

# SMART ENGAGEMENT WITH ASIA: Leveraging language, research and culture

3

PROJECT

EXTRACT

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EXPERT  
WORKING  
GROUP

Professor Ien Ang FAHA (Chair)  
Professor Chennupati Jagadish FAA, FTSE (Deputy)  
Professor Kent Anderson  
Professor John Fitzgerald FAHA  
Professor Fazal Rizvi FASSA  
Professor Krishna Sen FAHA  
Professor Mark Wainwright AM, FTSE

AUTHORS

Professor Ien Ang  
Dr Yasmin Tambiah  
Dr Phillip Mar

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Level 1, 1 Bowen Crescent  
Melbourne Victoria 3004 Australia  
Telephone: +61 (0)3 98640923  
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REPORT DESIGN

Lyrebird  
[joashley@live.com.au](mailto:joashley@live.com.au)

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Australian Academy of the Humanities

Australian Academy of Science

Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia

Australian Academy of Technological  
Sciences and Engineering

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# Australia's Learned Academies



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The Australian Academy of the Humanities advances knowledge of, and the pursuit of excellence in, the humanities in Australia. Established by Royal Charter in 1969, the Academy is an independent organisation of more than 500 elected scholars who are leaders and experts in the humanities disciplines.

The Academy promotes the contribution of the humanities disciplines for public good and to the national research and innovation system, including their critical role in the interdisciplinary collaboration required to address societal challenges and opportunities.

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Australian Academy of Science

## Australian Academy of Science

The Australian Academy of Science is a private organisation established by Royal Charter in 1954. It comprises ~450 of Australia's leading scientists, elected for outstanding contributions to the life sciences and physical sciences. The Academy recognises and fosters science excellence through awards to established and early career researchers, provides evidence-based advice to assist public policy development, organises scientific conferences, and publishes scientific books and journals. The Academy represents Australian science internationally, through its National Committees for Science, and fosters international scientific relations through exchanges, events and meetings. The Academy promotes public awareness of science and its school education programs support and inspire primary and secondary teachers to bring inquiry-based science into classrooms around Australia.

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### Academy of Social Sciences in Australia

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA) promotes excellence in the social sciences in Australia and in their contribution to public policy. It coordinates the promotion of research, teaching and advice in the social sciences, promote national and international scholarly cooperation across disciplines and sectors, comment on national needs and priorities in the social sciences and provide advice to government on issues of national importance.

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It is an autonomous, non-governmental organisation, devoted to the advancement of knowledge and research in the various social sciences.

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By providing a forum that brings together great minds, broad perspectives and knowledge, ACOLA is the nexus for true interdisciplinary cooperation to develop integrated problem solving and cutting edge thinking on key issues for the benefit of Australia.

ACOLA receives Australian Government funding from the Australian Research Council and the Department of Education.

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# Project aims

The depth of Australia's linguistic and inter-cultural competence will be a determining factor in the future success of developments in innovation, science and technology, research capacity, international mobility, trade relations and economic competitiveness. In the medium to longer term, the Asia Pacific region will be a principal focus, presenting major challenges and opportunities economically, socially and culturally, for our national security interests.



This project aimed to address issues including, but not limited to, the following:

- What are the attributes (such as personal interactions, ways of learning, cultural sensitivities) needed to succeed in Asia?
- What skills and knowledge would make it easier for people to collaborate in science, research and business?
- How do we use science and cultural diplomacy to advance our broader interests in Asia Pacific?
- What examples stemming from science and cultural diplomacy can we learn from?
- How could we most successfully assist development in the Pacific region?



# Executive summary

The focus of the report is on maximising opportunities for Australia to strengthen relationships with the countries of Asia. It finds that leveraging language, research and cultural capabilities will provide the basis for deep, long-term engagement that will return social, economic and political benefits to Australia and its partners in the region.

## **Smart engagement with Asia is essential for securing Australia's future.**

Australia's engagement with Asia has too often been characterised by short-termism, opportunism and focus on monetary gain. *Smart* engagement, by contrast, means more than the pragmatic emphasis on economic benefit, and working towards nurturing wide-ranging, long-term, deep and mutually beneficial relations, based on the principle of reciprocity. This principle stresses the value of cooperation and trust in international relations.

**Building stronger transnational links across the region is in the national interest** because it will, over time, allow Australia and Australians to become more integrated within a region increasingly characterised by overlaying networks of cross-border connections and relationships.



