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The new global realities: Escalating tensions and colliding world views despite similar challenges and regime dilemmas

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Abstract

Identifying a common analytical framework around which to make comparisons of respective governance and public administration practice is formidable, with such stark differences across the three jurisdictions of Australia, Mainland China and Taiwan. The differences are also currently being sharpened in an environment of heightened adversarialism and forceful tensions. Yet exploring a range of institutional dimensions provides a vantage point of analysis, particularly where there are common contemporary challenges and some parallels in the ways of addressing them.

To provide a comparative overview, this opening chapter focuses on three institutional dimensions, examining how they operate and how they may be changing or evolving in each jurisdiction: firstly, the respective roles, sizes and different conceptualisations of government settings and governance frameworks; secondly, the respective contributions of the economy and markets; and thirdly, the contributions of civil society.

The differences have long been clear but until recently discussion has focused on how Mainland China was changing under its opening-up reforms and learning from many Western-style practices. More recent international tensions, however, have sharpened the differences that continue to exist and, in some cases, widened them, presenting challenges for engagement—which is arguably more important than ever. It is interesting to observe some common developments, both positive and negative, and some common challenges not receiving the attention they deserve.

Keywords: Mainland China; Taiwan; Australia; comparative analysis of dissimilar systems; role of government; governments and markets; government and civil society; international tensions.

Constructing a framework for comparative analysis of dissimilar cases

Comparative analysis of countries or political systems generally involves identifying and then to some extent reconciling substantial differences in context, culture and defining characteristics—inevitably so, because the entire exercise involves comparing similarities and dissimilarities or contrasting like and unlike entities to probe the salience of key factors (Gray et al. 2012). Even so-called 'most similar' cases of, say, contemporary societies are often widely disparate in norms and values, forms and behaviour, and in the ways each society operates, makes decisions or conceals their vices. Hence, to propose to compare three very different jurisdictions with extensive and complicated histories, as we do in this volume, is arguably optimistically courageous, a rash endeavour or even somewhat naïve—and perhaps all three simultaneously! Nevertheless, focusing on a carefully chosen pared-down set of core themes or key factors allows us to compare and contrast developments within these case studies and analyse how these jurisdictions respond to various challenges and regime dilemmas. That is our mission with the many jurisdictional-based contributions of this volume.

We must accept from the very start that there are incredibly stark differences between the three jurisdictions chosen for this study: Mainland China, Australia and Taiwan. They are particularly stark between the communist party-state of Mainland China and the liberal settler-society of Australia, but also between the flourishing democracy of Taiwan and the two other jurisdictions. The differences are clearly substantial across

many dimensions—in terms of history, culture, scale, the economy, population, and geographic attributes, as well as in the political and institutional arrangements, regime prioritisations and popular sentiments of the peoples. Furthermore, we argue that these distinct differences in institutional arrangements and the values and ideologies behind them are being sharpened in the recent jingoistic rhetoric of political leaders in each of the three jurisdictions (e.g. Kearsley et al. 2020; Tsai 2021; Xi 2021; Dutton 2022). A heightened adversarialism and forceful rhetoric has recently erupted to mar inter-jurisdictional relations, magnify diplomatic and trade tensions, and escalate a new arms race. Such disputes have not arisen because of any single catalyst or incident (including the COVID-19 pandemic) but are contributed to by many and sometimes overlapping causes—political, economic and diplomatic. Many have been influenced by Mainland China's geostrategic repositioning and aspirational leadership.

We ought to acknowledge at the outset that it may seem insurmountably difficult to many readers to identify a common analytical framework to apply to our chosen jurisdictions around which to make comparisons of respective governance and public administration practice. Nonetheless, exploring a range of institutional dimensions essential to each case, even if radically dissimilar in nature, provides a possible comparative vantage point of analysis. It can also be observed that the three jurisdictions each face many similar contemporary challenges and regime dilemmas, both internationally and domestically, and some parallels in the ways of addressing these issues, despite vast differences in the dimensions of scale. Moreover, as scholars of government and public administration we should also recognise that there is considerable evidence of diffusion of public administration ideas and practices even when applied very differently or through different lenses (Lowndes et al. 2017).

Importantly for this project, and investing an intellectual interest in comparative public administration, we can build on the legacy of cross-national research and empirical investigation undertaken in our three jurisdictions for over a decade through the Greater China Australia Dialogue network. To date, this is the 10th publication that has been produced from these engaging practitioner-scholarly forums, which have examined issues of mutual concern and contemporary practice (Podger 2021). These previous publications have tackled important public policy topics such as intergovernmental relations, patterns of decentralisation and regionalisation, human resource management, performance management, developments in budgetary and financial management and accountability,

city management and urban provision, policy development processes, organisational structures for performance and accountability, and service-delivery modalities.

Accordingly, to provide a comparative overview of recent developments and future prospects, we focus in this opening chapter on three important institutional dimensions in the three jurisdictions, examining how they operate and how they may be changing or evolving. Firstly, we explore the respective roles, sizes, different conceptualisations of government settings, and governance frameworks in these societies. Each has recognisable and relatively enduring governing systems. Secondly, we consider the respective contributions of the economy and markets in delivering social outcomes and rising standards of living, and in particular the complexion of relations between governments and markets in achieving growth and prosperity. Thirdly, and finally, we explore the contributions of civil society in each of the jurisdictional cases, especially in delivering community wellbeing and resilience. Civil societies and community dynamics have their own cultures, norms and mores, which in many ways provide the structure and backbone of their societies. As comparativist scholars, we are cognisant that even this essentialist framework will raise issues and create problems in the contrasting understandings of these three institutional dimensions (government, markets and civil society), recognising that the composition and boundaries between them vary considerably (Lowndes et al. 2017).

