

Comment by Michael C H Jones
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As I struggle intellectually with writing an ACCCI economic narrative for February 2016, to be followed early in the year with Public Policy Submissions on aspects of countries strategically important for Australia - China Relations in a Global Era, and subsequently Peoples Diplomacy "interference" in the US 2016 and PRC 2017 Elections, the historic forty year interests and/or focus of Chamber must be maintained.

A new Observations column is required as is an update/refocus of Sydney - A Place of Learning.

One of the seven books I am currently reading is the 2001 "1688: A Global History" by John Willis, previously Professor of History at the University of South California, USA, who did his MA in East Asian Regional Studies in 1960 and PhD in History and Far Eastern Languages in 1967, both at Harvard University. Oh that American/Australian politicians had read such men.

For Australia 1688 is an interesting date, almost half way between the 1577-80 English sea captain Francis Drake's second circumnavigation of the world and Governor Arthur Phillips' 1788 first settlement of Sydney Cove, Australia. It is of course the year of the Glorious Revolution in England and arguably the foundation of English and Australian parliamentary and constitutional democracy.

Most of what Chamber has sought to do and accomplished since foundation in 1974/76, some might argue a more mature business oriented version of the Sydney University inspired Australian SDS on 11 campuses during the late 1960s, has been history based - both an understanding of Chinese aspirations post 1949 PRC foundation and Australian uncertainties concerning national multicultural identity and accommodation with the many Asias in all aspects - political, economic, social and cultural.

Sydney, was and remains the gateway to Australia. Yet it has suffered enormous discriminations and derision from its fellow cities, particularly Canberra, and it is not an overstatement to agree that in many respects Australia's Federation became a conspiracy against Sydney's growth as a genuine global city. Naturally there is also some truth in the assertion that Sydney's problems have in most part been due to its very low calibre politicians in the NSW State Parliament.

Hence is there any real confidence in Premier Mike Baird's new breed of NSW Liberal politicians or the reincarnation of Malcolm Turnbull as Australian Liberal/Coalition PM. How and Who will coordinate the amalgamation of 42/3 Sydney councils, what role will Lucy Turnbull play as Chair of the Greater Sydney Commission and can Jamie Briggs, Minister for Cities and the Built Environment, achieve anything substantial? Chamber's argument is that the answers will ultimately be found in the decisions of COAG and the Recommendations of the Productivity Commission.

For almost 20 years during the 1990s and 2000s throughout China and for thousands, yes thousands, of Chinese delegations to Sydney I was known as the de facto Mayor of Greater Sydney in my position as President of ACCCI simply because of the governance chaos/fiasco in Sydney. New Chinese Consul Generals, Rank of Ambassador, would regularly ring to understand the hundreds of official-sounding Chinese organisations in Sydney. In China it was simply impossible to explain governance/power at any level in Australia given our Head of State history. Remember power in China is the Communist Party, and the Central Military Commission, with the least important position being President of the PRC.

ACCCI escorted Party officials, ministers in the Central and Provincial governments, City mayors and wealthy businessmen throughout Greater Sydney which we divided into 5 Zones and matched with Key Cities in China re Metropolitan Sydney, Eastern Sydney/seaside, Western Sydney to Illawarra, Northern Sydney to Newcastle, and Western Sydney to Lithgow with Shanghai, Nanjing, Wuhan, Chongqing and Chengdu. This was part of the two-stroke strategy re East/West Shanghai to Chengdu, and Minorities Xi'an to Urumqi. It has all in great detail been on the ACCCI website for decades.

Thankfully Baird and Turnbull may now have the authority/power to wake Australia up, however with 4/3 year elections this is very doubtful.

Clearly Chinese and Australian cities are like Mars and Venus, virtually no similarities historically and particularly culturally. Yet there is the aspect of leadership. Since the 1979 launch of China's opening out to the world, economically the Key Cities of China at all five levels have exploded on to global consciousness - this link talks of four with completely different projectories. Yet arguably the Great Cities of Australasia have not realised their potential over the same time-period. Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Auckland are our frontline cities, with Adelaide, Perth, Newcastle, Wellington and Christchurch second tier, and perhaps Ballarat and Bendigo as examples of third tier. Darwin and the cities of Northern Queensland are not as easily categorised. Yet to my knowledge there has never been the sort of coordinated planning and setting of goals for Australasian cities as has occurred in China.

Growth in an ultra competitive world is vital, something many in progressive politics in Australia do not seem to understand. But so is socio-cultural equal opportunity which very seldom occurs to our ideological and moneyed elites. Sydney's historical broadbased institutions is the city's greatest advertisement worldwide, that is what needs to be promoted by Tourism Australia/NSW. But first clean up the governance/structural mess.

ACCCI welcomes recent month's developments, State and Federal, which are consistent with our advocacy in the Speeches and Media section of this website. We just apologise for the often non-sensical behaviour of the North Sydney Council, the District in which Chamber has its office.