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Andrew Forrest
The Forgotten ANZACs

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests, members of the foreign press, friends, colleagues.

Tonight, I want to talk to you about war, about peace, about allies and friendship. I want to talk to you all, and to every Australian, of an ally in war, an ally in business, and an ally in Australia's history and future destiny. An ally that has been neglected in recent times as we lose sight of our long term national interests and international friendships and indulge in immature commentary.

I want us all to consider the good friend of a largely forgotten past and the good friend of a very certain future. These people I refer to, with my academic mate Mr Will Davies, as "the forgotten ANZACS".

This friend is China. Every step across the last 100 years of Australia's history, we have each helped each other for our mutual prosperity and our destiny. You may each not know that through our common war history, which every Australian holds dear, we have been protected by Chinese service men and women, just as Australian soldiers have protected China. At every turn -- when China's history allowed -- we as Australians stepped up for China. In minerals, in energy, in education, in culture, tourism and most importantly in friendship.

We have fought alongside China. Our two nations have benefited from China's epic and humanitarian quest to raise itself from poverty, an achievement like no other in history.

This was the message when I first met the then Vice President Xi Jinping. He said to me, with some earnestness, over the next 11 years he would take every step possible to rid China of poverty. He invited me to visit Fujian, where he had been governor, and challenged my thinking as to why this provincial



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economic miracle could not be spread across all of China. He said that's what he lived for.

Last year, which I consider Australia's 'annus horribilis' for its relationship with China, we forgot about these things.

We disregarded a friendship that defines Australian modernity, and our shared humanity in the coming century.

We have listened too much to immature alarmists and not enough to each other. We have neglected the nourishment of our greatest friendship – China and Australia must nourish that friendship.

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests, it's time we remember.

Exactly 100 years and 7 months ago, China entered that epitome of human disaster, that so-called War to end all Wars, the First World War, and they entered on the side of the Allies.

China's huge contribution to defeat the Central Powers of Europe is way too easily forgotten.

Of the 680,000 men of the Chinese Labour Corps dispatched to both the Western and Eastern European Fronts, to help build railways, fortifications, and transport food and ammunition, 50,000 Chinese heroes died, roughly the same as Australia's entire war toll.

Chinese graves are today in Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemeteries right across both France and Belgium.

However, these Chinese graves are usually not located in the iconic rows of white headstones where allied troops rest, but on the edges of memorials, along the fence lines and surrounding walls.

If that doesn't strike you as patently unfair, I want to tell you another short story about how starkly underappreciated China's contribution to World War



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One has been. Shortly after the start of the war, an enormous, football field-sized painting was commissioned to illustrate all the Allies and their contributions to the war effort. This painting -- the 'Patheon De La Guerre' -- is regarded as the largest ever created in the history of the world.

Now, the Chinese Labour Corps of World War One were originally featured in this painting. But get this, these Chinese heroes were painted over to make space for pictures of American soldiers when they joined the War in 1917. I do not blame the artist, I blame the times. When you give your life, you deserve to be in that painting too.

They were quite literally erased from history.

Please don't think I'm blaming the Americans for that, but it does illustrate a point.

The contribution of Chinese-Australians in World War One is also largely obscured. Young men with Chinese heritage by and large were victims of prejudice -- excluded from joining the Australian Imperial Forces -- but those who enlisted early were the exceptions and they became our very brave soldiers.

Can I please share with you a story about a hero of mine, William "Billy" Sing, a sniper raised in Clermont Queensland, from a Chinese father and English mother, who is a fine example.

Unlike many other forgotten Chinese war heroes, we know about Billy Sing because one of his spotters at Gallipoli was the famous Australian novelist Ion Idriess.

Idriess described Billy Sing as "the crack sniper of the ANZACS" and indeed he was.

The ANZAC war diary for 23 October 1915 states Trooper Sing is "Our premier sniper". Within 5 months on the front lines he had accounted for 200 enemies.



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Every morning Billy Sing would crawl through the Gallipoli dust, barbed wire and blood to find a vantage point over the Turkish troops. His fame grew so great that the Turkish Army dispatched 'Abdul the terrible', their own crack shot, to assassinate him.

Billy managed to dispatch Abdul as well.

By the end of the war Billy Sing had been awarded the British Distinguished Conduct Medal, Belgian Croix de Guerre, and was remembered for countless acts of valour that no doubt saved hundreds of Australian lives. Yet he died, virtually destitute and largely forgotten, in Australia at the age of only 57.

In World War II, China's contribution alongside Commonwealth and American allies was even greater. With limited resources or assistance, Chinese fighters held down hundreds of thousands of Japanese troops while the Allies focused on war in Europe. We would not have been so successful without that.

By the time the war in the Pacific took off following the terrible attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941, the Chinese resistance fighters had already played an enormous role in preventing Japanese troops storming South East Asia, British India and Australia.

Australia's brave troops, likewise, thrust up into Asia, and fought hard to liberate Europe – and I'm talking seriously hard, I lost my uncle there – bringing peace and security to dozens of far flung nations that continue to celebrate and honour our efforts.

14 million Chinese died in that terrible war, including 2.2 million Chinese soldiers, the third highest military death toll after the Soviet Union and Germany, and seven times that of Great Britain. Where do you read that?