In addition, it is important to place these comparative institutionalist topics into the wider geopolitical context in which recent developments have been taking place. First, in the international context we have witnessed not only a remarkable rising of Mainland China as a new global superpower, but also the relative decline of US global hegemony from that which it enjoyed after the end of the Cold War, both of which have exacerbated increasing global tensions, mutual suspicion and distrust (Mahbubani 2020; White 2021; Rudd 2022). Mainland China's more assertive reclaiming of its aspirational place on the world stage has been confronted by political responses from both Australia and Taiwan, as well as from the US during the presidencies of Obama, Trump and Biden (Bolton 2017; Pelosi 2018; Tsai 2021; Dutton 2022). The associated emerging problematics in this new international context have important trade and military implications. For instance, Mainland China is by far Australia's most important trading partner in terms of resources, commodities, food and consumer goods, while the US is its most important international ally in national security concerns. In this rapidly transforming and unpredictable context, it is understandable that national rhetoric and political differences will be highlighted.

Second is the longer-term economic and political trajectories of the three jurisdictions. Mainland China has been experiencing perhaps the greatest economic transition the world has seen—from a poor, closed command economy to a modestly prosperous market economy, albeit with continuing socialist and authoritarian characteristics. This transformation has involved embracing aspects of the liberal institutions in other market economies, though adapted very differently. Taiwan, as one of the early 'Asian Tigers', experienced rapid economic growth earlier through its market economy and sustained that growth as it transitioned in the 1990s from an authoritarian system ruled by the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) to a democratic one with peaceful transitions of government. Australia has long been among the richest developed Western nations and has had a national democratic government structure since Federation in 1901 (and considerably earlier, in the mid-nineteenth century, under the British colonial regimes). Its economic and political trajectory over the last 40 years has therefore been more incremental than transformative, although gradually over time substantial changes have occurred (Kelly 1992, 2009). In purchasing power parity terms, Mainland China's per capita income remains well below those of Australia and Taiwan despite its recent rapid growth, and Taiwan's now exceeds that of Australia (possibly affected by recent moves in resources and high-tech prices—in exchange rate comparisons, Taiwan's per capita income remains well below that of Australia). See Figure 1.1.

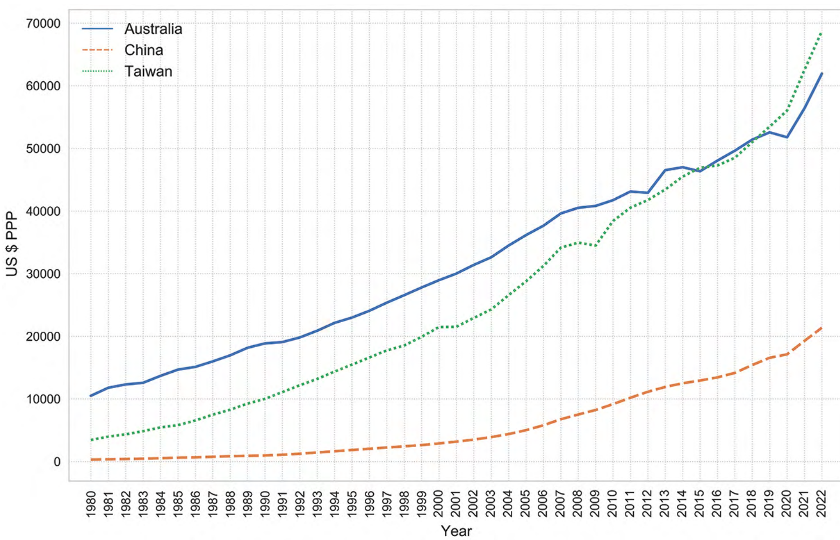

Figure 1.1: GDP per capita: Mainland China, Taiwan, Australia (USD purchasing power parity).

Source: IMF (2022).

Such trajectories can only be truly recognised in hindsight, and it is important to appreciate that changes or developments rarely occur steadily in one direction; path dependency has important implications for future options but also reform trajectories can recalibrate political and economic experience. But equally, there will always be contingencies and events that shape or interrupt progress, as societies face dilemmas (or swings and roundabouts) as circumstances demand or as choices are made and leaders change. We need to be aware of these trajectories as we seek to explain more recent developments and prospects facing the three jurisdictions.

Role of government

Mainland China

The big changes in the role of government in Mainland China occurred in the 1980s and 1990s and continued in the 2000s. The transition to a market economy began with allowing foreign investment and promoting international trade, quickly followed by the expansion of the domestic market and initial reforms to state-owned enterprises to make them more commercial or in some cases to privatise them. The role of government shifted accordingly from total command towards the more limited role espoused by most Western economists (e.g. Musgrave and Musgrave 1980), which involves focusing on resource allocation (e.g. the provision of public goods), redistribution (e.g. providing protection against poverty) and stability (e.g. managing inflation, debt and unemployment). The biggest shifts in these first 30 years of reform involved focusing on macro-economic control and reducing direct involvement or management of enterprises and markets. This also required building the associated legal and financial framework within which businesses and citizens could operate with confidence and managing the huge transition with minimum adverse impact. By the end of the 1990s, despite the remarkable increase in material wellbeing in Mainland China, adverse effects were becoming unacceptable, and the government's attention turned to addressing the market failures that were causing environmental damage and undermining social protection. While deregulation as an overall trend continued, the new priority under Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao became the 'harmonious society' (Bell 2006; Guo and Guo 2008), balancing the desire for continued economic growth with paying more attention to non-material aspects of wellbeing, including health, a clean environment, and social protection through social insurance and welfare programs.