Growing the connections—between people, businesses and institutions—will help sustain economic development and regional stability by enhancing mutual trust and understanding and facilitating transnational cooperation for greater prosperity and security.

In recent decades, much of Australia's relationship with Asia has been filtered through business transactions (including tourism) and a rapidly growing international education industry. In the next few decades, each of these areas will continue to be of enormous importance to Australia's economic development. However, business and educational links are more likely to secure Australia's future if they are couched within a wider set of considerations that smart engagement demands. **The principle of reciprocity is central to smart engagement.**

Language, research and culture are of critical importance in enhancing smart engagement with Asia. Each of these can be leveraged in facilitating Australia's enmeshment with Asia through durable, reciprocal relationships. Both science diplomacy and cultural diplomacy are important foci for governments today, although they have not received major policy attention in Australia. This report considers these two areas side by side, together with the crucial enabling role of languages, in the overarching context of Australia's engagement with Asia.

## Australia's connectivity with Asia can be facilitated by the bridging role of diasporas.

More than 8% of Australia's population was born in Asia. This is a much higher percentage than in other Anglophone countries such as the US (4%) and the UK (2%). **Yet Australia does not make enough use of the networks and linguistic and cultural resources inherent in its Asian diaspora population.** Asian Australians bring with them linguistic skills, social networks and cultural knowledge, which can enhance links between Australia and Asia. But their role and contribution is insufficiently recognised.

There are also increasing numbers of Australians living and working in Asia, drawn by the opportunities offered by the rise of Asia. This Australian diaspora in Asia can be an important resource for personal knowledge and understanding about the nuances and complexities of the different countries in the region, which can be better utilised.

Smart engagement with Asia means making more use of the bridging role of Asian diasporas in Australia and Australian diasporas in Asia. This is the case in all three areas of focus in this report: language education, research collaboration, and cultural relations. However, relying *only* on diasporas would not be smart: the majority of the population should be engaged as well.

## Although English is a global language, being monolingual in English will impede Australia's ability to engage more effectively with the region.

Many Australians believe that they do not need to learn other languages because of the status of English as a global lingua franca. Eighty-one percent (81%) of Australians communicate only in English at home, and interest in foreign language learning, especially Asian languages, has remained stubbornly low in Australia. However, evidence shows that **being monolingual in English is no longer adequate in an increasingly interconnected world where others tend to be multilingual.**

**English has become indisputably an Asian language, as it is widely used across the region.**

In many region-wide operations, such as international research collaboration or formal intergovernmental affairs, English is now accepted as the de facto language of communication. Demand for learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is high in all countries in the region. Yet proficiency levels are very uneven, with only Singapore (where English is the official working language) and Malaysia demonstrating high proficiency.

In highly competitive global economic spheres, multilingual people have a comparative advantage in increasingly global or cross-national companies and organisations. Multilingual capabilities are of undeniable benefit for facilitating intercultural interactions and are considered essential in various professions such as engineering, medicine and tourism. A 2014 survey found that only 51% of Chinese visitors were satisfied with the availability of Chinese language facilities in Australia, and 37% cited the 'language barrier' as a reason for not recommending Australia as a destination.

Thus, **smart engagement with Asia requires breaking 'the vicious circle of monolingualism'.**

Foreign language education remains essential for Australia. It is not sufficient to rely solely on English in the expectation that others will adapt. The principle of reciprocity demands that Australians need to cultivate a preparedness to recognise the inherently complex language diversity within the region, and the capacity and sensitivity to navigate this complexity. More use can be made of the large presence of Asians within Australia, many of whom are multilingual, to familiarise mainstream Australia with Asian languages and to present Australia as an inherently multilingual society.

## There is considerable room for improvement in connectivity between Australian and Asian researchers.

**Asia is the most dynamic region for research investment and output today.** R&D expenditure in the region exceeded that in North America for the first time in 2011. China is now the third largest producer of research articles, behind

only the United States and the European Union bloc, and is on course to overtake the United States before the end of the current decade. Japan's status as a global research power is in long-term decline, but it is still very strong. South Korea and India are also increasingly prominent regional research powers. China now dominates international research networks in the region. The density of research collaboration between countries in the region has increased strongly in the past decade. This suggests that intra-Asian research collaboration is on the increase, though from a low base.

