

The China narrative, part one: War-machine propaganda

Clive Hamilton's books exposing China "interference", Silent Invasion and Hidden Hand, are important, not because of the quality of the content—paranoid propaganda—but because the influencers behind Hamilton's crusade reveal his role as a cog in a vast narrative-management machine. The public, as well as MPs and other government officials, are being directed how to think about China by a small group of ideologically driven propagandists, funded by institutions of the section of the Anglo-American power establishment that seeks without end, even risking nuclear warfare that would annihilate mankind. (Part one of a series. Read part two [here](#); part three [here](#); part four; and part five.)

Clive Hamilton is a Professor of Public Ethics at Charles Sturt University. His first book on China, *Silent Invasion* (2018), continued the obsession with Chinese spies, dissidents and foreign interference that had been escalating in Australia through 2016-17. Hamilton alleges growing, sinister influence of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Australian society, his case built with anecdotes from student newsletters and hawkish journalism. Hamilton sees espionage and influence everywhere: the Chinese diaspora can "transform Australian society in a way that makes us all sympathetic to China and easy for Beijing to control. Australia will then assist China to become the hegemonic power in Asia and eventually the world." Hamilton's CCP "spies" include church parishioners and uni students. His argument concludes with his assertion that between 20- 40 per cent of Chinese-Australians are loyal to Beijing first. How does he arrive at this figure? From the "guesses" of some of his Chinese-Australian friends. If Australia "pushes back" against the CCP, China will "mobilise its forces already embedded in Australian society", he warns.

Hamilton: "China plans to dominate the world, and has been using Australia and New Zealand as a testing ground for its tactics to assert its ascendancy in the West. ... [O]ur own weakening commitment to democratic values, would see Australia become a tribute state of the resurgent Middle Kingdom."

Silent Invasion's references include a litany of militarised sources—representatives of neocon thinktanks, anti-China analysts, US defence papers, and the Council on Foreign Relations, which recently [pushed for a New Cold War with Russia](#). The influence of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) is obvious: a number of Hamilton's points are essentially lifted from old ASPI articles. The acknowledgments for his book are a laundry list of ASPI "ghostwriters", who are referenced by name but with no hint they work for ASPI, the institution driving most of the anti-China narrative in Australia. In addition to Australian government funding, ASPI's benefactors include the US State Department, NATO, and the leading American arms manufacturers who profit from the military buildup justified by the narrative that China is a threat. ASPI's influence may explain *Silent Invasion's* preoccupation with "sovereignty"—used as an imperialist buzzword justifying anti-China protectionism—and Hamilton's embrace of a US-centric foreign and strategic policy perspective. He warns of "Beijing's plan to shift Australia away from the US alliance.... A military standoff or engagement between the United States and China is quite possible in the foreseeable future. It may be the only way to stop China annexing and controlling the entire South China Sea.... In these circumstances Australia would be under an obligation to back the United States." A year later, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo echoed Hamilton, insisting the ANZUS Alliance was "unambiguous" in its automatic obligation for Australia to participate in any US conflict. (Pompeo and Hamilton are wrong—ANZUS does not legally oblige Australia to follow the USA into war—but their presumption reveals a profoundly dangerous expectation.)

Hamilton uses the China threat to oppose foreign policy independence: "Since the formalisation of the Australia-US alliance [ANZUS] in 1951, Australia has not really needed US protection because there has been no direct threat to us. Now there is an emerging threat in the shape of a PRC that clearly wants to be the Asian hegemon. Yet powerful voices in this country are calling for us to weaken the US alliance and adopt 'an independent foreign policy'. But what does an independent foreign policy mean when an aggressive new power is determined to dominate the region in which we live?" Hamilton ironically maintains that to defend Australia's sovereignty, we must cede it to the USA—through a binding obligation to follow them into war. Pompeo clearly agrees.

Following *Silent Invasion's* publication, Hamilton toured the USA, where his credentials as a Professor of Public Ethics apparently qualified him to speak to hawkish national security think tanks and testify on the growing threat of China to a receptive US Congress and State Department. In 2019, Hamilton was a guest speaker at Canberra's National Security Summit.

