

The West is lost and our unis founder in farce



Belgian-born China scholar Professor Pierre Ryckmans at home in 1996 ahead of his Boyer Lectures.

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In his 1996 Boyer Lectures, Sinologist and pre-eminent academic Pierre Ryckmans argued it was impossible for students to understand China unless they understood Western civilisation first.

At the same time, Ryckmans, who taught at both the Australian National University and the University of Sydney, recounted a lecture in which the guest speaker was attacked as elitist and bourgeois for talking about Chinese literati painting instead of revolutionary peasant art.

Ryckmans, who died in 2014, had concluded the attack was evidence that the liberal ideal of a university education was now dead and as a result tertiary education was “doomed to founder in the shallows of farce and incoherence”.

Fast-forward to the reaction by academics, student associations and staff unions to the prospect of establishing a Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation at the ANU or Sydney, and it’s obvious how prescient Ryckmans was. Such were the criticisms two weeks ago that ANU vice-chancellor Brian Schmidt cancelled the university’s proposed establishment of an undergraduate degree based on a liberal arts approach.

As reported in yesterday's Campus Morning Mail, 150 academics from the University of Sydney also have mounted a campaign to stop any negotiations to establish a Ramsay centre. In an open letter, academics condemn the Ramsay proposal as "European supremacism writ large".
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And you can forget the fallacious argument that opposition to the Ramsay centre is based on defending academic freedom and independence. The cultural left's long march through tertiary institutions is now complete as a rainbow alliance of theories enforce cultural relativism and the belief that knowledge, as it disguises power relationships, can no longer be impartial or disinterested.

In history, as detailed in Stuart Macintyre's *The History Wars*, during the late 1960s and early 70s, the subject was radically redefined by adopting "Marxist theory to analyse the class structure and the forces that shaped it". What Macintyre describes as "history from below" became the new orthodoxy as feminist, gender, postcolonial, postmodern and neo-Marxist theories predominated.

Today, courses at the University of Melbourne include "Pirates and Their Enemies", including the "personal, social and sexual strategies that pirates adopted". Students also can study "A History of Sexualities", "Witch-Hunting in European Societies" and "Global Histories of Indigenous Activism". Under the heading "Middle Eastern Wars: Jihad & Resistance", students are told the meaning of jihad "is to achieve a positive goal" and that they will study "concepts of pre-colonial resistance, wars of liberation and the clash of civilisations".

Proven by last year's Institute of Public Affairs survey of Australian universities, *The Rise of Identity Politics*, universities have long since abandoned teaching the narrative associated with the rise and evolution of Western civilisation.

Not surprisingly, Raelene Francis, head of ANU's college of the arts and social sciences, where the proposed Ramsay centre was to be established, specialises

in “gender and labour, prostitution, war and society, ethnic and religious issues”.

Last Thursday the ABC current affairs program The Drum provided further evidence of the antipathy towards Western civilisation and the extent to which the cultural left and political correctness dominate the halls of learning.

Hannah McGlade, a senior indigenous research fellow at Curtin University, - argued the ANU was correct to reject the Ramsay millions as two of its board members, John Howard and Tony Abbott, were guilty of ignoring the Stolen Generations report and failing to apologise for what she described as “genocide”. While it is uncertain whether McGlade has even seen the proposed Western civilisation curriculum, she expressed no doubt it was guilty of promoting “the superiority of the white race and not the devastation of the Aboriginal people”.

That the British Empire embraced slavery and genocide, McGlade concluded, would be ignored by any course funded by Ramsay. Van Badham, a writer for Guardian Australia who describes herself as a “radical Marxist”, also argued that the ANU had every right to knock back the Ramsay Centre. Based on the argument that John Howard closed two universities and that Paul Ramsay was “just a dead billionaire”, Badham concluded the plan to establish Western civilisation centres was “just disgusting”.

There is no doubt that Western civilisation, like all other civilisations including Islamic and Chinese, is guilty of oppression and the subjugation of minorities and those considered inferior. The primary distinction is that it is the West that experienced the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment plus the Industrial Revolution and the advent of the digital age. Concepts such as liberty and the inherent dignity of the person and freedom of conscience and religion are guaranteed. It is the West that produced Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France, Tom Paine’s Rights of Man and Mary Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.

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