

Report to Future Melbourne Committee

Agenda item 7.1

Post travel report by Councillor Philip Le Liu, China and Thailand, November 2023

6 February 2024

Presenter: Councillor Philip Le Liu

Purpose and background

1. To report to the Future Melbourne Committee on the travel undertaken by Councillor Philip Le Liu to China and Thailand in November 2023.
2. On 31 October 2023, the Council approved the proposal for Councillor Le Liu to travel to China and Thailand to participate in the Australia China Youth Dialogue (ACYD) and a program of meetings aimed at building relationships and links which foster stronger economic and cultural ties with Melbourne.
3. Councillor Le Liu was invited to attend the 13th ACYD and was one of 15 Australian delegates selected to participate in a forum of emerging leaders from Australia and China. Delegates included representatives from the Department of Premier and Cabinet, University of Melbourne Asia Institute and Austrade.
4. The ACYD was held in Chengdu between 17 and 20 November 2023. Whilst in Chengdu, Councillor Le Liu also took the opportunity to engage and meet with a number of officials from the Chengdu Municipal Government to return the reciprocal visits made by the Mayor of Chengdu in 2023 and also the Deputy Consul General at the Australian Consulate General Office. Further information regarding these meetings can be found in Attachment 2.

Key issues

5. Participation by Councillor Le Liu in the ACYD provided a valuable opportunity to establish connections and to promote Melbourne as a preferred destination for economic investment, international tourism and education.
6. Councillor Le Liu also participated in a meeting with the Victorian Government Trade and Investment Office and discussed potential opportunities for the City of Melbourne to further collaborate with Chengdu, leveraging on the direct flights between the two cities and the existing Victoria-Jiangsu sister state relationship.
7. At the suggestion of the Thai Chamber of Commerce and Melbourne's Honorary Consul of Thailand, Councillor Le Liu made a brief visit to Thailand in preparation of the Prime Minister hosting leaders from Southeast Asia for the ASEAN-Australia Special Commemorative Summit.
8. The ASEAN-Australia Special Summit will take place in Melbourne from 4 to 6 March 2024 and will mark the 50th anniversary of ties between Australia and ASEAN. Nine leaders from across Southeast Asia are anticipated to join the Summit at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.
9. Whilst in Thailand, Councillor Le Liu held meetings to discuss potential opportunities for City of Melbourne to leverage from the ASEAN-Australia Special Commemorative Summit, including potentially hosting visiting ASEAN delegates at the Melbourne Town Hall and further exploring opportunities for city to city business and cultural connections.
10. The key commitments, observations and opportunities associated with Councillor Le Liu's travel to China and Thailand are further outlined in Attachment 2.
11. The cost of travel was jointly funded by the ACYD, Council and Councillor Le Liu. At the time of seeking approval, a maximum of \$6000 (as contribution by Council) was identified by Councillor Le Liu. However, between estimation and bookings, the flight availability and price fluctuations resulted in increased airfares. Accordingly, the approval of Committee is now sought for the variation amount of \$1100.

Recommendation

12. That the Future Melbourne Committee:
 - 12.1. Notes the report by Councillor Philip Le Liu on travel undertaken to China and Thailand in November 2023.
 - 12.2. Notes that the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit will be taking place in Melbourne from 4 to 6 March 2024 and requests management to brief Councillors on opportunities for the City of Melbourne to meet with and host visiting delegates and officials with a view to building relationships and exploring potential business and cultural connections with leaders from across Southeast Asia.
 - 12.3. Approves the additional cost of \$1100 which takes the total cost to Council for Councillor Le Liu's travel to \$7100.

Attachments:

1. Supporting Attachment (Page 3 of 7)
2. Overview key commitments, observations and opportunities (Page 4 of 7)

Supporting Attachment

Finance

1. The cost of travel was jointly funded by Council, the ACYD and Councillor Le Liu.
2. The ACYD funded accommodation during the program with other nights (and incidentals) being covered personally by Councillor Le Liu.
3. Council covered the cost of airfare and visa requirements. At the time of seeking approval, a maximum of \$6000 was identified by Councillor Le Liu for his proposed travel. However, between estimation and bookings, flight availability and price fluctuations resulted in increased airfares.
4. As a maximum was set at the time of approval, the Committee's approval of the variation amount of \$1100 is required. This would take the cost to Council for this travel to \$7100.