Hamilton's research assistant for *Silent Invasion* was Alex Joske, a Bachelor of Arts/Economics student minoring in Chinese language at the Australian National University (ANU), where Hamilton worked. Joske is fluent in Mandarin and spent his childhood in China where his father, Stephen Joske, was the senior treasury representative at the Australian Embassy in Beijing. Alex Joske wrote for and briefly edited ANU's student newspaper, publishing articles alleging CCP influence on the university campus, which were picked up by mainstream media. In 2017, Joske sensationally quit the student newspaper over the editorial board's "leftist" identity politics, which somehow made the front page of *The Australian* and Andrew Bolt's blog, both loud boosters of Anglo-American foreign policy and regime change going back to the invasion of Iraq. In the months before *Silent Invasion* was published, mainstream media front-ran the book, publishing anti-Beijing articles by Joske and Hamilton, and

interviewing Joske for the ABC's report "Allegations of Chinese government interference on Australian campuses". In 2018, 21-year-old graduate Joske was hired by ASPI as a researcher/analyst and is now an in-demand authority on China for the mainstream press.

Hamilton's follow up book, *Hidden Hand* (2020), was coauthored with Mareike Ohlberg, a former analyst at the Berlin-based Mercator Institute (MERICS), a China-policy think tank which partners with ASPI and numerous other foreign policy think tanks that are all funded by US/foreign governments, arms manufacturers and the non-profit industrial complex. Ohlberg now works for the German Marshall Fund (GMF), a US-based foreign policy think tank, which a [whistleblower revealed](#) works closely with the CIA. Resumes of key GMF personnel list backgrounds at intelligence and defence agencies, NATO, and regime-change agitators the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). GMF is funded by US and foreign governments, NATO, arms manufacturers and powerful think tanks. The GMF's onsite project, "The Alliance for Securing Democracy", was a primary source of Russiagate hysteria "research". The Alliance claims it is independent, but shares benefactors with the GMF, and Alliance leaders have similar intelligence/defence backgrounds. An ASPI report recently recommended closer cooperation with GMF and similar institutions, and current ASPI staff also work for the US think tank.

Hidden Hand evidentially suits the interests of GMF benefactors—GMF posted a writeup of the book on its website. *Hidden Hand* aggressively ratchets up Silent Invasion's McCarthyism, piling on fears of communism and Marxist/Leninist ideology for the benefit of a US audience. Tracing back references reveals Hamilton/Ohlberg's intellectual dishonesty: deliberately-manipulated quotes and misrepresented statistics reveal *Hidden Hand* as war-machine propaganda.

Hamilton's paranoia of Beijing influence is intensified in *Hidden Hand*. In its narrative, even local councils and sister city programs are prey to CCP influence, and Beijing practices the "dark arts of economic statecraft". Starkly obvious is the author's utter contempt for, and ridicule of, any gesture of peace, diplomacy or cooperation from China as "Xispeak". Per Hamilton/Ohlberg, Xi-speak consists of "phrases like 'community of shared future for mankind'... when [CCP] leaders talk of making the international order more 'democratic', 'open' and 'diverse', this is code for an order in which 'authoritarian systems and values have global status equal to liberal democratic ones'.... Western nations need to realise that a CCP-led China is not and never will be its friend. Other than those it controls, Beijing abhors alliances and does all it can to break them up."

The Belt and Road Initiative, which is seen by US neoconservatives as a geoeconomic challenge to US hegemony, is consistently attacked throughout Hamilton's books as "the most powerful vehicle by which Beijing is changing the postwar international order. ... Xi Jinping has repeatedly referred to the BRI as essential to his vision of constructing 'a community of common destiny for humankind'. While the idea might sound good to Western ears, its aim is a Sinocentric world...."

Before his Beijing-is-bad epiphany, Hamilton's work primarily focussed on climate change. Why the abrupt shift? Prior to the months preceding *Silent Invasion's* release, Hamilton never expressed undue negativity towards China, in 2014 referring to it as a "new and enigmatic superpower".

Hamilton's first book was accompanied by a wave of convenient publicity over alleged attempts by Beijing to stop its publication. Hamilton claimed that *Silent Invasion's* original publisher, Allen & Unwin, pulled out because of "concerns of retribution from Beijing", although during parliamentary testimony he admitted no actual threats were made. The publisher appeared largely concerned with potential litigation regarding defamatory material in the book, advising Hamilton they wished to delay publication until related matters before the courts were settled, but Hamilton was unwilling to wait. The sensational international publicity over Beijing's alleged influence on an Australian publisher was an explosive boost to *Silent Invasion's* profile.

China-hawks Senator Cory Bernardi and MP Andrew Hastie threw their support behind Hamilton. Bernardi moved a formal motion in the Senate for the government to assist Hamilton in publishing the book, and Hastie wanted to use his power as Chair of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security to publish *Silent Invasion* under parliamentary privilege—an unprecedented suggestion giving Hamilton legal immunity from defamation.