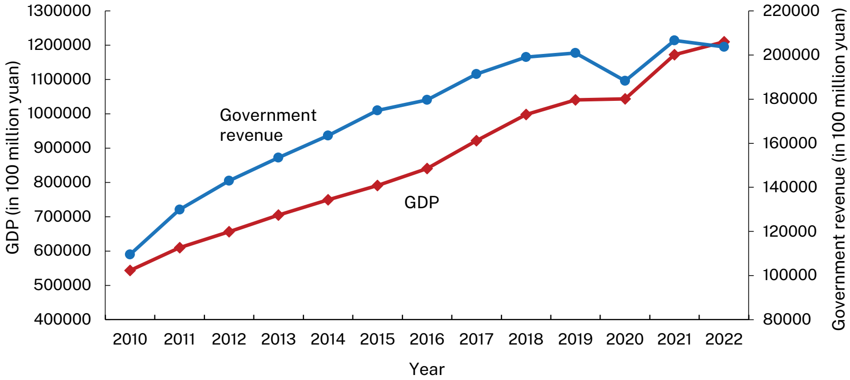

Figure 1.2: GDP and government revenue in Mainland China, 2010–20 (2010 prices).

Source: *China statistical yearbook* (2022).

The past 10 years have seen more efforts to modernise government systems and capacity. The earlier era, when 'limited government' was often referred to, has been replaced by references to 'pro-active government' (Lin 2015; Lin and Wang 2017; Zhou and Hu 2021), not an attempt to directly constrain the market or civil society but also not the Western liberal concept of government. Under Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, environmental protection has been formally added as an essential function of government and substantial progress made to improve public services and 'social management' as well as the other two original functions (macro-economic control and market regulation). As Figure 1.2 shows, the size of government and the size of the market have continued to grow over the last decade except the year of 2020 due to COVID-19.

Government revenue as a share of GDP has oscillated between 16 and 22 per cent of GDP over this period (Figure 1.3).

Xi Jinping's key rhetoric has included the 'China Dream' (Xi Jinping 2013) and more recently 'Common Prosperity' (Xinhua 2021), promoting the idea of a moderately wealthy nation with renewed international standing and whose prosperity is shared fairly among its people. The policy agenda emphasises the so-called third distribution of resources, which is through charity and philanthropy. Some tech giants and big companies responded by pledging billions of yuan to social innovations and social causes.

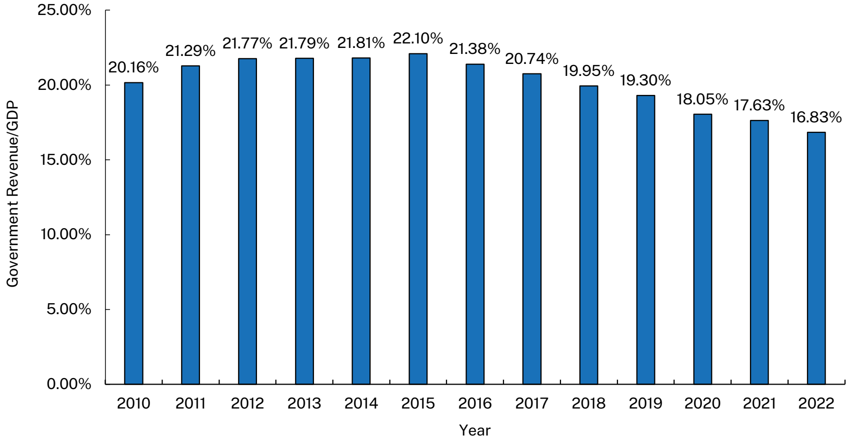

Figure 1.3: Government revenue in Mainland China as a per cent of GDP, 2010–22.

Source: *China statistical yearbook* (2022).

Other measures have been taken to streamline government, delegate more power to local government, and reduce regulation and make it easier for business to grow (Yang 2022). The top priority of Premier Li has been the *Fangguanfu* reforms, where *fang* means streamlining administration and delegating power, *guan* means improving regulation, and *fu* means upgrading services. Measures have also been taken to improve the capacity of government, particularly to deliver more and better public services such as through one-stop government service centres employing new technology to offer integrated services. Great efforts have been paid to improving the business environment, reducing institutional transaction costs and increasing market vitality. Capacity has also been increased in emergency management (with the creation of a new Ministry of Emergency Management). Considerable effort has also been devoted to improving financial management and accountability, with more transparent and comprehensive budgeting and financial reporting.

In recent years, increased attention has been paid to building a modern regulatory framework. Since 2021, Mainland China has accelerated the revision of its 2007 antitrust law. The new law was passed in June 2022, with effect from August 2022. The law aims to build a unified, open, competitive and orderly market system. The State Administration for Market Regulations released anti-monopoly rules targeting the country's giant internet economy companies in March 2021 (CNBC 2021), and the new law reiterated its approach toward regulating emerging economies:

accommodative and prudential regulation. The task of building the capacity needed in government to manage a modern, sophisticated market economy has proven to be immense, particularly given the size of Mainland China, its five levels of government, fierce inter-local competition and rapidly changing economic structure—the efforts of the last decade will need to be sustained for at least another decade.

As mentioned, the emerging governance model is not the Western liberal one, as Xi Jinping has made clear by his emphasis on the central role of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Increasingly under Xi, government is pervasive and business and civil society are expected to be closely entwined with—even embedded in—the party-state, notwithstanding the shift to a market economy and the relaxation of previous strict constraints on civil society.