Conflict of interest

5. No member of Council staff, or other person engaged under a contract, involved in advising on or preparing this report has declared a general or material conflict of interest in relation to the matter of the report.

Relation to Council policy

6. The Executive Officer Councillor Liaison has confirmed that the travel costs accord with the requirements of the travel guidelines outlined in the Council Expenses Policy including the requirement to seek approval for the additional expenditure.

Environmental sustainability

7. Carbon emissions resulting from air travel to China and Thailand were offset with the purchase of credits.

OVERVIEW OF KEY COMMITMENTS, OBSERVATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Australia China Youth Dialogue (AYCD) and program of meetings promoting business and cultural connections, China and Thailand, November 2023

The following is an overview of some of the key commitments, observations and opportunities arising from the travel:

AYCD program

1. Councillor Le Liu was selected as one of 15 Australian delegates to participate in the 13th Australia-China Youth Dialogue (ACYD) held in Chengdu, China. The overarching theme of the 2023 ACYD was Evolving Dynamics, with each day of the conference focusing on a topic including trade and investment, sustainability and healthcare. The ACYD included several site visits to Australian companies with facilities and operations based in China and Chinese companies with partnerships with Australia.
2. Some of the keynote speakers at the ACYD included people from Government (both Australia and Chengdu), Industry (Mining, Biotech, Manufacturing, Medical Devices) and Academia.

Chengdu and Melbourne connections – business, tourism and research

3. Councillor Le Liu visited the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding. Whilst visiting the Research Base, Councillor Le Liu met with officials to explore exchange and partnership opportunities supporting animal science.
4. Councillor Le Liu took the opportunity to discuss the possibility of City of Melbourne working alongside the Victorian State Government, Melbourne Zoo, Melbourne University and Parks Victoria to propose a joint research centre or project in Melbourne for scientists to work together on enhancing the protection of endangered animals including koalas and the giant panda.
5. The Chengdu Research Base welcomed the proposal for a research centre or project in Melbourne and highlighted that although it's not the only determining factor for panda exchanges with cities, it's noted that cities with strong scientific and research capabilities are highly valued.
6. Whilst in Chengdu, Councillor Le Liu held a meeting with the Victorian Government Trade and Investment (VGTI) Office. The purpose of the meeting was to obtain in-market insights from VGTI and to discuss potential opportunities to collaborate with Chengdu and Sichuan, leveraging the existing Victoria-Jiangsu Sister State Relationship.
7. The City of Melbourne has maintained an active partnership with Chengdu, leveraging the Victoria-Sichuan sister state relationship. Previous collaborations with the State Government of Victoria include:
 - 7.1 City of Melbourne worked with Liveability Victoria International to facilitate the Victorian Sichuan Liveable Cities Program in October 2017.
 - 7.2 City of Melbourne and Creative Victoria collaborated to support two Melbourne artists' participation in 2018 Chengdu sister cities sculptures creation and exhibition program.
 - 7.3 City of Melbourne partnered with Creative Victoria and VGTI Office to support the Chinese Museum's touring exhibition "*One Million Stories*" Australian Chinese 200-year Exhibition in Chengdu in 2022.
8. At the meeting, VGTI indicated their support and willingness to work with the City of Melbourne on promoting the proposed joint research collaboration on panda breeding to assist Melbourne in competing for the new lease contract of the giant pandas.
9. Councillor Le Liu also met with the Australian Consulate General whilst in Chengdu. The purpose of the meeting was:

- 9.1 To obtain in-market insights including a briefing following the recent visit to China by The Prime Minister of Australia, The Hon Anthony Albanese MP. This was the first Australian Prime Minister to visit China since 2016.
- 9.2 To discuss potential opportunities for local governments such as the City of Melbourne to collaborate with Chengdu/Sichuan.
10. It was noted at the meeting that Chengdu highly values the connection with Melbourne and is keen to continue and further develop the relationship. They noted that Mayor Wang Fengchao's visit to Melbourne in October 2023 was his first overseas travel since being appointed Chengdu Mayor.
11. Also discussed at the meeting was Tourism Australia launching their newest campaign Come and Say G'day in Chengdu in June 2023. With the increase in direct flights between Chengdu and Melbourne, it was noted that now is the time to be promoting Melbourne's tourism industry to Chengdu.
12. Councillor Le Liu held a meeting with the Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Culture, Broadcast – TV and Tourism. The purpose of the meeting was to understand the development and focus of the tourism and cultural sector in Chengdu. The meeting was also an opportunity to explore collaboration opportunities associated with Melbourne premier events and the tourism national campaign to attract visitation from Chengdu to Melbourne.
13. Discussions at the meeting centred around Chengdu organising a business delegation to participate in the 2024 Australia Tourism Exchange to be held in Melbourne in May 2024 and the possibility of Melbourne sending delegates to Chengdu in November 2024 to participate in a similar international travel mart.
14. A Courtesy Call was held between Councillor Le Liu and the Chengdu Municipal Government. This was a reciprocal visit following the Mayor of Chengdu's visit to Melbourne in October 2023 to foster the Melbourne-Chengdu strategic partnership and explore potential collaboration in areas of mutual interest.
15. Discussion centred on projects for future collaboration including participation opportunities associated with the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival. At the invitation of the City of Melbourne, Chengdu has agreed to send master chefs to Melbourne in March 2024 to participate in the 2024 Melbourne Food and Wine Festival. At the same time, Chengdu will also be sending a business delegation to Melbourne to renew the Melbourne-Chengdu partnership agreement.

ASEAN–Australia Special Commemorative Summit in Melbourne

16. Councillor Le Liu also travelled to Thailand briefly at the suggestion of the Thai Chamber of Commerce and the Honorary Consul of Thailand in Melbourne to get a first-hand look at Thailand's economy, culture and opportunities for city connection between Bangkok and Melbourne for the upcoming ASEAN-Australia Special Commemorative Summit, being hosted by the Prime Minister of Australia in Melbourne.
17. The ASEAN-Australia Special Summit will take place in Melbourne from 4 to 6 March 2024 and will mark the 50th anniversary of ties between Australia and ASEAN. Nine leaders from across Southeast Asia are anticipated to join the Summit at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.
18. Councillor Le Liu took the opportunity to discuss potential opportunities for the City of Melbourne to leverage from the ASEAN-Australia Special Commemorative Summit, including potentially hosting visiting ASEAN delegates and to further explore business and city to city connections. Councillor Le Liu has raised this with Council management with a request to provide clarity on potential opportunities for the City of Melbourne.



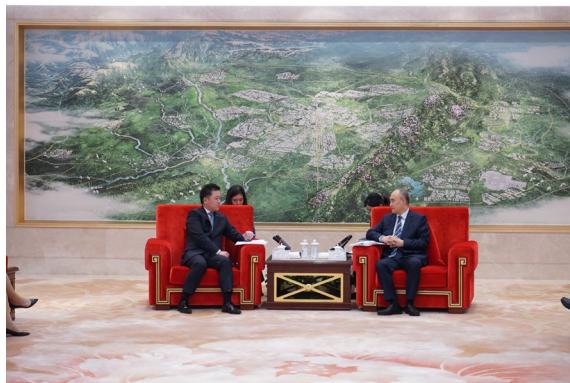
Councillor Le Liu and Deputy Consul-General Ms Nina Dynon, Australian Consulate-General in Chengdu



Councillor Le Liu meeting with Madam He Li, Director General, Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Culture, Broadcast –TV and Tourism



Courtesy Call with Chengdu Municipal Government.





Councillor Le Liu meeting with representatives from the International Exchange and Cooperation, Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Culture, Broadcast – TV and Tourism and Victorian Government Trade and Investment Office



Councillor Le Liu meeting with Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding