



Ear to Asia podcast

- Title:** Freedom of thought under fire in China
- Description:** As several leading universities scrub freedom of thought from their charters and formalise allegiance to Chinese Communist Party doctrine, we ask just how far academia in China will bend to politics in the era of Xi Jinping? Seasoned China watchers Dr Delia Lin and Dr Sow Keat Tok join host Ali Moore to examine the new authoritarian tilt on China's campuses. An Asia Institute podcast. Produced by profactual.com. Music by audionautix.com.
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- Voiceover:** The Ear to Asia podcast is made available on the Jakarta Post platform under agreement between the Jakarta Post and the University of Melbourne.
- Ali Moore:** Hello, I'm Ali Moore. This is Ear to Asia.
- Sow Keat Tok:** I think over time you'll see more and more overt attempts by China to limit the kind of research that can be published around the world. So it's up to the vigilance of academia to really preserve this freedom of speech and freedom of thought.
- Delia Lin:** When we are collaborating with China, it doesn't matter in what areas or which Chinese institutions or individuals, then we need to be very clear about our values or about the processes and about how far we want to go and what we want to do. For people I know, I think everyone is pretty clear about that.
- Ali Moore:** In this episode, academic freedom under fire in China. Ear to Asia is the podcast from Asia Institute, the Asia research specialist at the University of Melbourne. In December of 2019, one of China's leading institutions for higher learning, Fudan University, made a significant change to its charter. It removed its stated commitment to freedom of thought and instead added a pledge to equip its teachers and employees with Xi Jinping Thought.
- Fudan University, known as a relative bastion of liberal thought among China's universities, hasn't been alone in officially putting the communist party's interests above all else. Nanjing University and Shaanxi Normal University have also recently formalised their allegiance to party doctrine and more institutions are expected to follow. China has been tightening controls on the internet and civil society since Xi Jinping assumed the presidency in 2012. So perhaps it was inevitable university and college campuses would also be targeted.



So to what extent does politics intersect with higher learning and academic research in Xi Jinping's China? Does the party expect academics and the knowledge they produce to bend to its ideological will? And how is the rest of the world to respond? Joining us to discuss the new authoritarian tilt on China's campuses, we're joined by China political scientists and Ear to Asia regulars, Dr. Delia Lin and Dr. Sow Keat Tok, both from Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. Welcome to both of you.

Delia Lin: Hello Ali.

Sow Keat Tok: Hello Ali.

Ali Moore: If we can start by getting a sense of what's been lost, how important was this commitment to freedom of thought in the charter of these universities as both a protection and, I guess, Delia, also an incentive for academics?

Delia Lin: Yeah, absolutely. I think it's very important because Fudan University's known, as you said in your introduction, is known to be a university that promotes freedom of thought and also freedom of speech and intellectual independence. And also Fudan University is the first university in China that was established by the Chinese themselves. And it was set up in 1903 from memory and it's basically built into the spirit of the university that academic independence is important.

Ali Moore: At the same time, Sow Keat, if I can put this to you is it, when you look at that phrase, freedom of thought, has it been merely symbolic? We are dealing with an authoritarian state.

Sow Keat Tok: I think it's more than symbolic. Freedom of thought is absolutely cardinal to academic enterprises. Without that, you really can't advance knowledge and what we'd like to think as advancing the mankind, the way that we think, the way that we understand the world around us. So in this case by acknowledging or removing it, I thought, was pretty significant.

Ali Moore: Does it mean the same, freedom of thought in China, as it does in the West?

Sow Keat Tok: That's a good question. Freedom of thought is something that is more important than the freedom of expression. I'll put it that way. Freedom of thought really is the emancipation of the mind that allow to think about things that otherwise people wouldn't have thought about. But in terms of freedom expression, you have to think before you can talk about it.

Or even express it in writing or in other ways. So in this case, I thought the freedom of thought itself is really a kind of signature for authoritarian, in fact totalitarian type of approach.



Ali Moore: Because Delia, when you think of thought, it goes to the soul, doesn't it really?

Delia Lin: Yeah, absolutely. It goes to the mind and the soul. It means a lot. And we also need to look at not just the history of the university itself, but also look at the history of the university charter, drafting university charter in China. And I found it really ironic, this revision. It's very ironic because Chinese universities for a long time have been pushing back, drafting university charters.

They didn't want that, but minister of education wanted it. So the kind of initiation of drafting the university charter started in 1992. By October, 2015 only 114 universities pushed by the ministry of education. And mind you in China, there were more than 2,600 universities, drafted the university charter.