The role of government in relation to the market in Mainland China is still evolving, further minimising direct intervention in market activities while strengthening interim and ex-post regulation. Nevertheless, it is difficult to describe precisely and fully the emerging role of government to outsiders. The role of government in a party-state seems to involve several paradoxes from a Western perspective. In part, the pervasive role of government may reflect longstanding Confucian cultural values of considerable acceptance of authority. But there is no doubt that Xi has strengthened the role of the party both within government and across society. That said, many of the reforms initiated in earlier decades are continuing and being extended. How the tension between market liberalisation and firmer party involvement will be resolved is still evolving. Similarly, government reforms that aim to improve transparency and accountability within government are continuing despite the opaqueness of an increasingly powerful party and authoritarian leadership. And policies to delegate more functions to local government appear to conflict with the political centralisation of power.

In other words, it's complicated.

Taiwan

Government continues to be a dominant force in Taiwanese society—a legacy of the authoritarian era but also perhaps reflecting ongoing Confucian cultural values. Public expectations favour activist government ('strong government' but not necessarily 'big government' (Hsieh et al. 2019)) to lead the country to prosperity through economic planning and to distribute

resources using a range of regulations and public programs. However, the overall environment has changed significantly over the last decade or more and several factors are forcing the government to reconfigure its role.

Firstly, government resources are declining. After a peak of 25.6 per cent in 1990, government revenue as a share of GDP has steadily decreased. Over the last decade it has averaged just 15.1 per cent (see Figure 1.4). In addition, there are now fewer state-owned businesses than in the past and their importance in the economy has declined.

Secondly, Taiwan's market economy has matured. Many private enterprises, such as TSMC, the world's largest contract chipmaker, have become an essential part of the international economic system, thus making it more difficult for the government to maintain its dominant role. Thirdly, following Taiwan's democratisation, the government has to pay far more attention to various stakeholders and to public opinion thus weakening its previous dominance. Finally, new public management theories have been widely embraced over the last two decades, promoted in academia and supported by key political leaders and senior bureaucrats. The idea that 'the job of government is to steer, not to row the boat' (Osborne and Gaebler 1992:25) has taken hold, leading to strategies, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, to achieve 'small and beautiful government' (Su 2018:79).

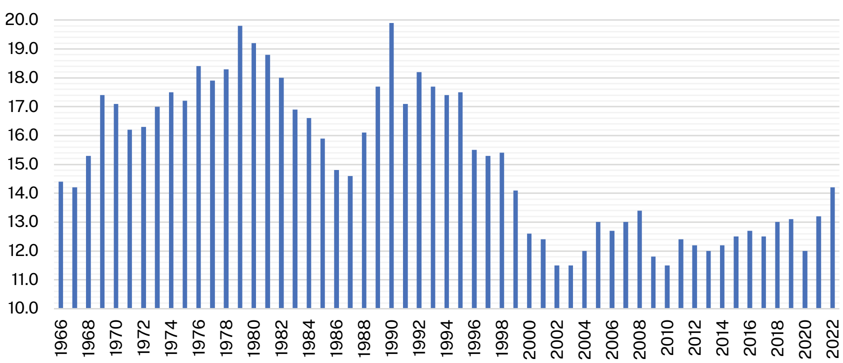

Figure 1.4: Taiwan's government revenue as a per cent of GDP, 1996–2022.

Note: Excludes social security revenues which are placed in a trust fund. Social security expenditures in 2020 were around 16 per cent of GDP.

Source: Ministry of Finance Taiwan (2023).

The main strategies adopted have been streamlining government organisations, placing caps on the size of the civil service and pursuing public–private partnerships (PPPs) to provide infrastructure and deliver services. Whether these strategies will achieve small and beautiful government is yet to be proven, but the 'strong government' model has proven difficult to sustain. As a result, the role of government and its relationship with the private sector and civil society are still evolving.

Among the reasons for this reconsideration of the role of government is the growing maturation of society, including the education level of the people, living standards and citizens' aspirations meeting Western expectations. It is not yet clear that the goal of 'small and beautiful government' will be achieved or maintained; to date, the measures to improve the capability of the public sector have met with mixed success at best. As discussed below, the use of PPPs has achieved some efficiency gains but has also involved political risks, including accusations of corruption. There has also been limited political interest in genuine management capacity in the public sector. Civil service caps have not been adjusted for increased workloads, causing considerable dissatisfaction within the civil service. Political leaders are also requiring more attention to be paid to communications and marketing, forcing civil servants to spend time on social media (e.g. Facebook, Line and WhatsApp Messenger) and public hearings, eating into time civil servants should be devoting to planning and implementing policies. The morale of the civil service has also suffered from the government's clumsy efforts to implement civil service pension reform (originally intended to 'bind' civil servants' loyalty to the regime via generous pension entitlements, but now intended to lighten the government's future fiscal burden by constraining the largely non-contributory pension liabilities). These reforms would adversely affect retirement incomes of civil servants and put at risk future quality recruitment into the civil service.

Political polarisation in Taiwan, exacerbated by divided attitudes towards Mainland China, has also undermined the neutrality of the civil service while consuming government resources and weakening the trust needed for collaboration with the private sector and civil society. The grip of the KMT over politics has weakened considerably and the party has fragmented, with rival personalities vying for leadership of the ageing movement; meanwhile, the Democratic Progressive Party has consolidated its base, especially in the island's decentralised population outside the northern Taipei / New Taipei region.

In light of the growing tension with Mainland China, even though government revenue as a share of GDP has steadily decreased, Taiwan has made modernising the armed forces and increasing defence expenditures a priority. As a result, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Government boosted the annual defence budget for fiscal year 2022 to NTD3,355 billion (USD120 billion), which is the largest-ever yearly defence budget in Taiwan. Additionally, since 2020, the legislature has also passed two 'special defence budgets' amounting to NTD4,841 billion (USD170 billion). The extra funding aims to upgrade weapons in a short period.

