Suzhou and Australia: An Educational Working Conference

On the 28th and 29th of March Professor David Walker, BHP Billiton Chair of Australian Studies at Peking University attended a conference of Australian Secondary School Principals drawn together by a shared interest in developing links with China and promoting the teaching of Chinese in their schools.

Held in the city of Suzhou the conference was titled: Suzhou, China and Australia: An Educational Working Conference. Professor Walker presented a keynote address: From ‘Yellow peril’ to ‘Our Asia’: what should we be teaching in schools?’ on the 28th of March, and gave a second address to the conference on the following day.

On this visit, Professor Walker was also able to visit the Australian Studies Centre at Soochow University where he met with Professor Wang Labao and colleagues.
In late March, Professor Walker welcomed a number of visitors to the Peking University Australian Studies Centre. Dr Lachlan Brown from Charles Sturt University, Associate Professor Caitlin Byrne of Bond University and award winning Journalist Mary Delahunty. Brief biographies have been included below.

**Dr Lachlan Brown**
Lachlan has been living in Wagga since 2011. He grew up in Macquarie Fields in Southwest Sydney and completed his PhD at the University of Sydney where he examined the poetry and prose of Kevin Hart. In 2008 he was a recipient of the Marten Travelling Bequest for poetry.

He has won the Henry Lawson poetry prize, the Macquarie Fields poetry prize, the Hermes best poem award and has been shortlisted for the Blake Poetry Prize. Lachlan’s poems have appeared in journals including Mascara, Heat, Southerly and Etchings. His first volume of poetry, Limited Cities, was published by Giramondo in 2012. He has given readings at the Sydney Writers’ Festival, the Write Around the Murray Festival, the Newcastle Young Writer’s Festival and at the Association for the Study of Australian Literature Conference.

**Dr Caitlin Byrne**
Caitlin Byrne is currently Assistant Professor in International Relations at Bond University where she teaches courses in East-West diplomacy, global institutions and conflict resolution, and global statecraft.

Caitlin is also a Research Fellow with the Centre for Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California. She is an elected council member of the Australian Institute of International Affairs (Queensland) and book review editor for the Australian Journal of International Affairs.

**Mary Delahunty**
The Australian Studies Centre was honored to welcome prominent, award-winning Australian writer and journalist, Mary Delahunty in the month of March. Mary Delahunty has previously worked on The Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s well known current affairs shows; Four Corners and The 7:30 Report.
To celebrate the publication of the Chinese translation of Professor David Walker’s book *Not Dark Yet*, the Australian Embassy hosted a book launch at the Hilton Beijing in conjunction with Australian Writers Week.

The launch was undertaken by Michelle Garnaut, the well-known owner of the Beijing restaurant ‘Capital M’ and it was attended by Professor Walker’s colleagues from the Australian Studies Centre, PKU, academics from other Australian Studies Centres in Beijing, Chinese students with an interest in Australia, Australian Embassy staff, figures from the publishing industry and many Australians living in Beijing.

Professor David Walker is the BHP Billiton Chair of Australian Studies at the Australian Studies Centre, PKU. As the author of many academic works including a prize-winning survey on the historical relationships between Australia and Asia, in 2004 he was faced with a dilemma.

Over the short period of only one week his eyesight deteriorated badly to the point where he was considered to be ‘legally blind’. As access to historical records and letters was increasingly difficult, David needed to reconsider the kinds of history he endeavored to write. He writes: “...I had to find another, more personal voice and another way of writing. The mix of the historical and the personal seemed promising.”

Drawing on family photographs, historical documents stories and his own personal memories of various relatives, Professor Walker has described the history of his family over five generations since his great-great grandparents first settled in South Australia in the 1850s in his book *Not Dark Yet*, published by Giramondo Press, Sydney in 2011.

The title is taken from one line of a song by the American singer Bob Dylan: ‘It’s not dark yet, but it’s getting there’, and is used here as a reference to the loss of sight.
Professor Walker’s book tells the story of a very unassuming middle-class family but it is also set within the much broader framework of the development of Australia and the impact of the Second World War.

Professor Tom Griffiths of The Australian National University depicts the text as: ‘simultaneously witty and poignant’ and as ‘both profoundly moving and very funny’.

Thanks to the fantastic work of Professor Li Yao from Beijing Foreign Studies University, readers in China can now also appreciate this work. This translation has been published under the title 光明行：家族历史 by the People’s Literature Publishing House in 2014.

Over the years Professor Li Yao has translated over thirty Australian books into Chinese. His achievements were recognised by the University of Sydney who have since awarded him an honorary doctorate in April 2014.

Intern Guest Lectures

In early March the Australian Studies Centre Research Interns offered their insight and perspective on Australian culture with the Chinese students taking the Australian Studies Course.

Over two separate lectures the interns not only shared their experience with local Chinese students but delivered lectures on the Gold Rush in the mid 1800’s and general cultural belief systems in modern day Australia.
On 20th March, the Australian Embassy and Australian Studies Centre at Peking University organised a panel discussion featuring the Australian journalist Pamela Williams—an investigative reporter at the Australian Financial Review. She has won five Walkley Awards since 1994, an accolade equivalent to the Pulitzer Award in America. She is also the author of two best-selling books.

The panel was titled ‘Journalism in the Age of Globalization and Australian Perspectives’ and took place at Yingjie Overseas Exchange Center, Peking University, and was part of the Seventh Australian Writers’ Week which has been running since 2008. Ms Williams began the forum with a twenty-minute lecture. Throughout the event, Williams stressed what she believed to be the essence of being a journalist and expressed her optimism for the future of journalism. “Check the facts”, said Williams. She further stated, “I think human beings will always want to read news, as ancient people did looking for the story behind the story. People remain hungry for a long story that gets into the real facts.”

According to Williams, the future of journalism in the ‘Age of Globalization’, appears to some people to be bleak with widespread internet social media inundating global readers with increasing volumes of media, originating from a wide variety of sources. Journalists are increasingly being made redundant and media organisations are now struggling to “keep their heads above water.” Despite this, Pamela Williams remains confident and believes that “journalism has a healthy future.”
Williams believes that the internet will be the instigator of a new "industrial revolution" in journalism. In her view two factors will provide the basis for saving the journalism industry. The first will operate via patronage- media entities will emerge financially supported by wealthy business magnates and by business corporations such as Amazon or The Washington Post. The second method of survival will involve journalists using new internet platforms to conduct traditional journalism. Journalism will in this way "recreate itself".

Following the lecture, Professor David Walker asked Williams a number of questions regarding the topics raised in her talk. The panel proceeded with a Q&A session among the audience, in which Australian scholars, Peking University students and professors were active participants.

Apart from a large number of Peking University students filling the Moonlight Hall, numerous Australian scholars, novelists and students from other universities also attended the event. The Australian Studies Centre at Peking University looks forward to playing host to more prominent Australians in the coming months as we further strengthen understanding about Australia in China.