One of the reasons to reject drafting university charters because they couldn't see the sense of doing it. Because they were angry, it's kind of resistance to the government because they were not happy. There was too much party administration within the university and they didn't think a charter is going to help them to gain more independence.

But the government's purpose for asking the university to draught a charter is exactly wanting to give them more freedom so that they would be governed by this charter drafted by themselves and in the end approved by the minister of education.

Ali Moore: But in the end that's not-

Delia Lin: But it was the opposite to now. So the purpose of drafting university charters is in Chinese, it's called qu xingzhenghua 去行政化. De-administration-ization.

Ali Moore: It's de-centralization.

Delia Lin: It's de-centralization. So that universities are not governed by party administrators but are governed by professors, by academics, by themselves. That was the purpose of drafting this university charters. By the universities pushed back because they didn't see that's going to really happen. They didn't trust, they didn't believe that university charters would actually give them more freedom. So they were not really interested in drafting one. So it's very interesting to see that the purpose of the charter actually shifted from reducing party administration to, in today's time, be a instrument for fortifying party leadership.

Sow Keat Tok: I also have one more thing to add to that. The backdrop to all this development is the expansion of higher education in China and the



Americanization of universities. They apply American standards to Chinese universities. And as part of the whole reform project, they have to introduce something called a charter. University administrators or professors saw that the whole endeavour was just a hypocrisy. And they were very reluctant to get on with things because they're afraid that if once the charter was written, they were governed by it and they'd rather not have it. So it's easier to-

Ali Moore: Manoeuvre.

Sow Keat Tok: Yeah. It's easier to manoeuvre.

Ali Moore: And so does that mean that now with that change to the charter, that ability to manoeuvre those unspoken restrictions, if you like, that that window has narrowed or that ability has just become slightly less?

Sow Keat Tok: Yep. I see it that way. Now. In the West, we tend to see charter as something that's behavioural principles that we want to enshrine within the academic profession. Whereas in China there is a political element to the charter.

Delia Lin: Actually the charter is very comprehensive as well. It's very long. Unlike our charter is very short but in China all the university charters very long and it goes to the detail of the institutionalisation of the university as well.

Sow Keat Tok: So in the end it become more constraining than liberating.

Ali Moore: So, for people who don't know what is Xi Jinping Thought? And if it's being used in education, what does that actually mean?

Delia Lin: Xi Jinping Thought is very broad and it covers really a lot of aspects. And it's really difficult to summarise what it really means because it does cover a lot of things. But what's most important here is party leadership. That's considered as number one under Xi Jinping Thought. And we really need to look at an 11th party Congress that was held in October, 2017.

And I believe that that's where the game change starts because after this party Congress, then party leadership, party leads all, was written in the party constitution. And this change in the party constitution was more than symbolic. The impact was very profound because that's changes the way that education, the way the law even is formulated in China.

Ali Moore: With the party at the centre of everything?

Delia Lin: Of everything.



- Sow Keat Tok: Because right up till the early 2010s the trend, the bigger trend within Chinese political reform has been one that's moving towards greater decentralisation and greater separation of politics and administration – state administration.
- Ali Moore: As Delia was saying with the charters being aimed originally at that.
- Sow Keat Tok: That's right. Absolutely. So the whole point here is really, that what Delia said, is a reversing of that trend, okay, towards greater party leadership and it elevates party above the state.
- Delia Lin: Yeah, exactly. So this revision, recent revisions to the university charter, it's really a part of that big story.
- Ali Moore: So does that mean that as an academic, as a researcher, you now your first port of call under Xi Jinping Thought is what does this mean for the party?
- Delia Lin: Exactly.
- Sow Keat Tok: Yes.
- Delia Lin: And how party sees my research, whether my research is going to serve the party.
- Ali Moore: So do you think the changes at Fudan will have a broader implication on academics beyond Fudan?
- Delia Lin: Well, certainly it sets an example of how far you can go in revising your university charter. Other university including Nanjing University, Shaanxi Normal University, Renmin University, not all of them have added Xi Jinping Thought. I believe in Nanjing University has. Shaanxi Normal University did not add Xi Jinping Thought into the revision to their charter.
- Ali Moore: But they took out the freedom of thought.
- Delia Lin: They took out freedom of thought, but Fudan University made more substantial changes than that. And to the great detail.
- Ali Moore: Do you think they did it off their own bat or do you think they read the tea leaves?
- Delia Lin: Very good question. And we don't know what the inside story is, but I'm sure that there was negotiation. But another interesting thing that has happened at Chinese universities is that a lot of universities have changed its general party secretary. So I think the extent to which the university charter has changed has a lot to do with the governing style of the new general party secretary, who is number one now. Before he was the president, now



it's the general party secretary who is the number one leader of the university.

