1979 and saw a national institute for elite athletes in operation.

In China, there is a clear link between modern sports and international politics and the search for national identity. It was sport after all, which kick started the normalisation of Sino-America relations through Ping-Pong diplomacy in 1971.

The search for modern Chinese identity began in 1895 after the humiliating defeat to Japan, coupled with the malaise of the Qing court leading to the once proud Middle Kingdom being dubbed the 'Sick Man of Asia'. Keen to build national strength and character,

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China emulated the increasing Western obsession with physical education as a means of developing better disciplined, morally alert and obedient citizens.

In 1917, Mao Zedong used sport as a metaphor in one of his earliest essays published in the reformist *New Youth* journal, where he indicated that to 'cultivate inner strength ... one must build a strong body'. Fifty-years later, he used a gentle paddle in the Yangtze River to prove that he was still politically fit for the unfolding Cultural Revolution.

China's return to the world stage following rapid economic reform was sealed in 2001, when it won the right to host the 2008 Olympics, qualified for the 2002 World Cup (football) and gained accession to the World Trade Organisation.

China's re-entry onto the world stage has caught the attention of international sporting bodies and government bureaucrats.

The Chinese Olympics-driven system, referred to as a *juguo tizhi* (whole-nation regime), reinforces a centralised management and administration that channels the country's sports resources into elite achievement. Early talent identification, provincial sports schools and universities, along with hierarchal training methods coupled with traditional Chinese medical practices have helped restore national pride but created a sports system that is failing to cope with mass health issues (obesity, ageing) in a modernising China.

China's economic transformation has also attracted foreign clubs and codes keen to leverage its size, scope and potential fan base.

Australian sport is no stranger to China. Lindsay Gaze, the godfather of modern Australian basketball, took the Australian team to China in 1973. The Melbourne Tigers during his long reign as coach regularly visited China, trialled Chinese players, broadcast their games on Chinese cable and boasted a Chinese co-owner and sponsors, including Haier. Even in retirement, Lindsay remains connected by agreeing to coach Tianjin, Melbourne's sister city's basketball team in 2009.

Australian coaches are well regarded in China.

In 2008, Queensland swimming guru Ken Wood sold his training programs and consulted the Chinese National team ahead of the Beijing games and is one of three Australian coaches that helped train sixteen year-old sensation Ye Shiwen to a world record and two gold medals at London 2012.

The former Australian men's and women's national basketball coaches Brian Goorjian and Tom Maher are currently in China, which helped entice Australian Liz Cambage to play for Zhejiang and, this year, Beijing Great Wall.

Australian footballers (soccer) are also well represented in China's Super League. China is now the third most likely overseas destination for Australian players after the United Kingdom and Germany with fourteen players calling China home in 2013. This has been assisted by the Australia's switch from Oceania to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) under FIFA in 2006, as Australian players can now be included in Chinese teams

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as an Asian player, which frees space for other foreign players.

The inclusion in the AFC has prompted the Lowy Institute to suggest that football diplomacy could further enhance our trade and reputation in the region, which was further highlighted in the recent *Australia in the Asian Century* White Paper. In 2015, Australia will host the Asian Cup with a potential broadcast reach of 2.5 billion that could reposition the importance of football against other domestic codes.

In 2010, the AFL used Australian Rules Football as a unique cultural product that was

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put on show with an exhibition game between the Melbourne Demons and Brisbane Lions as part Australia's official program at the Shanghai World Expo. At the time, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd suggested that AFL is a 'sport that reflects Australia's national values of courage, enterprise, resilience and mateship'. Rugby League is also considering playing a game in 2014 in southern China for premiership points to support existing and discover new Chinese commercial partners.

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Australian sporting trophies have also toured China with the Australian Open (tennis) men's and women's trophies (affectionately dubbed Norm and Daphne) undertaking an annual pilgrimage since 2011. The Melbourne Cup, despite the obvious restrictions on gambling, has also appeared in China in 2008 and 2012 to support in-bound tourism.

Aside from recent Olympic success, China is not necessarily viewed as a sporting nation by Australians. In 1935, the Victorian Chinese Community sponsored the 'Prince of the Breaststroke' Kwok Chun Hang's visit to Australia, who through his sporting prowess was hailed the 'best Chinese Ambassador ever to visit Australia'. Earlier, Wally Koochew was the first Chinese Australian to play high level representative football in the Victorian Football League (VFL) for Carlton in 1907. Despite Wally's success, only Les Fong, a champion rover in the Western Australian Football League (WAFL) in the 1970s and 1980s has dominated the sport. Recently, Australian diving, badminton and table tennis

teams have improved their world rankings with Chinese coaches and athletes migrating to Australia.