Why the uproar and high-profile support of Hamilton? *Silent Invasion* is inflammatory, but hardly new or secret information, with the majority of it sourced from hawkish journalism, ASPI reports or anecdotes taken directly from Joske's student newspaper articles.

Andrew Hastie called Hamilton an "unlikely ally", declaring dramatically: "What's really at stake here is not just sovereignty, national security and our long-term economic prosperity but our democratic tradition, including free speech, free press and free thought." Hastie is the most notorious China hawk in the Australian Parliament, collaborating with warmongering British think tank, the Henry Jackson Society, to author anti-China reports. He recently compared China with the rise of Nazi Germany—a calculated insult to a country that lost 20 million people at the hands of Nazi Germany's Japanese allies. Interestingly, [Hastie's "awakening" to the threat of the CCP was attributed to a 2017 speech](#) written by journalist-turned government speechwriter John Garnaut, titled "Engineers of the Soul: what Australia needs to know about ideology in Xi Jinping's China". While Garnaut's speech was clearly persuasive to Hastie, a China expert, [former Australian Ambassador to Beijing, Dennis Argall](#), called Garnaut's speech a curious "ideological argument against ideology ... contorting history to say

Stalin=Mao=Xi”.

Garnaut also influenced Hamilton, a fellow ANU colleague, which may explain Hamilton’s sudden anti-China shift. Hamilton heavily references Garnaut in *Silent Invasion*, acknowledging Garnaut’s “strong support” and “excellent advice throughout”. This is revealing in light of Garnaut’s CV. Garnaut was Fairfax’s Beijing correspondent in 2007-13, and its Asia Pacific Editor on his return to Australia. In 2015, he was “hand-picked” as an advisor/speech writer to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and influenced Turnbull’s increasingly adversarial attitude towards China. In 2016, Garnaut, enjoying a meteoric rise from mere journalist to foreign policy influencer, headed an inquiry into Beijing’s alleged foreign interference operations, following years of his own hawkish reporting on China. On that inquiry he worked closely with ASIO to produce a classified report on the extent of Chinese influence in Australia, which justified Turnbull’s controversial espionage and foreign interference laws. [In an interview with ABC](#), former Prime Minister Paul Keating said: “Once that Garnaut guy came back from China and Turnbull gave him the ticket to go and hop into the security agencies, they’ve all gone berko ever since. When you have got the ASIO chief knocking on MPs’ doors, you know something’s wrong.”

In March 2020, Attorney General Christian Porter replaced the entire Foreign Influence Transparent Scheme leadership team with what [the Herald Sun called](#) a “crack team of experts ... to unmask secret agents covertly pushing foreign interests on our soil”, with Garnaut hired to “prepare evidentiary briefs against people suspected of being undeclared agents of influence”. Garnaut met with Porter, ASIO and the AFP to discuss the new enforcement strategy. In May 2020 the Department of Defence’s Information Warfare Division contracted Garnaut for “Strategic Decision-Making and Capability Development”. Concurrently, Garnaut works for ASPI’s International Cyber Policy Centre and is on the Advisory Board for a project on Russian and Chinese disinformation at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)—a US think tank funded by arms manufacturers, big corporations and US/Australian/foreign governments. CSIS shares donors with MERICS, runs regular dialogues in partnership with ASPI and hosted a talk on “Chinese Influence” by Hamilton on his *Silent Invasion* book tour.

Hamilton’s books encompass the current China narrative: espionage, foreign interference, and imminent military escalation. The vast network of powerful vested interests highly invested in maintaining this narrative should be extremely suspect—that, again, we’re being lied into war.

By Melissa Harrison, Australian Alert Service, 12 August 2020

The China narrative part two: Dissidents or separatists?

Clive Hamilton's books exposing China "interference", [Silent Invasion](#) and [Hidden Hand](#), are important, not because of the quality of the content—paranoid propaganda—but because the influencers behind Hamilton's crusade reveal his role as a cog in a vast narrative-management machine. The public, as well as MPs and other government officials, are being directed how to think about China by a small group of ideologically driven propagandists, funded by institutions of the section of the Anglo-American power establishment that seeks war without end, even risking nuclear warfare that would annihilate mankind. (Part two of a series. Read part one [here](#); part three [here](#); part four; and part five.)

In *Silent Invasion* (2018), Australian academic Clive Hamilton insisted Australian universities should invite dissident Chinese writers and intellectuals onto their campuses and take steps "to ensure that Chinese students [from mainland China] are removed from their ideological ghettos by having them attend courses on human rights and democracy...." Unchallenged testimony from Chinese "dissidents" and "democracy activists" is routinely used as evidence in the ongoing anti-China campaign. Closer examination reveals many prominent "dissidents" are in fact separatists, funded by Western "democracy" promoters intent upon regime change.