So Fudan University had its new general party secretary in 2016. And she had no experience in higher education, but she had extensive experience in party administration. And she's known to be a hardcore party follower and has implemented, if we look at even just Fudan University. Before I came, I looked at Fudan University websites. Unfortunately I couldn't compare it to the previous website, but now it's very clear the website is all about a party leadership.

Ali Moore: And so Sow Keat, is that all about limiting academic freedom?

Sow Keat Tok: Yes, I think it is. I see the process of removing the term freedom of thought more significant than having it there in the first place or not mentioning it in the first place. Because the process of removing it, you are sending a very clear signal out that this is not something that we want. This is not really or-

Delia Lin: We're removing it.

Sow Keat Tok: Yeah. We're removing it. So it's like this is not encouraged.

Delia Lin: And this is deliberate. They thought, after very careful thought that phrase needs to be removed. So that's a very important signal.

Sow Keat Tok: Yeah. So they could have a charter without mentioning it, but the process of removing it really is a very strong signal to all academics, to all students out there that this is something that is out of bounds in future. So for me, including Xi Jinping Thought, that is probably part of the bigger trend anyway. Okay. Everywhere-

Ali Moore: That's pretty standard practise, hey?

Sow Keat Tok: It's a standard practise. You can resist it, but it's not a matter of if you do it, but when you do it, I'll put it that way.

Ali Moore: So removing the freedom of thought, does it mean that that we will see academics not tackling vast areas of research? Of being more prone to self-censorship? Will we see more academics focus on maybe less vulnerable areas like science and technology rather than humanities? Will that be the long run implication?

Delia Lin: Well, I think it's more profound than that. It's not just about more people just doing science and...

Ali Moore: Safer subjects.



Delia Lin: Safe subjects and certainly less people would be willing to do humanities if they feel that they do have their views. They would feel that there was absolutely no point in doing any humanities or any philosophy because they knew that there wouldn't be any philosophy or humanities, if they themselves have got a creative mind. So would those individuals that would go for more practical subjects and disciplines.

I think that that could be the trend, but I think what's also significant from education perspective, is that this new charter would then change the way that even science is taught. What knowledge really means and what kind of knowledge can be talked about. And then what kind of information can be given. And also we just talked about the windows becoming more and more narrow.

Ali Moore: The window for manoeuvring.

Delia Lin: For manoeuvring and just becoming more and more smaller. Because China has always been authoritarian state, and there's always been restrictions as to what you can say. But then previously there was more room for manoeuvring. And there were many ways of, especially without the charter, then there were many ways of doing things that you would get away with. But now it's getting harder and harder.

Sow Keat Tok: But we also have to give credit to academics, entrepreneurs, who are able to really work along very tight borders. I mean in the totalitarian era of Mao, for example, there was research done that totally ran against what the party line would dictate them to do. And some of those research deals really surface until the 1980s or 90s.

I'll give you one example, which is the project that Delia and I are doing on Nanjing Massacre. The issue of Nanjing Massacre was raised in the 1950s. Okay. There were a small group of historians and anthropologists were working on it, but because of political environment, they didn't want those work published. But doesn't stop them from doing those research. And those materials that they have gathered in the 1960s and 70s became foundational to the subsequent expansion of Nanjing Massacre studies in the 1980s onwards.

Ali Moore: So you're saying that you can work around it if you're particularly, I suppose, you've got to be very good at that and work out where the boundaries are? But that means that you quite possibly they wouldn't be published or it would be something that would not be well publicised.

Sow Keat Tok: That's right.

Ali Moore: So how does this restriction fit with the leadership's attempts to boost China's global competitiveness to increase the innovativeness of the



country? Because it does essentially seem to be contradictory to put academics in a box and then ask them to think outside the box.

Sow Keat Tok: In terms of competitiveness, it does pour sand into China's ways of innovation and things. But within those fields that the CCP has identified as priorities, I think China will still steam ahead and become very, very competitive around the world. I'll put it this way, you don't expect China's innovation to be as comprehensive as it would be, but in certain niche areas, I think they would still do very well.