The Australian sporting public have embraced Chinese women's tennis star Li Na as much for her on court ability as for her self-deprecating post-match interviews. Her 2013 Australian Open Final reached 69 million fans in China but her party-sanctioned individualism expressed as *danfei* (fly solo) has earned her a rebuke. Early this year, the *People's Daily* asked 'when star athletes' personalities have become insufferable by the standard of social customs and traditions, who is to rein in their unchecked insolence?'

Just as Li Na's *danfei* runs counter to the group-orientated nature of the China's *juguo tizhi*, Australian sport is predominately a grassroots, community based activity that differs from the hierarchical, top-down approach to sports in China.

Despite this contradiction, can sport become a bridge that broadens the Sino-Australian bilateral relationship?

In 2012, the Australian Sports Commission and CSIRO released *The Future of Australian Sport* that focused on China as part of the 'New Wealth, New Talent' section. Fundamentally, it asked what opportunities exist for Australia in terms of sports related tourism, broadcast, events, services and equipment as China's economy grows, and the Chinese middle class pursues more leisure activities.

Similar to the success of Australian football joining the Asian Confederation, this report suggests that Australia should petition to move into the Olympic Council of Asia. In 2006, Australia's application was rejected, but joining this 45-member council would also give access to the Asian Games, the world's second largest multi-event sporting competition after the Olympics.

Recently, the Federation of International Basketball Associations (FIBA) hinted that Australia would benefit from moving away from Oceania into the Asian Confederation, following football's earlier move.

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The regulatory shift away from the Pacific into Asia for a number of sports reflects a broader cultural shift in Australia that helps define our place in the region. However, it is how these agreements and associations are activated that gives real meaning to the role of sport in building links between Australia and China.

Sport in isolation is just a contest but its reach and significance in Australia often outweighs the outcome. The ability to be seen, in a sporting sense, as part of Asia, to build rivalries with Chinese teams in basketball, and swimming, to normalise bi-lateral talent transfer, and see Chinese teams and clubs regularly in Australia will undoubtedly create a foundation for better understanding and mutual respect.

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The first aim of the next Australian government, in regards to international sports policy, should be to ensure our next bid to join the Olympic Council of Asia is successful and to maximise opportunities associated with the Asian Cup in 2015.

Aside from the obvious economic imperative, many Australian government departments are struggling to find a narrative that highlights the value proposition of our engagement with China – sport may well prove to be the game that brings both sides together.

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE ON CHINA IN THE WORLD

The Australian Centre on China in the World (CIW), College of Asia & the Pacific (CAP), The Australian National University (ANU) is an initiative of the Commonwealth Government of Australia in collaboration with ANU, a university with the most significant concentration of dedicated Chinese Studies expertise and the publisher of the leading Chinese Studies journals in Australia. CIW is a national research centre that is jointly managed by a body of academics that includes scholars of China at universities in Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, Melbourne and Sydney.

The Centre is a humanities-led research institution that is engaged with the broad range of social sciences to produce academic work that, while relevant to the full spectrum of demands of international scholarship, also relates meaningfully to those in the public policy community, and to the broader interested public, both in Australia and overseas. It values a New Sinology, that is an intellectual, cultural and personal involvement with the Chinese world (be it in the People's Republic, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan or globally) that is underpinned by traditions of academic independence, local fluency and disciplinary relevance.

CIW sites

<http://ciw.anu.edu.au>
<http://www.thechinastory.org>

CIW publications (also available online)

China Story Yearbook 2013: Civilising China, October 2013
China Story Yearbook 2012: Red Rising, Red Eclipse, August 2012

Stephen FitzGerald, *Australia and China at Forty—Stretch of the Imagination*, 澳大利亚与中国已届四十年—舒展的想象力, February 2013

Australia and China: A Joint Report on the Bilateral Relationship 中国和澳大利亚：关于双边关系的联合报告, with the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), February 2012

CIW journals

China Heritage Quarterly
(<http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org>)
East Asian History
(<http://www.eastasianhistory.org>)
The China Journal, co-published
(<http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/chinajournal/>)
Danwei, affiliated
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