



## THE OTHER DANGER OF ANTI-CHINESE HYSTERIA

BY DENNY ROY

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Australia is sorting through another case of possible intervention in its politics by the People's Republic of China, and some of the commentary is unhelpful. Under Australian law, quite reasonably, Australians with allegiance to a foreign country are disqualified from serving in Parliament. Enter Hong Kong-born Gladys Liu, who in May 2019 became the first Chinese-Australian woman elected to the Australian House of Representatives. Liu became an Australian citizen in 1992. There are legitimate and serious concerns that Liu is at least partially acting as an agent of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) government in Beijing.

The first part of the case for suspicion is Liu's ties with Chinese government influence operations. The World Trade United Foundation (WTUF) is one of many innocuously-named organizations sponsored by the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFWD) to attempt to influence important people and groups abroad toward supporting the Beijing government's agenda. The WTUF cultivated ties with Liu and also with Jennifer Yang, naming both honorary chairwomen in 2014. Liu and Yang were candidates of the two major Australian political parties competing in 2019 for the seat to represent the district of Chisholm, which has a large ethnic Chinese population. PRC records also indicate that from 2003 to 2015 Liu was a council member of the Guangdong and Shanghai chapters of the China Overseas Exchange Association, which was then run by the Chinese government's State Council and is now under the UFWD. When confronted with these records, Liu

offered the defenses of "I cannot recall" and "They can put your name there without your knowledge."

The second, and more damning, part of the case for suspecting Liu's complicity with Beijing is her defense of Beijing's agenda, which is the objective of the CCP's United Front strategy. In June, after hundreds of thousands of Hong Kong residents demonstrated against a proposed extradition law that the Australian Foreign Ministry officially criticized as a possible violation of Hong Kong's autonomy, an SBS News interviewer asked Liu to comment. She said "I have not really looked into the details of the legislation."

In September, TV interviewer Andrew Bolt asked Liu three times whether she agreed with the UN Permanent Court of Arbitration and the Australian government's assessment that Chinese claims in the South China Sea are "unlawful." Three times she gave evasive responses, the most detailed being "My understanding is that a lot of countries [are] trying to claim ownership, sovereignty of the South China Sea, because of various reasons." When Bolt asked her if she considered Chinese paramount leader Xi Jinping a "dictator," Liu said, "I'm not going to use the word 'dictator.' He is, in their system, an elected chairman." These are, to say the least, odd responses from a politician nominally representing Australian constituents.

Race, partisan politics, and history have unfortunately but inevitably complicated the story. Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who had celebrated the pioneering achievement of his fellow Liberal Party member Liu, jumped to her defense. He said the accusation against Liu had a "grubby undertone" and was an implied "smear" against the entire Australian-Chinese community. "Does [being Chinese-born] make her in cahoots with the Chinese government? Of course not, it's a ridiculous suggestion," he argued.

Morrison badly and no doubt knowingly mischaracterized the issue. Liu is not under suspicion because she is of Chinese ancestry, but rather because of her demonstrated links with United Front organizations, her inadequate explanation of those links, and her starkly awkward pro-CCP statements.

Morrison's rush to play the racism card is, ironically, reminiscent of Beijing's reaction to discussion in recent years of Chinese government attempts to surreptitiously influence government and society in Australia from universities to Parliament House. This reaction is typified by a 2017 *People's Daily* editorial that read in part, "racial paranoia tarnished Australia's image as a multicultural society." The accusation of racism stings sharply in a country that is trying to move beyond the legacy that produced last century's "White Australia" policy. The Chinese government is not above thrusting its finger into a trading partner's unhealed wound to advance the CCP's self-interest.

The challenge for Western democracies such as Australia and the United States is to confront the real problem of Chinese influence operations – and the related problem of Chinese government-organized industrial espionage – while avoiding the Scylla and Charybdis of anti-Chinese racism. On one hand, McCarthyist hysteria would lead to terrible injustices with tragic outcomes for particular individuals as well as the nation as a whole. An illustrative case is that of Temple University physics professor Xiaoxing Xi, whom the FBI initially charged with espionage in a bungled investigation and later cleared, but not before he incurred over \$200,000 in legal fees defending himself. Officials and responsible commentators should emphasize that Chinese ancestry is neither sufficient nor necessary for wrongdoing. An infamous example is former Australian Senator Sam Dastyari, who is not ethnically Chinese, but was rightly forced to resign after investigations revealed he improperly took Chinese government-linked money and did political favors for China, including speaking in support of Chinese claims in the South China Sea. Similarly, the United States has a long list of men convicted of spying for China who are not ethnic Chinese. Conversely, ethnic Chinese in Australia, the United States and elsewhere are among the fiercest opponents of the CCP regime.

On the other hand, race should not shield the guilty from investigation and appropriate legal action. Feigned or misguided anti-racism, which Beijing will happily abet, risks yielding national strength and autonomy to the CCP government. Politicians may not be able to resist

disingenuously pushing the race button when it suits them, but our societies must remain calm and analytical.

Gareth Evans, former Labor Party cabinet minister in Australia, lamented of the Liu saga that "hyper-anxiety" about Chinese influence "is making it harder than ever for Chinese-Australians to aspire to leadership positions." Evans may be right that media discussion of Liu is discouraging to Australians of Chinese ancestry. The solution, however, is not to cease investigating people who exhibit the key warning signs, such as Liu. Incidentally, Australian Senator Penny Wong, also a woman of Chinese ancestry, is among those questioning whether Liu "is fit and proper to be in the Parliament."

Some degree of "anxiety" is justified, given what we know of PRC objectives and methods. The task is to rise above prejudices and focus on making fair interpretations of the evidence.

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