Ali Moore: But you don't think that fundamentally you need to have freedom of thought in order to create innovation and have people who can think in a way that is new and different?

Sow Keat Tok: As an academic, I respect my fellow academics for able to perform what they're supposed to do. Censorship is not something that's unique to China. Even in the West, we have certain form of censorship. We call it political correctness or we call it something else. But in China's case we have to also understand that scholars have been working within a very constrained environment for thousands of years.

Ali Moore: Then that's the point that Delia was making. But Delia, do you see a contradiction by this seeming attempt to put academics in a box and then ask them to think outside it?

Delia Lin: I think absolutely there was a contradiction and a lot of Chinese academics have been arguing that it's very difficult to work within this restriction. And asking the reasons why there were so few Nobel prize winners in China, why there were so few real innovations. There were a lot of talents in China and as Sow Keat points out, they're working very hard. If they really are passionate and believe in what they are doing, they're working everything they can to push the boundaries and to make their research outcomes heard.

Now everyone is talking about Wuhan coronavirus. Just recently on social media, this story of Professor Gao Fu, who is the director of disease control and prevention in China, who is a fantastic scholar. And he is blamed for not having reported it to the public that the virus can be transmitted from person to person.

But a lot of netizens have found out that's not true because he was told not to say this. He's not allowed to say this aloud. But still he's a scientist, from a scientific perspective he needs to say this. So what he did is he published an article with international journal, that was published. He actually did say that it can be transmitted from person to person. So he did his duty as a scientist, but then as a scientist within China, there were things he could not say.



Sow Keat Tok: Yeah, he published in Science, didn't he? And it predated the announcement of the virus in the very first place.

Delia Lin: That's right.

Sow Keat Tok: So that was very significant. [crosstalk]

Delia Lin: And he was hoping that by doing that, then somehow this message would actually come back to China through the West.

Ali Moore: It really does illustrate the point very well, doesn't it? You're listening to Ear to Asia from Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. I'm Ali Moore and I'm joined by Asia Institute political scientists. Dr. Sow Keat Tok and Dr. Delia Lin. We're talking about the tightening of controls around academic and research freedoms in China.

And just that point of international publication and the route that was taken in this case. I suppose there is a bigger question around that and that is the credibility of Chinese research globally when you have changes like we've seen at Fudan. Sow Keat, if I can put this to you, do you see a bigger picture issue of how the world looks at China's research programmes?

Sow Keat Tok: Absolutely. I think there is a bigger issue out there. But first I want to acknowledge that there are a lot of very good researchers in China today, working really hard trying to get groundbreaking research out. But the system is under tremendous pressure because of the political environment. Not just that, but there's structural issues within academia is just rife, okay, in terms of funding, in terms of disciplines and et cetera.

Delia Lin: And collaborations as well.

Sow Keat Tok: Collaboration.

Delia Lin: International collaborations.

Ali Moore: But don't you get to a situation where regardless of the abilities of a domestic Chinese researcher to do a terrific job and overcome the obstacles, that the West or the rest of the world will still have a particular view of what's produced because they're looking at the system and putting their own lens on the what they perceive the pressures will be?

Sow Keat Tok: Yep. I think so. I can't say too much of what the others say, but for me, whenever I look at a Chinese publication, I'll definitely take a close look, very critical about it and look at how it has been written. I'll just flip to the conclusion of the article. It's very easy to discern whether it's a good article or bad. Is that if they attempt to produce too many policy suggestions, then no, I don't think that's a good article. The reason being-



- Ali Moore: Is that across the board or just with Chinese research?
- Sow Keat Tok: Just with Chinese research because that is where the whole Xi Jinping thing comes in, the Xi Jinping Thought. The way that they connect their research with whatever political thought that they want to link up to is really to draw those references to what the country wants them to do. So whatever technology or whatever science breakthrough that they have found relevant to the current political climate, that kind of things.
- The more important thing here really is that decides whatever discovery is being done. I think those are the things that we need to take note of. That there are also quite a number of articles and research out there, published ones, that are really just subpar because of the publishing enterprise within China itself. There is a lot of-
- Ali Moore: Is it easier to get published domestically than it is internationally?
- Sow Keat Tok: Yes and no. It's easier to get published domestically if you know the right people. So there's a lot of guanxi 关系 network within the publishing-
- Delia Lin: It's a very different game.
- Ali Moore: Are you as cynical as Sow Keat is about...?
- Delia Lin: I have to agree with Sow Keat on that because I work on a lot of Chinese publications and I think because the general public or the general academia would be looking at publications. We have a lot of personal contact conversations with scholars and we know that there are a lot of them who are working really hard and who have great ideas, but it doesn't mean that they're able to publish those ideas.
- Whereas the kind of perception that the West gets, general perception, is from what they can see out there. Very few people would have opportunities to work closely with the Chinese scholars. And also because I work on a lot of Chinese publications, I do look at them, but the main purpose for me to look at Chinese publications is to look at the information that is given in it.
- Delia Lin: The argument usually is toeing the party line and the articulation is made around should Xi Jinping Thought, that's expected, but I'm interested in the specific information. That's where I find the value is.
- Sow Keat Tok: The data [crosstalk]
- Delia Lin: The data. That's what I find interesting.