That said, the government and the civil service have made considerable improvements in some areas of public service delivery, such as medical care, social services for the aged, community security, and transportation. As for the fight against COVID-19, the government has adopted a unified monitoring and strict control policy since 2019. This authoritarian or big government model was effective at first. However, soon political considerations contaminated the procurement of vaccines and antigen test kits, resulting in an increase in deaths and dissatisfaction among people.

Not only were Taiwanese people unhappy with the way the government handled the procurement and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and antigen test kits, but they were also confused and disappointed by the tensions between the central and local governments regarding the formulation and implementation of anti-pandemic policies. There has been a slow but consistent trend toward decentralising political power since the mid-1990s. At that time, several institutional reforms were carried out to enhance local governance capacities. Nevertheless, the central patriarchy has never entirely faded away. The outbreak of COVID-19 provided an opportunity for the central government to 'legitimately' enhance its control and intervention in the local governments. However, the local governments are not as obedient as before. Instead, local governments often protest loudly against the central government's dominance and strive to win local support with their government performances.

Looking to the next decade, Taiwan will need to find ways to reduce partisan and political infighting and to gain bipartisan interest in rebuilding a civil service in which civil servants feel respected. There will not, however, be a return to big government.

Australia

In Australia, the last 10 years has seen a great deal of political volatility at both federal and state level. There have been five prime ministers, five national treasurers, six defence ministers and ministerial reshuffles at least once every two years. At the state level there have been huge election landslides in NSW, Queensland, WA and Victoria. At both levels of government there has been a steady decline in voting for the two major parties, especially in the nation's Senate. Minority governments, once a rarity, have now become quite common; and governments have increasingly had to rely on the support of a number of prominent independent politicians who hold the balance of power.

Associated with this volatility has been a shift from clear ideological differences between the parties to an emphasis on pragmatism coupled with more 'professional' political opportunism. Executive government is dominant, including through a 'National Cabinet' (replacing the former Council of Australian Governments), meeting much more frequently to direct the management of the COVID-19 pandemic. Legislatures have generally been restricted to endorsing special funding packages or support measures. Government seems to be by press releases and media conferences (often daily) by state premiers and territory chief ministers as well as the prime minister. Crisis management under COVID has seen governments behave unilaterally, often with authoritarian streaks.

While National Cabinet has provided a useful deliberative forum where views can be shared, the reality of federalism and the semi-sovereignty of each government represented has constrained consensus decisions and led to some problems of consistency and coordination. Moreover, party politics have unsurprisingly intruded in deliberations, constraining cooperation across jurisdictions. Whether the increased role of the states and territories evident during COVID will stop the long-term trend towards the national government is questionable. Some commentators suggest it may do so, but others point to the vertical fiscal imbalance that allows the national government to exercise power, and to underlying centralising forces such as technological change and globalisation.

While COVID has led to an unprecedented (and expected once-off) jump in government spending, there has been no underlying shift in the size of government in Australia since 2010.

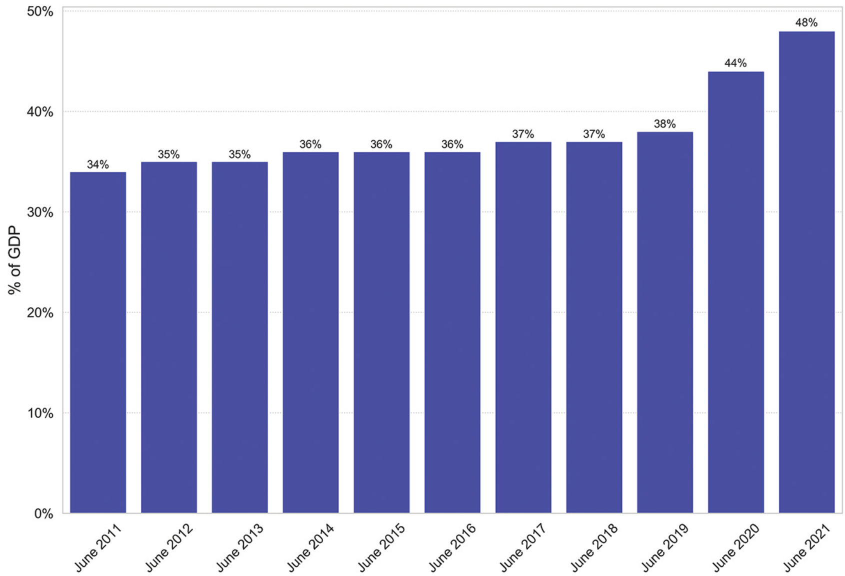

Figure 1.5: Total government expenses as per cent of GDP, Australia, 2011–21.

Source: ABS (2022).

Aside from the short-term effect of COVID, total government spending remains at around 35 per cent of GDP (Figure 1.5) and public sector employment at around 20 per cent of the workforce. The new public management (NPM) reforms of the 1980s and 1990s affected the way governments in Australia played their roles but not the roles themselves (Keating 2004), though the reforms did reduce public sector employment, and, at the Commonwealth level, the size of the civil service has since continued to be tightly controlled.

There are, however, considerable pressures to increase government spending over the next decade and beyond, particularly on health, aged care and disability services; defence spending is also increasing as a result of increasing international tensions. The response to COVID will leave the nation with the highest level of debt it has faced since World War II (though at around 60 per cent of GDP, not as high as that of many other OECD countries). The challenge will be how to return eventually to a surplus while also meeting long-term expenditure pressures. Economic commentators are highlighting the need to promote stronger economic growth particularly through increased productivity, but growth has been modest for the last decade, wages stagnant and productivity low. The challenges for the next decade are therefore considerable.

