

China-Australia Relations and China's Policy Choices toward Australia: A Chinese Perspective

Fangyin Zhou

Abstract

Since 2016, Australia's attitude toward China has taken a turn for the worse, and Sino-Australian relations have seen a significant decline. With regard to the change in Australia's attitude toward China, Chinese scholars initially analyzed it mainly from the perspective of the U.S.-Australia alliance and the China-U.S.-Australia triangle, viewing U.S. influence as the key reason for the change in Australia's policy toward China. Later, Chinese scholars have become increasingly aware of the significant policy autonomy in Australia's China policy and the inadequacy of viewing Australia's China policy from the U.S. perspective. On the one hand, Australia's unique threat perception and interest perception have shaped the characteristics of its China policy; on the other hand, how to effectively balance security interests and economic interests is a long-standing dilemma faced by Australia under the strategic competition between China and the U.S. The Australian government has shown a degree of policy flexibility in its approach. The limited coercive economic measures taken by China against Australia have sent clear policy signals to Australia and have become a factor influencing its policy towards China. In the coming period, although no obvious opportunity for improvement in China-Australia relations is in sight, both sides may be more prudent and pragmatic strategically, and China-Australia relations can be expected to remain basically stable at a low level.

Fangyin Zhou is Professor at the School of International Relations, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. Correspondence should be sent to zhoufangyin@gmail.com.