

Australia's Asia capability is declining

Australia has distinctive interests in relations with China which **require a sovereign China knowledge capability**, balancing security, politics, economics, and relationship-building.

Australia's universities generate prolific, diverse knowledge about China – this is a success story.

However, there **are serious questions around our ability to generate core capability for stakeholders**: direct knowledge of China, informed by world-class understanding of how China operates, and engaged with Australia's national interests.

Indicators of decline in China capability

- An average of 3, and no more than 5 Australians graduated with Honours (Chinese studies with language) in any one year, 2017–2021.
- Universities that were once strong on China such as Adelaide, La Trobe, Tasmania, and Deakin, have significantly reduced their specialist offerings.
- Since 2010, ARC grant funding for core China research has declined, from \$11m in 2010 to \$4m in 2022.
- In 2007 Australia's thesis database recorded 367 theses on China, down to 167 in 2020 & 110 in 2021.
- The number of China experts in Australia's academic workforce has been and is declining.

“Deep knowledge of a country reduces the risk of strategic miscalculation—a real danger in an increasingly volatile world. When one nation has the capacity to really understand the workings of another's political system, the chances of an escalating cycle of misunderstood signals and misconceived responses diminishes...”^[1]

— **Her Excellency the Honourable Frances Adamson AC**
Former Secretary of DFAT and Governor of South Australia

More than China—we're losing the capability to engage with our region

- In 1997, Vietnamese and Thai were each taught at 8 universities—by 2021 this declined to 5.
- 13 universities offered undergraduate subjects on South Asia in the 1970s—3 times more than today.
- Only 5 universities offered semester-length subjects on India or South Asia & only the ANU had a program dedicated to South Asia.
- Only 5 universities offered semester-length subjects on India or South Asia.
- As of 2023, only the ANU offered a major in any Southeast Asian language apart from Indonesian.
- Hindi is taught at 2 universities, ANU and La Trobe, down from 4 in 1997.
- Sanskrit was taught at 5 universities in 1997—by 2023 it was only taught as a major at the ANU and a minor at the University of Sydney.

[1] Australian Academy of the Humanities, Australia's China Knowledge Capability (2023) p.2