The ‘professionalisation of politics’ (accompanied by the rise of ‘career politicians’ who have never worked outside adversarial politics) has not only contributed to the shift away from ideological debates but also, arguably, undermined the capacity of the civil service and the ability of the nation to face the challenges ahead and properly deliberate major policy reforms. The challenges include not only the economic and social pressures mentioned above but also climate change (a diabolically divisive issue in Australia for a decade and a half) and international relations. Debates are taking place about curbing some of the opportunistic behaviour of ruling parties, strengthening accountability mechanisms and enhancing civil service capability but serious action has yet to be taken.

The domestic issues facing the government are compounded by international developments. The relative decline of the US and the priority its people seem to be giving to its domestic concerns over its postwar international role (Trumpism being just one manifestation of this), as well as the increasing power and assertiveness of Mainland China, present Australia with a dilemma. Its primary defence and security ally may have decreasing power, interest and influence in the Asia-Pacific region, while its primary trading partner, Mainland China, is asserting both domestically and internationally policies antithetical to Australia’s liberal democratic traditions and beliefs. Current disputes with Mainland China include its unilateral restrictions on trade in some commodities, discouragement of tourism and international students coming to Australia, and military manoeuvres in the South China Sea, as well as Australia’s actions such as denying Huawei from participating in 5G communications development, tightening foreign influence laws (including for university research), questioning the origin of COVID-19 and constraining foreign investment. The associated dilemmas for Australia are being played out in debates between defence and security advisers and economic advisers, including over whether or not engagement helps expand areas of shared interest, given the context of the approaches being taken by Mainland China under President Xi. Resolving these debates is made more difficult by Mainland China’s refusal for more than two years to allow bilateral ministerial or heads-of-government meetings (though there are now signs of relaxation).

Governments and markets

Mainland China

Mainland China is continuing to promote market reforms and its total trade is continuing to increase. It is also looking to rely domestically more on private consumption than government infrastructure investment for future economic growth (though this has been deferred by COVID). As Mainland China has embraced markets, it has nonetheless pursued a development model of close links between government and private investment and planned industrial expansion. Under President Xi, the role of the party across all sectors of society is being given increased emphasis, leaving some uncertainty about how market reforms are likely to play out in the future.

For example, reform of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) seems to have slowed according to some observers (Wang and Leng 2018): further privatisation seems not to be on the agenda. SOEs continue to be required to have a branch of the party within the organisation, which may create tensions and ambiguities for corporate governance. Nonetheless, pressure to improve performance, including through greater transparency and accountability for the purpose of better governance within government, seems to be mounting.

Premier Li's '*Fangguanfu*' reforms, mentioned earlier, aimed to make it easier to do business. Considerable effort has been made to making the permit process easier. In October 2019, the State Council passed the Regulation on Optimizing Doing Business Environment (State Council of China 2019). Efforts have also been made to improve Beijing and Shanghai's 'doing business' ranking by the World Bank. The State Council selected Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Hangzhou and Chongqing as experimental cities for further improving the business environment. In January 2021, *The Action Plan for Building a High Standard Market System* was announced, which includes a series of reform measures in this area (Ren 2020). This is an ambitious plan, but empirical data show that at least in the major cities, the business environment has already improved significantly, especially in terms of market entry and starting a new business (Jiang 2021).

Nonetheless, large private companies are now required to have party branches and, as with SOEs, this presents the risk of tensions and ambiguities in corporate governance, and hence risks for shareholders, particularly foreign

investors expecting Western-style corporate governance and accountability in line with World Trade Organization principles. At the same time, the government is looking to address both anti-competitive behaviour by some of the biggest companies and prudential problems created by others through inadequately regulated borrowing.

The government is also looking to make more extensive use of PPPs not only in physical infrastructure investment but also service delivery and support services. The approach is not, however, based on rigorous competitive tendering but on 'relational contracting' where performance is still expected and monitored but relationships of trust must be built first and relied upon. In practice, the enterprises participating in PPPs are mostly SOEs.

Taiwan

Since the early 1950s, Taiwan has pursued a development model where the government was closely involved in industrial expansion through planning and various incentive programs (particularly tax concessions) to subsidise private enterprises and support key industries. After democratisation and even after subsequent economic globalisation, this modus operandi has not changed in any significant way. The current ruling party, which took office in 2016, has sought to play an active role in developing industries such as smart machinery, biotech and medicine, green energy, defence and the 'circular economy'.

It is not clear, however, whether government is still capable of guiding private companies or doing so successfully, given how rapidly industries change today. Many scholars are calling on the government to minimise intervention and instead to deregulate, to allow markets to adjust more quickly, allocating resources more productively and enhancing economic growth. Powerful interests, however, are resisting such policy changes.

Taiwanese governments remain enamoured of using market mechanisms to enhance efficiency within government. Between 2002 and 2021, there were 2,008 infrastructure projects involving PPPs with a total private investment of USD66 billion (Ministry of Finance Taiwan 2022b, Table 6.1). These included hospitals, schools, subways, hotels, social housing, harbours and incinerators. While there is evidence of success in terms of value for money (Ministry of Finance Taiwan 2022b), there have also been problems, some relating more to political risks and public unease than any substantial failure. An example is the case of Mr Ko Wen-Je who, when running for mayor of

Taipei in 2014, accused the city of corruption in the management of five build-operate-transfer (BOT) projects. A lengthy investigation found in most cases the accusation was groundless, but the damage was done and the trust needed between the corporate sector and government to manage PPPs was lost and the scope for future PPPs greatly reduced (Wu and Chu 2021).

