

A New Sinology – by Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister of Australia

China's power and influence are growing. But its future course remains uncertain. To understand what role China will play in shaping the world order, we need to understand China more deeply and engage China more frankly.

Australia has a long tradition of thinkers and writers on China, such as the first ever permanent China correspondent for *The Times*, George E. Morrison. These thinkers have always been aware that a knowledge of China has to be grounded in an understanding of the histories, literature and philosophies of its past. It is a tradition of passionate, sympathetic but nonetheless clear eyed analysis.

To analyse China's future, we need to better understand China's extraordinary history, including its long evolution of reform and foreign engagement. That is a complex task. In China itself there are many competing views about China's history, its present and its future.

That is why we are establishing the Australian Centre on China in the World at the Australian National University. The Centre will be an international institution that will seek to enhance understanding of China, and promote dialogue with China. It will focus specifically on China's role "in the world".

The Centre will be founded in the midst of remarkable change in China, generating great interest in what role China sees for its future. There is a hardline view that regards China's rise as a threat to the existing global order. There is a contrary view that a new "Beijing consensus" should replace the "Washington consensus". There are many views in-between. The truth is that there are many conflicting views about China and its future – and those differing views are held by Chinese as much as they are held by others.

China has benefitted remarkably from its policies of domestic economic reform and global economic engagement. But there is still an ongoing debate in China itself about that reform. There is also an international discussion about China's future. There are questions about the handling of human rights in China, and about the development of a truly transparent and independent legal system. And China's friends also want to see China's economic system develop in a way that brings China and the Chinese people fully into a globalised world economy.

A growing China will pursue its interests globally: that is natural. And I believe that China recognises its own fundamental interest in working with – not against – the international system that has served China so well in recent decades. We see this in China's role in the G20, where it has partnered with the other major economies in responding to the global economic crisis. China is also working with the international community to meet the challenges of climate change, although it needs to take on a greater leadership role on this critical problem.

China has also engaged deeply with the nations of the Asia-Pacific, and encouragingly shares Australia's goal of building the right regional architecture for dealing with future challenges.

China's contribution to the world order is undeniable. But there is much more to be done. China can – and should – do more to support international efforts on global security challenges such as Afghanistan and Iran.

China engaging across the board as a major stakeholder in the maintenance and strengthening of a stable, rules based order is good for China, and good for the world.

To understand what role China will, can and must play in shaping the world order, we need to understand China more deeply and engage China more frankly at all levels. I believe that it is time for a new sinology.

This must go beyond old Cold War concepts of *fan-Hua* or *qin-Hua* – that is, of either being anti-China or pro-China. The realities are more complex than this old binary opposition suggests. We should be able to express to China views based on our values and beliefs without our core friendship towards China, or China's towards Australia, being called into question. We need a more sophisticated dialogue; a new way forward for a rising great power.

I would like to see this dialogue based on the principle of *zhengyou*. A *zhengyou* is a candid friend, a partner who sees beyond immediate benefit, and who speaks the truth as the basis for a profound and sincere friendship.

In Australia's case this means being able to speak to China in a frank manner when our interests are engaged, and to expect the same from China: a dialogue based on respect, understanding and a mutual recognition of values. This new principle for engagement and understanding is as important for China as it is for Australia and the collective West.

This is an edited extract of the 70th George E. Morrison Lecture delivered by the Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, launching the Australia Centre for China in the World