**National governments, including those in Asia, are increasingly investing in science diplomacy to promote international research collaboration**, both to advance the research endeavour itself (e.g. by the sharing of scientific facilities) and as a way to enhance international relations (e.g. by establishing mutually beneficial partnerships between research institutions). An important focus for science diplomacy in the 21st century is the need for international research collaboration in addressing challenges that cross national borders, such as climate change, infectious diseases and ageing populations. This provides opportunities for Australian researchers with specialist knowledge in such fields to collaborate with researchers in Asia. However, this requires appropriate resourcing and the creation of opportunities through more robust and proactive science and research diplomacy, as well as attention to overcoming cultural barriers.

**At present, Australian researchers' collaboration with colleagues in Asia is below par compared with collaboration levels with Western countries, especially the United States and New Zealand.** The exception is collaboration with China, which has risen exponentially. Much of Australia's collaboration with China is conducted by Australia-based Chinese diaspora researchers, implying that researchers without Chinese backgrounds do *not* collaborate as much with counterparts in China. Universities and research organisations could do more to harness the networks and knowledge of their diaspora researchers to extend collaboration with Asian countries to other Australian researchers.

## Deepening cultural relations between Australia and Asia requires patient relationship building to foster sustained and long-term interconnections and networks.

Being the only country in the region with a predominantly European heritage (apart from New Zealand), **Australia has a long history of distant relationships with neighbouring countries.** This sense of cultural distance has persisted despite strong growth of trade with the region, with seven Asian countries in the top ten of Australia's largest trading partners. **The sense of distance is mutual: in most countries in the region there is a lack of knowledge about contemporary Australia and outdated stereotypes prevail.** Transforming this state of affairs will require patient and long-term investment in deepening cultural relations.

There has been an exponential rise in investment in cultural diplomacy in the countries of the Asian region. But much of the focus of governments has been on the one-way projection of national soft power arguably to increase their global cultural standing. Australia also invests in cultural diplomacy to counter its perceived soft power deficit in the region. **Analysis of Australia's cultural diplomacy programs and activities shows that there is a beneficial trend towards more collaborative approaches.** For example, Australian cultural practitioners are already initiating or participating in such bilateral or region-wide cultural collaborations, indicating a strong appetite for on-the-ground engagement with Asia. In particular, Asian and Pacific diaspora activity is extensive but receives little public acknowledgement in Australia.

Much more can be done. For governments, **smart cultural engagement with Asia means creating the conditions for broad and deep cultural exchange and collaboration to flourish**, not just by direct investment but by supporting a wide range of community, third-sector and commercial initiatives. **Embracing long-term relationship-building will be more effective than short-term, one-off programs to foster sustained regional connectivity.**

**Both science diplomacy and cultural diplomacy are increasingly important dimensions of public diplomacy, but there is a lack of clarity and consensus about policy-making in these areas.**

Despite their considerable differences, science diplomacy and cultural diplomacy have a number of characteristics in common. Both are increasingly important policy areas globally, especially in emerging industrialising countries (including those in the Asian region). Both are seen as ‘fuzzy’ policy domains with multiple goals, stakeholders and participating organisations. In both, there is a tension between national and transnational regional (or global) goals, that is, between competition and cooperation. At the same time, **the need to establish more reciprocal, mutually beneficial approaches, based on sustained and long-term partnerships and commitment, is increasingly being recognised.**

The need to focus on more international cooperation and collaboration is especially challenging in the Asian region, where attachment to the principle of national sovereignty is strong. Narrow interpretations of the national interest are detrimental for a world that faces many shared challenges and common problems. **Developing institutional arrangements that allow countries to go beyond the self-interested bias of the national state, their own and that of others, is an important priority for the 21st century.**

**Diaspora diplomacy is now an important component in governments’ international relations toolkit.**

Diaspora diplomacy implies drawing on the human capital and transnational connections of diaspora groups to develop and enhance links between host and home countries. The reliance of developing countries in Asia and the Pacific on their overseas citizens for remittance income has been well-known for some time. Countries such as China and India have very well-developed policies and practices to capitalise on the resources, skills and knowledge of their diaspora

populations in the West in domestic economic and technological development. More recently, Western immigrant nations have woken up to the potential of diaspora diplomacy. For example, the US Department of State has initiated the establishment of an International Diaspora Engagement Alliance to harness the role of US-based diaspora communities as informal ambassadors in their countries of origin, focusing on entrepreneurship, innovation, philanthropy and volunteerism. Given Australia’s relatively large Asian immigrant population, this can be a model for Australia. **Smart diaspora diplomacy should not focus on serving the national interest only; instead it can be a vehicle for transcending national divides to embrace broader global perspectives and common interests.**

**There is an urgent need for action.**

This report finds that Australia will be left behind if it does not step up its transnational connectivity with the region. Time is not on our side. Since the beginning of the 21st century the countries of the region have themselves become increasingly interconnected, as the geopolitical balance of global power irrevocably shifts towards Asia, especially China. Engaging with Asia is therefore more than ever a national necessity for Australia. But such engagement needs to be *smart*: it needs to be focused on the development of a wide spectrum of sustained connections and relationships, based on the principles of reciprocity, mutual benefit and shared interests. An example is the Federal Government’s New Colombo Plan, which provides opportunities for Australian students to study in Asia. Growing the connections—between people as well as institutions—cannot be a ‘quick fix’: it requires long-term investment and commitment. This report shows that many on-the-ground initiatives already exist. Asian diasporas in Australia and Australian diasporas in Asia, in particular, naturally have the linguistic and cultural resources that make them inclined to establish and maintain transnational connections. Building on such initiatives, and scaling them up, will help Australia and Australians to become more integrated within the region in the decades to come.





# Key findings

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### **1.1. The rise of Asia requires that Australia becomes more deeply engaged with the region than ever before.**

The rise of Asia is a defining characteristic of the 21st century, dominated by the rising influence of the giant regional powers of China and, to a lesser extent, India. To secure regional prosperity and security, a key policy priority in the region is enhancing cross-border connectivity, at physical, institutional and people-to-people levels. It is crucial that Australia positions itself more strongly in the growing web of regional interconnections that is currently emerging. Australia needs to pursue smart engagement with Asia, which goes beyond the pursuit of purely transactional relationships for short-term gain and focuses on the patient cultivation of genuine partnerships through mutually beneficial cooperation and collaboration.

### **1.2. Australia has a relatively large Asian population, which is a comparative advantage.**

In comparison to other Western countries, Australia has a high percentage of residents and citizens of Asian descent (more than 8%, compared with the US which has less than 4%, the UK 2% and Germany less than 1%). This is a significant comparative advantage



for engaging with Asia. Asian diasporas are a resource for linguistic skills, cultural knowledge and social networks, which help connect Australia and Asia. Diaspora diplomacy is key to connecting Australia more extensively and intensively with countries in the region.

**1.3. Australian businesses are under-prepared to maximise on emerging opportunities in the region.**

Australian business is a long way from the level of engagement, investment and commitment needed to secure its long-term share of the region's growth. Foreign direct investment in Asia is particularly low. Australia invests more in New Zealand than in China, Indonesia, or all ASEAN countries combined. A prevalent view is that doing business in Asia is 'too hard', because of real and perceived differences in cultural practices, traditions and language. Developing Asia capabilities is a major priority for Australian business. There is broad agreement that key to business success in Asia are sustained networks and relationships, far more than in the West.

**1.4. International education is a key sector for strengthening Australia's ties with the region.**

International education is an important arena for Australia's connectivity with Asia. Of the more than 400,000 international

students studying in Australia in 2013, nationalities in the top ten were almost all Asian, with students from China contributing 29%, India 9% and Korea 5%. Students from Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia were also in the top ten in terms of numbers. Australia's international engagement through education has shifted from a focus on aid to a focus on trade, reflecting a dominant emphasis on the economic value of international education. We should strengthen international education's role as a driver for establishing sustained relationships and mutual engagement, for example by engaging alumni organisations.

## Chapter 2: Languages for smart engagement

### 2.1 English is a global language.

In the Asian region, there is little disagreement regarding the status of English as a global lingua franca in many professions and fields of knowledge. It also plays an essential role in facilitating the development of people-to-people links. Interest in learning English is high. However, proficiency in English varies across the region and cannot be taken for granted.

### 2.2 To maintain sustainable and reciprocal relationships with Asia, it is not enough to be monolingual in English.

There are two disadvantages in the arrangements of current global communication: not knowing English; and knowing only English. Because Asian users of English are developing Englishes to suit their needs rather than relying on the norms of 'standard' English (i.e. the US or UK variety) or Anglophones, the global dominance of the monolingual native English speaker is in decline. Familiarity with Asian languages facilitates comprehension and communication in the varieties of English being used in Asia. Knowledge of Asian languages is also critical for deep, mutual and long-term engagement with Asia.

### 2.3 Multilingualism facilitates international exchange and professional effectiveness.

Multilingualism is a competitive advantage. While English is currently the dominant language of international communication, knowledge of Asian languages such as Chinese can contribute to reciprocity, facilitate international exchange and collaboration, and promote business links. In a multicultural and multilingual society, effective communication and service provision in professions such as medicine and mental health necessitate that practitioners be multilingual. Professions where transnational teams characterise work environments, will also benefit from a multilingual workforce. Moreover, successful business engagement with Asia and within Asia, particularly at the SME level, is heightened with language familiarity. Australia's tourism sector is one of the largest in the world, with 64% of international visitors coming from the Asia Pacific region. The sector's National Training Framework includes language and cultural awareness training to address shortcomings in the level of linguistically and culturally responsive services, e.g. the lack of quality Chinese-speaking tour guides. Raising the levels of linguistic and intercultural capability in the tourism industry will enrich the quality of tourists' experience of Australia, with positive, long-term implications for this sector.

### 2.4 Interest in studying foreign languages, especially Asian languages, is declining in Australia.

Only 12% of Australian parents see foreign language skills as an important priority for their children at secondary school. This is lower than for parents in other Anglophone countries (Canada 20%, US 23%, UK 28%). In New South Wales, the proportion of students studying a foreign language for the Higher School Certificate is now less than a fifth of what it was during the 1950s. There has been a decline in the actual number of school students studying Asian languages

since 2000. As of 2013, the popularity of Indonesian had fallen 76% since it peaked in the mid-1970s, and more students studied Latin than Chinese. Promotion of the study of foreign languages, especially Asian languages, should therefore prioritise investment in creating demand, rather than the more common emphasis in government policy on the supply side.

## **2.5 Diasporas are linguistic resources for smart engagement.**

Asian diasporas in Australia are multilingual, and a substantial resource for the learning and transmission of Asian languages. However, given the pressure to assimilate into English, diasporic multilingual capabilities tend to be lost within three generations and cannot be taken for granted. Formally valuing the linguistic, cultural and link-building/networking resources Asian diasporas offer will benefit Australia domestically, and enhance its competitive edge regionally and internationally. Australian expatriates in Asia are likewise positioned to benefit Australia's regional connectivity. They will gain from a deeper understanding of Asian languages and cultures, in order to optimise engagement with Asia.

## **2.6 Multilingual capabilities need to be mainstreamed in Australia.**

Even though the great majority of Australians are still monolingual, the simultaneous use of many languages in Australia is already an everyday experience, particularly in large cities. This reality can be harnessed to facilitate language learning as an integral part of education and socialisation. Innovative pedagogic approaches to language learning, such as content and language integrated learning (CLIL), which integrate language acquisition with other school and academic subjects, have proved effective and should become more widespread in Australian education.

# **Chapter 3: Research collaboration as smart engagement**

## **3.1 R&D expenditure and research outputs are increasing rapidly across Asia.**

The Asia Pacific region has seen a steeper rise in R&D expenditure and scientific publication outputs than anywhere else in the world. As of 2011 the region accounted for 28% of global output, close to US output at 30%. China is fast becoming the world's largest producer of research output and is expected to overtake the United States before the end of the current decade. In 2011, its share of total regional output in science and engineering papers was 38%. Although Japan still has a strong R&D establishment, its share of outputs has been in long-term decline (20%, down from 44% in 2001). South Korea (11%) and India (10%) are also rapidly growing research powers in the region: both have overtaken Australia (9%) in terms of share of outputs. Indonesia, on the other hand, still has very low R&D intensity (only 0.1% share of total regional output).

## **3.2 China is emerging as the dominant research power in Asia.**

China's rise in research, especially in science and technology fields, is because of a number of factors: a large population and human capital base, a large diaspora of Chinese-origin researchers, a culture of academic meritocracy, and a centralised government willing to invest in research. Although the United States is still the most important global research nation, China is now the referent country in the region. As Chinese collaboration networks increasingly dominate the region, it provides incentive for all other nations to increase their own regional engagement in research. China is also becoming an important destination country for international students, especially from other Asian countries. In 2012 China took in 8% of all globally mobile students

worldwide, after the US (19%) and the UK (11%) but before France (7%), Germany (6%) and Australia (6%).