Australia

Australia has a long history of intervening in markets, mostly to protect key industries from international competition and to regulate the labour market to maintain employment and ensure a floor ('minimum wage') for employees' wages. Over the last 40 years, this has radically changed as governments on both sides of politics have embraced a more open and competitive market and reduced regulation of the labour market (Kelly 2009). This has ushered in a long period of sustained economic growth and improved productivity, at least until the last decade. There remain however industries subject to considerable government intervention, including defence, and much of the growing services sector is heavily financed and regulated by government (e.g. health and aged care). In addition, the labour market remains far more regulated than in the US and some other OECD countries, and the nation is one of the only ones in the world to retain a judicial-based arbitration system to determine pay and conditions—now called the Fair Work Commission.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on competition and markets continues, with two key agencies playing a particularly significant role over the last 30 years: the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), which combats anti-competitive behaviour by business (including some recent world-leading action against global tech giants (ACCC 2019)) and protects consumer rights; and the Productivity Commission (PC), which conducts inquiries into industries to promote improved efficiency, including industries largely funded by government such as aged care, child care and disability services (the PC is also charged by governments to monitor the performance of all government services).

Since the 1980s, governments have also looked to use competition to enhance their own efficiency, commercialising and privatising many government businesses, using PPPs for infrastructure projects, contracting out some service delivery and using purchaser/provider splits to help others focus on costs and efficiency. While there are debates about how effective these measures have been, and privatisation has never been politically popular,

there are no signs of a reversal of approach. Equally, however, while some experts advocate further reforms to enhance competition and to extend the use of private sector management practices in government, there seems little political appetite to go down that track.

What seems more likely over the coming decade is that there will be incremental adjustments in both directions, as the recent pause in significant policy reform continues. There may be some reduction in contracting out where there are signs that private sector providers have been able to exploit their position because the public service has lost capacity for informed purchasing (e.g. in IT), and some further adoption of private sector innovation techniques to make better use of technology in service delivery (e.g. Services Australia and Services NSW).

Government and civil society

Mainland China

When Mainland China first permitted the establishment of civil society organisations, they were subject to a dual administration/management system which required each to have a sponsoring department as well as general permission, thus making them almost an extension of government. This was relaxed in the mid-2000s with a new direct registration system without a sponsoring department. The result was a massive increase in the number of social organisations across Mainland China, reflecting their members' shared interests in any number of fields—environment, arts, culture, social support, industry associations, professional groups, sport etc.—and working at different levels, from local communities up.

Under Xi Jinping, this more relaxed regulatory approach has been somewhat tightened by the requirement announced in 2015 (Shen et al. 2020) that each organisation must have its own party branch if they have more than three communist party members, or a joint branch with other institutions if the party members in their organisation number fewer than three. How significant this change has been is unclear. The previous relaxed approach still operated with an expectation of considerable embeddedness between the social organisations and government, and party involvement or at least full awareness. But it did not, once the dual registration system ceased, require full alignment of activities with the party-state.

Over the last decade, the government has been contracting with not-for-profit (NFP) social organisations, as with business, to deliver some public services. This has been expanding particularly in social services such as aged care, as these have been given increasing priority. This has created ambivalent government–NFP relations, where the government perceives NFPs as a threat to political stability while it also needs NFPs to meet social demands that might fuel grievances against the government (Kang and Han 2008; Spires 2011; Teets 2013). As with business, the approach has been less based on open competition than on 'relational contracting', relying heavily on the NFPs' ongoing close links with government (Jing and Chen 2012; Zhan and Tang 2016). Considerable effort is being devoted by the government to improving service delivery more generally, including via NFPs.

The approach under President Xi is clearly aimed at strengthening embedded relationships, protecting the party's power by prohibiting the creation of separate centres of power in society. But this does not mean that society has no impact on government policies and management. Indeed, NFPs can apply insider and outsider tactics to influence public policy . The government has, through a number of measures including social media, increased ways in which citizens can comment on public programs and their delivery and there continues to be a form of 'social accountability' as Jun Ma (an original Dialogue principal) described in 2009 (Ma 2009). Nonetheless, the more recent use of 'social credit' can be as much about controlling citizens and social organisations as it can be about improving the responsiveness of government to the needs and preferences of its citizens.

Taiwan

In Taiwan, democratisation was followed by the rapid emergence of NFPs, which gradually formed an interdependent relationship with the government. In embracing NPM ideas since the early 2000s, the government has increasingly drawn upon NFPs to deliver social services. For instance, the government gave funding to many disability rights social advocacy groups to provide services to disabled people. This funding transformed those disability social movement organisations into service-oriented NFPs (Chang 2017). Basically, under the NPM ideologies of privatisation and marketisation, the government's role in directly providing social services has shrunk. Instead, NFPs have assumed a more significant role as service providers, either through direct subsidies or government procurement systems. As a result, it is not unusual to see public welfare facilities contracted out and managed by NFPs in Taiwan.

Many NFPs now only survive with government funding, which skews the relationship and curtails their autonomy. Nonetheless, grassroots social organisations in particular play an advocacy role for specific interest areas such as the environment and social support. They also are calling for more public participation in policy debate and government decision-making. Their efforts have inspired more young people to take part in public affairs, providing an impetus for building a more mature civil society in Taiwan (Lin 2007; Huang 2014).

In response, governments over the last decade have begun to value the participation of civic groups in policy deliberation and decision-making. Online policy participation network platforms have been established to solicit public opinion and suggestions for policy. Civil servants also work with NFPs to arrange forms of 'participatory budgeting', particularly for the prioritising of local projects (Su 2017, 2018:87–90; Kuo et al. 2020).