America's role in the Pacific theatre has seen it have a continuing presence in the region as a force for peace. China's history, sacrifices, importance and power also demand it has an important role in ensuring peace and stability in our region.



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China was a significant player in the eventual Allied victory, as was our beautiful country Australia. We may not have been the best resourced, or the largest armies, but we fought like hell for a common cause. China and Australia's grit, defiance, and resolve for peace, assured stability in this region.

We are allies in peace and also allies in business.

Many foreign business leaders that I meet marvel at Australia's miracle economy. This June will mark 27 years without a recession. In the modern era, that is a world record.

Even in the depths of the Financial Crisis, when North America and the whole of Europe suffered severe recession, Australia managed to keep its balance sheet clean. Uniquely, that was Australia and China.

How is that possible?

The answer is our excellent fiscal relationship with China, one built on decades of trust.

China's incredible growth and prosperity, built on its commitment to regional leadership and peace, is why Australia has had such a good run. And every time I have met President Xi since, I have found him to be that man of peace. And we are proud of that growth. China's growth has driven Australia's growth. Their historic quest to pull hundreds of millions of people out of poverty in a single generation has also pulled us along in their wake, and they now buy nearly 30% of our exports and represent a \$30 billion trade surplus on our current account.

Likewise, Australian entrepreneurialism in mining and agriculture, and our highly-skilled services in sectors like education and healthcare, continue to propel the development and rising standard of living of our northern neighbour, China.

There is much more growth to come.



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Where our differences in culture and history sometimes stand between us, business and friendship are a conduit for our shared values.

But Ladies and Gentlemen, I want to assure you that this speech doesn't come from a place of purely commercial self-interest. Most of you know how I spend my wealth.

Believe me, I know how tough China can be, to the point of ruthlessness. No less tough than any other sovereignty I have dealt with acting in its own interest, I might add. Like we in Australia do.

I have battled them over control of Fortescue, and I enjoyed that battle. It was no less than a full-on contact sport.

As a proud Australian, this speech comes from a place of national interest.

Australia is my favourite country in the world. Being a proud Australian to me also means being proud to stand in the middle of a peaceful, cooperative and prosperous region. I am pro-China, pro-America, pro-Japan, pro-India, pro-Vietnam and pro-Indonesia. I am pro the countries of Asia and Australia stands proud among them. There are few places in the world where you can stand before an audience like the one assembled here today and be as proud a patriot, and make that declaration.

I do not want to see our country emulate the diplomatic tensions, cold-snaps, and tragedies of the past. I live in a peaceful region, with peaceful leaders, and it's up to all of us to uphold that. I know my Australian Prime Minister and I know the Chinese President and they are both men of peace.

They both recognise the importance of the China-Australian bilateral relationship to our mutual wellbeing and prosperity. The Australian Prime Minister speaks to me in earnest about his goodwill towards China and how Chinese blood runs in his family.

As our Foreign Minister Julie Bishop rightly said this week, China's effective leadership continues to strengthen our comprehensive strategic partnership.



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China's constitution remains a matter for China, as Australia's laws and regulations are for ourselves to decide.

Though much of the current Australian debate fuels distrust, paranoia and a loss of respect. Ladies and gentlemen, this has to stop.

China has asserted its growing economic and political power in the world. We should expect nothing less. So do we all.

That does not for a moment mean that Australia should not vigorously pursue and protect its national interest. We do.

If we act with maturity, strength and respect, Australia's relationship with China will prosper.

Mutual respect is the bedrock of our shared destiny and purpose in the region.

So I ask Australians to stand with me and respect and celebrate the Chinese community's deep roots in Australia, and the vital role China has played in the strength and cultural richness of Australia.

Our shared experiences, through some of the worst horrors in history, are far more meaningful than differences in tradition or our political systems.

These differences, which are often used to imply some "new challenge" to Australia, have existed for decades. They existed while we carved out our current strong relationship. They existed when we fought alongside one another. And they existed when we signed globally important trade deals.

We need to stop only focusing on what separates us.

We need to frankly address areas of concern and disagreement between us. We should do this within the context of our aligned future and our friendship.

Government, business and commentators all have a role to play in our future and mature engagement.



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I am hopeful that 2018 will mark a turning point in the China-Australia relationship and, from my own experience, there is plenty to celebrate.

In the fight to eliminate cancer for the next generation, we are allies. Chinese oncologists and health experts are among the best in the world, and in my work through the Minderoo Foundation to connect the world's cancer centres, China is a productive, insightful, committed and aligned partner.

In sport, I would love to see a Chinese rugby team playing our new Western Force team here in Perth.

In music and the arts, we share the dynamism, optimism and risk taking of countries that are growing and open to change.

In history, Australia is celebrating this heritage with a recent exhibition on the Chinese ANZACS at the Chinese Museum in Melbourne, and a memorial at last for ex-servicemen at the Chinese Gardens in Sydney.

We can and must celebrate our relationship.

So, I call on all of you to toast this Chinese New Year and in 2018 make the Forgotten ANZACS our Best Remembered Friends.

Raise a glass please. To Australia and China working to forge a new future together.