### **3.3 Intra-regional research collaboration and student mobility are on the rise across the Asia-Pacific region and may, over time, transform the geography of international knowledge networks.**

Although the main Asian countries have shown less international research collaboration than researchers in North America, Europe and Australasia, bilateral international collaborations between Asian researchers have risen steeply, especially since 1997. This suggests that an increasingly dense intra-regional network of research collaborations is emerging. Similarly, while outbound Asian students have tended to go to the West for their higher education, student mobility within the region is on the increase as some Asian countries themselves have become destination countries for international students. Intensifying student and researcher mobility within Asia may leave Australia out of the loop if Australian students and researchers do not step up their participation in these mobility trends. Most study-abroad Australians still tend to go to Western countries, with the top five destinations being the US, New Zealand, the UK, Germany and France as of 2010. Incentives for Australians to study in Asia, such as the New Colombo Plan, should be a policy priority.

### **3.4 Proactive science diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region, focusing on enhancing cooperation to address shared, transboundary challenges is needed.**

There is significant scope within the region to improve more strategic collaborative research to address the many common challenges facing different parts of the region. An important focus for regional science diplomacy would be work towards the development of effective institutional frameworks for multilateral collaborative research to promote regional public

goods, which has the support of the most important countries in the region. The participation of China, newly emerging as the most powerful research nation in the region, is crucial in this regard. To date, the region lacks such region-wide multilateral frameworks, and skilful and persistent diplomatic legwork would be required to bring them into being. The Chief Scientist's proposal for an Asia Research Zone resonates with some regional cooperative efforts that are already underway, such as those developed within ASEAN and by Japan. It may be possible to build on these initiatives.

### **3.5 Australian research collaboration with China is well developed. However, Australia's research relationship with other Asian countries is relatively weak.**

Bilateral collaborations remain important. Australian research engagement with China exceeds that with other countries in the region by a wide margin. Although Australia has substantial links with Japan and India, overall Australian researchers have weak connections with their counterparts in the region, compared both with the level of China engagement and the level of interconnections among Asian countries themselves, which has intensified significantly in the past decade. In a time when intra-regional connectivity is strengthening as a result of rising student and researcher mobility, there is a danger that Australia might miss out on newly developing regional research networks if Australian researchers do not manage to strengthen and deepen their collaborative links with researchers across the region.

### **3.6 Australian research collaboration with China has developed mostly through the diaspora.**

Chinese diaspora researchers play a disproportionately large role in Australia's collaborative effort with China. Of all scientific publications co-authored by researchers in China and Australia, a large majority of the Australia-based authors,

66%, were of Chinese descent. This suggests that Australian researchers who are not of Chinese background do not collaborate with China-based colleagues as much as they could. There is considerable unmet potential for extending diaspora research networks to other Australian and regional researchers by recognising the leadership roles Australia-based diaspora researchers can play in bridging national differences and nurturing collaborative networks.

### **3.7. There are important obstacles to increased research collaboration.**

Survey data show that, according to Chinese and Indian researchers in Australia, there are different obstacles to collaborating with China and India. For collaboration with China, the main two obstacles mentioned were (1) Inadequate resources or capabilities at Australian universities (according to 51% of respondents) and (2) Inadequate support from the Australian government (42%). For collaboration with India, the main obstacles were (1) Bureaucratic red tape in India (51%) and (2) Lack of interest from Australian institutions (41%). Addressing such obstacles requires targeted policy measures specific for each country.

### **3.8 Smart research engagement with Asia requires paying greater attention to the people-to-people dimension of research collaboration.**

Although institutional and resourcing barriers will be important reasons for the weak links of Australian researchers with their Asian peers, a lack of social connections and of intercultural capabilities play a crucial role in this relatively poor performance. Chinese and Indian diaspora researchers strongly argue that their linguistic skills and familiarity with their cultural heritage are of great benefit in their collaborative activities with researchers in these countries. For many of them, existing relationships (e.g. through postgraduate studies, former workplace relations or family or personal connections) have been fundamental for initiating collaboration.