Ali Moore: So you would say there was already a particular Chinese brand of research if you like? And as China grows, does that have global implications?

Delia Lin: I think a lot, huge. On different levels. So as China grows with this limitation to freedom of thought and freedom of expression, it's getting increasingly harder to establish international collaboration with the Chinese scholars. And we always need to take into account their position and how they are able to collaborate.

But also because this Chinese model is becoming more and more salient and explicit, some Chinese academics do think that's the correct way of doing research. This is the way of viewing China. So it's getting more difficult even if they come overseas because international collaboration hasn't stopped. And we've got so many Chinese scholars or Chinese students coming out of China, even increasingly more. And China is putting so much money to the academics, encouraging them to go overseas, but it doesn't mean that when they go overseas then they see a different ways of doing academic work, then they appreciate it.

It doesn't mean that. Some of them appreciate the way that we do research here, but some of them don't think that we are doing good research because-

Ali Moore: Because they come from a China model?

Delia Lin: They come from China model and they come from different perspectives.

Ali Moore: And they believe in the China model.

Delia Lin: The believe in the Chinese. Say, well you just don't know about China. You just don't know China, you been out China for too long, you don't know China. But some of them will say you actually know China better because you see China from outside in. But then some will say, well you just don't know China.

Ali Moore: But if you look at that China model and what its implications could be globally, how keen and indeed overt is China about influencing global education programmes and global research? And I'm thinking here of the very specific example of Cambridge University press, who had a China publication, and the government demanded that they remove or delete hundreds of articles and book reviews about Tiananmen Square and the cultural revolution.

Ali Moore: Cambridge University press complied. And then there was a massive international outcry and those articles and those research papers and reviews were reinstated. I guess on the one hand terribly concerning that



they complied. On the other hand, gratifying that there was global outrage. But do you see that, Sow Keat, as a trend?

Sow Keat Tok: I see that as a trend. Yes. I think over time you will see more and more overt attempts by China to limit the kind of research that can be published or is published around the world.

Ali Moore: Not just in China?

Sow Keat Tok: Not just in China. It used to be that if you publish in Chinese you need to tow the party line. You don't publish in Chinese, you don't have to. We are not concerned about publishing in English because the Chinese communist party is not going to read our work anyway. But the Cambridge University press incident shows that the reach of the CCP is far greater than we expect and that is probably going to happen again. So it's up to the vigilance of academia to really preserve this freedom of speech and freedom thought.

Ali Moore: But when there's so much money involved.

Sow Keat Tok: Exactly.

Ali Moore: And academics need money to do their research and often it's short and if it is being offered then does that compromise people?

Sow Keat Tok: I think the thing is already looking at commercialization of the academia in a very big scale. Look at what's happening in the States over here in Australia and elsewhere in the world. American model is really a capitalist model for education. And speaking from a liberal perspective, not from a communist perspective.

And even China is copying this now, you see. And at the end of it is the publishing houses, even in the West are running on a capitalist model. They only publish articles because they are profitable. They publish books because they are profitable. All right. And if I have to reach out to the 1.4 billion Chinese market, I better do what the CCP wants me to do.

So it's something that is already happening. And CCP is also encouraging foreign researchers to join hands, collaborate with Chinese researchers to work on the list of topics that China is interested in. For example, like Belt and Road Initiative and even Xi Jinping Thoughts and stuff like that.

Ali Moore: But this will be the challenge won't it? I mean I know that Human Rights Watch has actually put out a code of conduct, which is for academic institutions to use when they're dealing with China. But the challenge will be that if China sees a particular way of doing things and China wishes that the rest of the world saw that way as well. If the rest of the world is still



prepared to take the money and accept the research project and agree to the collaboration, then China's job has just been made a lot easier.