Taiwan has closely watched the erosion of rights in Hong Kong since its reintegration into Mainland China in 1997. Confidence in the preservation of a 'one country/two systems' model has waned as President Xi has tightened his grip over Hong Kong's institutions, civil society and liberalist ways. The outlawing of any expression of dissent in Hong Kong has not gone unnoticed in Taiwan, and merely served to strengthen the desire for genuine sovereign independence from the political classes.

Australia

Australia has long had an active civil society sector, particularly through the churches and trade unions. While the union movement is no longer the force it was (membership had fallen to 14 per cent of employees by 2016 and most of these are in the public sector (ABS 2020)) and society is far more secular today than in the past, church-based NFPs remain major providers of social services and non-church NFPs have grown in importance both in social services and in other fields such as the environment.

Governments have funded NFPs to provide aged care services since the 1950s, but the use of non-government organisations (both NFPs and for-profit organisations) has expanded considerably since the 1980s, not only in aged care but also in childcare, employment services and disability services. This expansion has continued over the last decade with increased community-based support for aged care and new funding for childcare and disability services. The approach has been shifting from formulaic

funding of providers based on provider applications to more competitive arrangements and now towards demand-side funding which allows much more consumer choice and control (PC 2011; Commonwealth of Australia 2017). The transition is by no means complete, and presents a number of challenges for both the government and the NFPs (and for-profits) concerned, including how to control costs and how to ensure the providers provide quality care. The expanded role of NFPs in delivering publicly funded services also requires governments to address how best to ensure the NFPs have the capacity needed (Butcher and Gilchrist 2020).

Reliance on government funding at times presents the NFPs with a dilemma, when governments do not welcome the NFPs advocating policies with which they disagree. Attempts continue to be made from time to time by governments to constrain NFPs' advocacy activities whether through contracting arrangements or through regulation of NFPs' charity status (for tax purposes) (Oquist 2021). So far, however, there seems no discernible impact on the vibrant role of NFPs in public policy debate.

There has been little sign yet of interest by government in direct public participation in government decision-making (or in providing consumer feedback of the quality of services—a long overdue proposal that has been previously announced (AGRAGA 2010; DPMC 2011: Figure 5.1) but subsequently deliberately ignored). Instead, there are extensive processes of consultation in most areas of public policy development. More concerning is the extent to which 'professionalisation of politics' involves market research rather than genuine consultation and aims to identify the 'spin' most likely to gain votes rather than the best policy.

Concluding comments

Differences between these three jurisdictions have long been clear and stark, particularly in their institutional arrangements. But until the last few years, public administration discussion has focused on how Mainland China was changing under its opening-up reforms and learning from many Western-style practices regarding the role of government in a market economy and the role of a civil society somewhat separate from government. Discussion also highlighted common challenges, and management issues and practices such as regarding budgeting and financial management, performance management, human resources management, intergovernmental relations and the use of new technology to improve public services. There is evidence

of diffusion of ideas across the jurisdictions, particularly surrounding performance management and government partnering with business to improve efficiency and effectiveness, ideas drawn from NPM but applied very differently given the different institutional frameworks.

More recent international tensions, however, have sharpened the differences that continue to exist and, in some cases, widened them. Mainland China's growth in power has been accompanied by much greater assertiveness confronted in turn by firm responses from Australia and many other Western countries, as well as Taiwan. The rhetoric now highlights the ideological differences between liberal democratic systems and Mainland China's authoritarian approach. Some commentators might even see common windows of opportunity in these challenging times, but the jury is out at present on whether such opportunities will actually materialise.

In this context, it is still interesting to observe some common developments of concern in all three jurisdictions. These relate to increased politicisation that appears to put at risk the capacity of government to address the various policy challenges they face. As mentioned, in Mainland China President Xi is strengthening the party control in ways that some argue may undermine the opening-up reforms that have successfully delivered Mainland China's remarkable economic growth and improved so many people's wellbeing, including economic freedoms. In Taiwan, deep political differences, and failure to respect the role and neutrality of the civil service, risk reducing government capacity, notwithstanding measures taken to build a 'small and beautiful' government. In Australia, the 'professionalisation of politics' seems to be not only undermining the capability of the civil service but more broadly constraining the capacity of the nation to address major economic, social and environmental policy challenges.

Against this somewhat negative assessment a range of improvements in public sector performance needs to be acknowledged in all three jurisdictions over the last decade. In Mainland China, enormous steps have been taken to develop a comprehensive social security system, health insurance and services for the aged, to expand and strengthen the education system and to address environmental issues, not to ignore the extraordinary investment in infrastructure including high-speed rail and 5G technology. Taiwan, too, has maintained stable and fair economic growth and seen ongoing improvements in public services and infrastructure, including medical care, preschool education, public housing, sports and leisure facilities, and transportation. Despite slow economic growth, Australia has also benefitted

from significant improvements in health, disability services, childcare and retirement incomes, is investing more in aged care, and has enhanced its infrastructure through the National Broadband Network and major city planning and transport. All three jurisdictions have also, with some swings and roundabouts, managed the COVID-19 pandemic better than most in terms of health outcomes.

Yet in all three there are common policy challenges that should receive more attention. These include climate change and other environmental concerns, regulation of technological giants including social media, post-COVID debts and the associated need for more economic reform, and international trade. Many of these require international cooperation, which is threatened by growing tensions. In addition, each jurisdiction has its own domestic challenges requiring policy and management capacity in government.

In this environment of sharpening differences and contested global developments, engagement has become more difficult. Yet engagement is arguably more important in such a context to better understand respective views and to look for shared interests. This is particularly the case in public administration and the machinery behind government decision-making, not only to better understand respective processes and practices but also to identify possible lessons which, suitably adapted, may be applied across jurisdictional boundaries. Such engagement can also serve to clarify fundamental differences that must be acknowledged and not hidden.

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