Gladys Liu controversy a symptom of foreign influence—but not China's

The furore over Liberal Party MP Gladys Liu's connections to organisations allegedly controlled by the Chinese government proves that a malign foreign power truly does exert undue influence over Australian politics. That power is not the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Beijing, though; it is the Anglo-American empire based in London and Washington, DC, whose agents of influence in the Canberra defence and intelligence establishment—most notably the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO)—have gained a degree of control over our nation's political discourse, both within and outside Parliament, that previous generations of leaders did not tolerate, and have in recent years spoken out against.

Liu was elected Member for Chisholm, in Melbourne's inner eastern suburbs, in May this year, retaining the seat for the Liberals by a razor-thin margin of 0.6 per cent over Labor candidate Jennifer Yang. The high proportion of Chinese Australians in the electorate (about 30 per cent of the population, and 20 per cent of voters) led both parties to preselect candidates from the same demographic, who were already familiar to the community from their involvement in state (Liu) and local (Yang) politics. Both are naturalised Australians, Liu having immigrated from Hong Kong in 1985, and Yang from Taiwan in 2001.

ABC News reported in mid-August that in 2014-16 Liu had been an honorary chairman of the United Chinese Commerce Association of Australia (UCCAA), a subsidiary of the World Trade United Foundation (WTUF), a Hong Kong-based non-governmental organisation with, as its spokesman told ABC, "an 18-year history of public diplomacy". In May 2019 the WTUF was approved for special consultative status with the United Nations, meaning the 19 current members of the UN Committee on NGOs—*including the USA*—all deemed it above-board, fit to take part in official UN business. The ABC however prefer to cite "observers in Hong Kong" and "China experts" who claim that the organisation is really just a front for the CCP's United Front Work Department, which it describes as "Beijing's over-arching strategy to enhance its reputation and power by wielding influence on Chinese citizens as well as expatriates in countries such as Australia … through companies and organisations that are seemingly independent of the Government and Party". Having claimed in a Sky News interview with Andrew Bolt that she could not recall whether or not she was or had been associated with several other allegedly CCP-run groups, Liu confirmed the next day that she had also been an honorary president of the Australian Jiangmen General Commerce Association (AJGCA), and had had a 12-year (2003-15) association with the Guangdong Overseas Exchange Association, both of which "experts" claim are United Front operations, but had resigned from both before she announced her candidacy.

A storm in ASIO's China teacup

The government and media would of course be remiss not to scrutinise the activities and influence of foreign NGOs, be they from China or anywhere else. But it is plain that the attacks on Liu have nothing to do with national security. ABC News itself let that penny drop—inadvertently, while trying to perpetuate the smear—when it reported 12 September that "Liu's association with Chinese figures who were deemed a security risk was the subject of an ASIO investigation even before she entered Parliament or became a Liberal Party candidate." Citing no sources, but obviously on the say-so of ASIO itself, ABC political editor Andrew Probyn wrote that "ASIO Director-General Duncan Lewis advised, … based on the guest list" of some 30 members Chinese community, that then-PM Turnbull not attend a February 2018 Chinese New Year meet-and-greet organised by Liu, who was then a Liberal Party campaign director and prolific fundraiser.

ASIO cannot have been too worried, though, because in Probyn's words, "The ABC understands Mr Turnbull was not directly told of Mr Lewis's advice." And does anyone seriously believe that ASIO would have looked silently on as the Liberals then pre-selected Liu for federal office (even if, as has been reported, the party itself didn't think she could win), if it had had the slightest concern that she might be a foreign agent? Having its media stenographers insinuate that she might be, however, plays perfectly into ASIO's own political agenda. (And it would be the same had Labor won Chisholm, since Ms Yang *held the same roles at the UCCAA and AJGCA, at the same time as Liu* , and attended many of the same events, making Labor's demand that Liu resign from Parliament stunningly hypocritical.) As John Menadue, head of the public service in 1974-76 under PMs Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser, wrote 9 August in his blog Pearls and Irritations, "our security and intelligence agencies like ASIO and ASIS [Australian Secret Intelligence Service, Canberra's foreign intelligence agency] have led and bullied the Australian Government into hysteria over China", to ensure Australia remains firmly embedded in the (Anglo-) American empire and its Five Eyes intelligence alliance. To the end, he wrote, "Thousands of influential Australians have been coopted by US money and support in 'dialogues', study centres and think tanks. The US has nourished agents of influence in Australia for decades. China is a raw beginner in the use of soft power."

Echoing the theme of Fraser's 2014 book *Dangerous Allies*, Menadue wrote that if Australia is to succeed as a nation, it must break free of the colonial-era belief that the protection of powerful foreign allies is worth the cost in blood— our own, and that of the peoples whose lands we have invaded—extracted in first British and then US imperial wars. "We have not shaken off that

dependence [on] and subservience to distant empires", he wrote. "We continue to seek security *from* our region … rather than, as [former PM (1991-96)] Paul Keating put it, security *within* our own region [emphasis added]. … Insofar as China is any sort of distant threat it would be much less so if we were not so subservient to the US. The US is determined to make China its enemy. We are cooperating in that process."

At Labor's May 2019 election campaign launch, Keating said that the intelligence agencies had "lost their strategic bearings" over China, and needed cleaning out. "When the security agencies are running foreign policy", he warned, "the nutters are in charge." Fraser, the last truly "liberal" Liberal Party leader, went much farther in the final years before his death in March 2015, calling repeatedly for the US alliance to be scrapped altogether—starting with the Joint Intelligence Facility at Pine Gap, NT, whose targeting of US drone strikes he warned made Australia complicit in (still ongoing) crimes against humanity.

The fawning of the present generation of Labor and Liberal "leaders" does not compare favourably.

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