This suggests that the social and cultural dimensions of international research collaboration require more attention in assisting Australian researchers who do not yet have the links to engage with Asia. International research collaboration is likely to be productive only through long-term commitment, multiple repeat encounters and spending significant amounts of time together, facilitating mutual familiarisation and trust. Short-term missions and delegations are unlikely to generate the results desired.

## **Chapter 4: Cultural relations and smart engagement**

### **4.1 Australia's cultural relations with the countries of the Asian region are characterised by a strong lack of mutual knowledge.**

Despite a massive increase in trade and other transactional linkages, many Australians continue to feel a strong sense of cultural distance towards the countries of the Asian region. They tend to know little about their regional neighbours and their feelings towards Anglophone and Western European countries are persistently much warmer than towards any Asian country. Feelings towards Japan and Singapore, the most westernised countries in the region, are the warmest, while attitudes towards Indonesia are unrelentingly cool.

### **4.2. Australia suffers from a soft power deficit in the region.**

Conversely, most people in Asian countries know little about Australia. An informal poll in China found that impressions of Australia were extremely sketchy and focused on koalas and kangaroos. While many people in the region consider Australia 'a good place to visit', significant minorities perceive the country as white and racist, suggesting the persistence of longstanding stereotypes. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of Indians still believed that race is an important factor

in Australian immigration intake, even though this has not been Australian official policy since the early 1970s. The lack of common heritage and history is a barrier for close cultural relations, which can only be alleviated by long-term investment in proactive cultural engagement.

**4.3 There has been a substantial increase in investment and interest in cultural and public diplomacy in all Asian countries since the beginning of the 21st century.**

Asian governments invest in culture and cultural diplomacy to increase their international cultural standing and soft power, in line with their growing economic power. Overall, an emphasis on outward cultural projection and cultural export predominates, with much less attention being given to reciprocal cultural exchange. Paradoxically, this can limit the soft power effects of cultural diplomacy, as attitudes within the region remain tinged by mutual distrust between nations. More collaborative approaches to cultural diplomacy are required to counterbalance suspicions raised by narrow schemes of nation branding and soft power projection.

**4.4 Australian cultural diplomacy practices—both those resourced by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and by other government agencies—are very diverse and demonstrate a strong tendency towards embracing more collaborative approaches.**

In line with international trends towards more cooperative and relational approaches to cultural diplomacy, DFAT-funded cultural diplomacy programs show a move away from projective ‘showcasing’ efforts to more emphasis on cultural exchange and collaboration for mutual benefit. As well, while support for Australian creative industries is focused on gaining access to Asian markets and audiences, experience on the ground points to the need for patient, intense people-to-people engagement to establish mutually beneficial and long-term, sustainable collaborations.

**4.5 To pursue smart cultural engagement with Asia, Australian cultural diplomacy needs to support a broad spectrum of initiatives to enhance society-wide cultural relations and people-to-people connections on the ground.**

Many cultural organisations, community groups and independent producers (including diaspora groups) are already committed to building strong connections with Asia through a plethora of disparate projects and initiatives, many of them small-scale and based on volunteers. For example, a survey showed that 79% of arts organisations in Victoria have engaged in cultural exchange activities with Asia in the period of 2008–2012, mostly using their own cash. While such small projects don’t seem ‘big enough’ to make a difference, their impact will be achieved in a cumulative and iterative way. It is important that such bottom-up initiatives are nurtured so that they can flourish. A devolved approach to cultural diplomacy, which supports projects that are sensitive to local contexts and builds relationships on the ground, is more effective than centrally planned public diplomacy campaigns.

**4.6 Australian cultural professionals have been at the forefront of the development of new region-wide, sector-specific cultural networks and organisations, which facilitate long-term connectivity and institutionalise a shared, regional sense of community.**

Organisations such as the Asia Pacific Film Academy bring together film professionals from across the region and establish the necessary cultural infrastructure to nurture peer to peer exchanges and multilateral cultural collaboration across the region. Australian cultural professionals have played a leadership role in initiating such networked organisations. As they nurture long-term relationships beyond short-term, one-off projects, they are important and innovative contributions to Australian cultural diplomacy, promoting Australia’s

role as an engaged regional citizen. Such initiatives require appropriate resourcing and deserve support.

