

Review: 2013 Yearbook of Chinese in Australia
澳大利亞華人年鑑 2013
(Sydney: China Yearbook Association Inc., 2014)

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The *2013 Yearbook of Chinese in Australia* 澳大利亞華人年鑑 2013, published in late 2014, is, we are informed, the first such yearbook of a Chinese society published in a non-Chinese majority polity and the only yearbook of a minority community in Australia. The reasons a book is published are often as interesting as its contents, and the question of why this book was published now, and in Australia, is worthy of further interrogation. In his afterword, the general editor of the yearbook, Yankee Feng (馮小洋), advises that this Chinese-language tome is simply a commemoration of overseas Chinese society in Australia. Noting that the compilation of such a yearbook usually requires government assistance, Mr Feng lauds the organising committee, society leaders, friends and contacts for the successful publication of this “non-governmental” volume.

However, the nature of the editorial committee and the support it received suggests that the yearbook had the endorsement of the Chinese government. Firstly, the Yearbook’s [editorial committee](#) includes many members of the [Australian Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Unification of China](#), which is directed by the United Front Work Department of the Communist Party of China. They include the Council’s chairman Huang Xiangmo (黃向墨/黃暢然), the late president William Chiu 邱維廉 and other members of diverse united front organisations in Australia.

In addition, the congratulatory messages carried within the volume from Qiu Yuanping (裘援平), the director of the State Council’s Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, from the PRC ambassador Ma Zhaoxu (馬朝旭) and from all of the Chinese consuls across Australia underline official PRC encouragement of the undertaking. The book’s recording of all PRC-sponsored activities within Australia and the fact that Sydney-based Consul General Li Huaxin (李華新) officially launched the book, also clearly indicate more than tacit endorsement by the PRC. In the end, the volume is a “patriotic” product, endorsed by the PRC and lauded in the *People’s Daily*.

But to what end? In recent years it has become increasingly apparent that China has again begun utilising ethnic Chinese globally in promoting the PRC’s agendas, and the Yearbook is an aspect of this new political engagement. By portraying Australian ethnic Chinese — both long-term citizens and new arrivals— as sharing a common identity, regardless of their origins, and promoting the idea that the PRC is the political representative of ethnic Chinese across Australia, the book is fulfilling an overtly political function. It also provides an avenue for United Front members to promote their own role as social leaders in Australian Chinese society.

Despite the clearly political origins of the volume, the 550-plus pages of the Yearbook are remarkably informative, and a boon for anyone interested in Australian Chinese society. The vast amount of information compiled further underlines the external assistance which must have been rendered to the editors. After an introductory section comprising photographs of diverse China-Australia diplomatic and cultural activities over the year and an overview of Australian administration and multiculturalism policies, the text continues with an outline of key events between Australia and China and within Australian Chinese communities over 2013.

The most informative section -- one which must have involved a great amount of research -- is that which provides biographies of key persons of Chinese descent across various fields in Australia. The categories under which individual are listed include

community leaders, political figures, scholars, entrepreneurs, religious figures, writers and artists and media figures. There is also a very useful listing of Chinese organisation across the various Australian states. These entries provide previously unavailable background to prominent ethnic Chinese persons and Chinese cultural and political organisations around Australia.

A more detailed listing of official China-Australian diplomatic representation and relations as well as financial, trade and human movement trends over the year follows, and the volume concludes with a guide to living in Australia.

The Yearbook is an essential reference tool for anyone interested in China-Australia links, or Chinese communities and prominent ethnic Chinese individuals in Australia. The functionality is greatly aided by an excellent range of indexes which enable searches of personal and institutional names across the whole volume.