Delia Lin: Absolutely. This commercialization of education has made it really difficult for any academics to stand up for their principles or for their values and assess who they collaborate with and how they collaborate. And not just academics but also institutions as well. And we're talking about not just publishing houses but also universities as well. So that's definitely a challenge that education in the West has not faced before. It's unprecedented.

Ali Moore: So do you not collaborate with China? And how is that even possible given the vast swathe of research and they're building universities by the week to meet growing demand? How does one deal with this?

Sow Keat Tok: I trust academic minds and the academic creed to be able to really side step all this constraints that's being put to them. And I will still collaborate with Chinese scholars, but I'll make sure that I'll only work with those people who think along the same frequency as I do. Not someone who, who really goes the other way around and we can't really talk about issues together or critically. It takes a little bit of mischievous thinking, which is very much inbuilt into my brain. Is like, we will toe the line, but we will make cheeky statements here and there just to, not to test the waters, but to really say what we want to say. I mean academics are trained to do that.

Delia Lin: In a way it's creativity as well.

Sow Keat Tok: Yeah, it's creativity.

Delia Lin: And sometimes it's fun to do it. But of course we choose who we work with and also the same time we need to be mindful of the restrictions they're under and make this very open. Especially if we are working on some sensitive topics, then we'll make it very clear. And also make sure that those academics are protected, that we would not pose any danger or any risks to them. So there's always risk assessment that we do ourselves as well.

Ali Moore: But in many ways, I guess from a global point of view, the changes in Chinese academia and academic freedoms is no different to the challenges posed by China in so many other areas. For example, economic areas and the constant debate in Australia about the extent to which we are interlinked and dependent. That you have to judge where your values and where your position is and how you are prepared to interact as opposed to just saying either we accept it all or we don't accept it all.

Delia Lin: I think so. I think it's really an age that we need to be very clear about our own values. And so when we are collaborating with China, it doesn't matter in what areas or which Chinese institutions or individuals. Then we need to



be very clear about our values and about the processes and about how far we want to go and what we want to do. For people I know, I think everyone is pretty clear about that.

Sow Keat Tok: You're absolutely right. We don't think of the whole situation as a binary situation. To think of it that way you are really underestimating the agency of academic circles worldwide. There is a very dynamic process. I think academics being who they are will be trying to find that grey area no matter how narrow it is. They'll find that grey area and try to maximise what they can do within that grey area. So it's a beyond that black and white. That is the one that we are looking at really.

Ali Moore: You made the point, Sow Keat, at the beginning of this interview that the key was not so much even that freedom of thought was there as a phrase in these charters, but more that it has now been taken away. So looking ahead, can you ever see a day or a catalyst for that to be put back? Or now it has been taken out, it is out forever?

Sow Keat Tok: I think there is no chance of it putting back. It takes generations. But then again generations later the political climate could change. Hopefully whoever is working within Chinese universities and with Chinese institutes still hold to that, create that freedom of thought is absolutely fundamental to what we are doing and there is no fear of that being removed at all.

Delia Lin: Yeah, I don't think it's a matter of time that in time that this will be put back. I think this change is fundamental. And to ask for a change back, it requires another fundamental change. It's not about time or after few generations and finally people realise how important freedom of thought is. People know that freedom of thought is important, but as Sow Keat points out, removing it from the university charter is a fundamental change. And then putting it back, again, it's a very strong voice. So at the moment in today's political climate, there's no such context. There was no such environment where you can actually put it back.

Ali Moore: Do you think that will change one day?

Delia Lin: Well, let's put it that way. Nothing stays the same, right? All the time. Change is constant. Change always happens.

Ali Moore: That's a good way to end it because we certainly don't know what is going to happen, but it's been absolutely fascinating to listen to the two of you. Thank you so much for joining Ear to Asia. Thank you Delia.

Delia Lin: Thank you.

Ali Moore: And thank you Sow Keat.



Delia Lin: Thank you.

Ali Moore: Our guests have been political scientists, Dr. Sow Keat Tok and Dr. Delia Lin of Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Ear to Asia is brought to you by Asia Institute. You can find more information about this and all our other episodes at the Asia Institute website. Be sure to keep up with every episode of Ear to Asia by following us on the Apple podcast app, Stitcher, Spotify, or SoundCloud.

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