**4.7 There is a great lack of recognition for the role of Asian and Pacific Islander diaspora groups in linking Australia with their various countries of origin through cultural engagement.**

Diaspora cultural practitioners based in Australia demonstrate many of the key attributes of smart cultural diplomacy, including peer-to-peer trust, self-reliance, a

focus on impact, a high degree of literacy in digital and traditional media, autonomous organisations, and a commitment to building long-term relationships. They account for a significant proportion of Australia's people-to-people ties with countries in the region. Any official approach towards such diasporas to serve as 'bridges' between nations needs to acknowledge their autonomy as independent actors with creative visions of their own.

**Box 1: Note on geographical terminology**

In this report the term 'Asia' is used as a shorthand label to describe the geopolitical region in which Australia finds itself. The geographical boundaries of this region are ambiguous, and can range from the west coast of the Americas to the east coast of Africa, spanning the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

In recent decades Australian governments have tended to focus most strongly on East Asia, where major economic interests lie, linking it to the Pacific where Australia has strong regional influence, and to the alliance with the United States. By the 1970s the term Asia-Pacific had become common in Australia, combining 'a well-established definition of Australia's region as the Pacific with a new emphasis on Asia' (Edwards & Goldsworthy 2003, p.19). The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, first proposed by Prime Minister Bob Hawke in 1989, reflects this view of Asia. APEC originally included twelve nations: Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and the United States, with China, Chinese Taipei (Taiwan) and Hong Kong joining a few years later. APEC has now been extended to 21 'Pacific Rim' nations, mainly countries with a Pacific coastline including Russia and Pacific South American nations, while excluding Pacific Island nations.

In the past few years successive foreign ministers from both sides of politics have used the term 'Indo-Pacific' to include South Asia, and particularly India (though not the Gulf states or East Africa which are of course, geographically, littoral Indo-Pacific) more definitively into Australian considerations of Asia.

Institutionally, the region has been defined differently again by a number of East Asian countries through the building of regional institutions such as ASEAN + 3 (from 1997), which added China, Japan & South Korea to the ASEAN nations, and the East Asia Summit (from 2005), which includes the ten members of ASEAN, Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, the United States of America (US) and Russia.

At a broader societal level, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has a membership of 47 countries ranging from West Asia (including Iraq, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia), Central Asia (Afghanistan, Iran), South Asia, East Asia and Southeast Asia. Australia joined the AFC in 2006 after having left the Oceania Football Confederation, of which it was a founding member.

Although terms such as Asia, Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific are influential in defining our 'neighbourhood' and our place in the world, what they represent remains imprecise and contested. Therefore, the term 'Asia' will be used throughout this report, except when another term is required to reflect the specific contexts in which they arise.



# About Securing Australia's Future

In June 2012 the Australian Government announced *Securing Australia's Future*, a \$10 million investment funded by the Australian Research Council in a series of strategic research projects. Projects are delivered to the Commonwealth Science Council by the Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA) via the Office of the Chief Scientist and the Australian Chief Scientist.

Securing Australia's Future is a response to global and national changes and the opportunities and challenges of an economy in transition. Productivity and economic growth will result from: an increased understanding in how to best stimulate and support creativity, innovation and adaptability; an education system that values the pursuit of knowledge across all domains, including science, technology, engineering and mathematics; and an increased willingness to support change through effective risk management.

Six initial research topics were identified:

- i. Australia's comparative advantage
- ii. STEM: Country comparisons
- iii. Asia literacy – language and beyond
- iv. The role of science, research and technology in lifting Australian productivity
- v. New technologies and their role in our security, cultural, democratic, social and economic systems
- vi. Engineering energy: unconventional gas production

Two further research topics have been identified:

- vii. Australia's agricultural future
- viii. Sustainable urban mobility

The Program Steering Committee responsible for the overall quality of the program, including selection of the Expert Working Groups and the peer review process, is comprised of three Fellows from each of the four Learned Academies:

Professor Michael Barber FAA FTSE  
(Chair)

Mr Dennis Trewin AO FASSA  
(Deputy Chair – Research)

Professor James Angus AO FAA

Dr John Burgess FTSE

Professor Bruce Chapman AO FASSA

Professor Ruth Fincher FASSA

Professor Paul Greenfield AO FTSE

Professor Lesley Head FAHA

Professor Peter McPhee AM FAHA FASSA

Professor Stephen Powles FAA FTSE

Dr Susan Pond AM FTSE

Professor Graeme Turner FAHA

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PROJECT

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