The history of clandestine funding of Chinese separatist movements is long. In the 1950s, the US government authorised the CIA's covert assistance to the "Tibetan internal resistance movement": providing logistical support and training in guerrilla warfare; paying [US\\$15,000 a month to the Dalai Lama, according to CIA veteran John Kenneth Knaus](#); and running a propaganda campaign, all intended to "[confront, thwart or harass](#)" the Chinese communist government. The program ran for almost two decades.

National Endowment for 'Democracy'

Today, separatist activities are funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a non-profit which [receives hundreds of millions of dollars](#) in US government funding, to "promote democracy" overseas. In 1991, NED founding member Allen Weinstein declared: "[A lot of](#) what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA."

NED is widely criticised for its leading role in a litany of coups and regime-change operations in countries the USA and UK and their subservient allies consider adversaries. In 1993 [Barbara Conry](#), a US foreign policy analyst at the CATO Institute, said NED used taxpayer funds to "harass the duly elected governments of friendly countries, interfere in foreign elections, and foster the corruption of democratic movements". NED's activities would "otherwise be possible only through a CIA covert operation". Such activities "would be illegal for foreign groups operating in the United States", Conry noted, yet NED is "exempt from nearly all political and administrative controls."

NED declares that democracy "has acquired the status of the only broadly legitimate form of government". This echoes the original founding principles of warmongering British neoconservative think tank the Henry Jackson Society (HJS), whose co-founder Dr Brendan Simms thinks countries can be bombed into democracy: "Democracy can be dropped from 10,000 feet", Simms boasted in 2011. NED officials are on the HJS advisory board.

In *Hidden Hand*, Hamilton quotes NED's assessment that "authoritarian powers like China" rely on "sharp power, the exercising of coercive and manipulative influence". This is pure projection—NED has funnelled millions into China projects for decades, with significant funds going to vague "democracy" initiatives. For years, NED has funded pro-democracy activities in Hong Kong and supported prominent Uighur organisations [with, as documented by The Grayzone, ties to the US intelligence apparatus](#).

In 2012, [NED declared](#) that China "has become what Chinese Nobel Peace Laureate Liu Xiaobo has termed 'a blood transfusion machine for other dictatorships', promoting its own model of autocratic capitalism as an alternative to democracy. ... [Therefore] NED will place special emphasis in the period ahead on supporting activists and intellectuals in China...."

China 'dissident', neoconservative conformist



The late Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo (seen here with Nancy Pelosi posing with his portrait.)
Photo: Flickr

Liu Xiaobo (1955-2017) was a famous Chinese dissident writer who was awarded the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize for “his eloquent and powerful defence of human rights”, according to Hamilton. Silent Invasion researcher Alex Joske, Hamilton’s connection to the extreme anti-China Australian Strategic Policy Institute (funded by the State Department and NATO) claimed in the 4 September 2017 *Sydney Morning Herald* that “democracy activist” Liu [pushed “for a change in regime by focusing on gradual change in society”](#).

In truth, Liu was a hardcore neoconservative and supporter of colonialism, whom the [15 September 2010 Guardian reported as saying](#) that “to choose westernisation is to choose to be human”. Liu endorsed the US- and UK-led invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, saying horrific civilian and coalition casualties were the “price [that] must be paid” to “[overthrow Saddam’s tyranny and establish a democratic Iraq](#)”. Over years, NED donated millions in funding to Liu’s organisations, the literary Independent Chinese PEN Centre and *Democratic China* magazine. In 2014 Liu was the recipient of NED’s Democracy Award. In 2008, Liu published his democracy and human rights manifesto, “Charter 08”, which “[called for a Western-style political system in China and privatisation of all enterprises and farm land](#)”. A [2009 CIA cable](#) obtained by WikiLeaks revealed many of the signatories to Charter 08 had been discredited in China in 2004, “when over 200 intellectuals signed an open letter supporting the US invasion of Iraq, causing them to ‘lose credibility’ for their ‘extreme pro-Western’ views.”

[According to Joske](#), after spending a year working as a visiting scholar in the USA, in 1989 Liu “rushed to Beijing to join student protestors”, where he [played a leading role](#) in the Tiananmen Square protests. In a 2018 exposé on Tiananmen, [independent journalist Godfree Roberts](#) reported that the Taiwanese government had funded Liu’s flight from Washington.

Three years before Tiananmen, George Soros, billionairebacker of European so-called “colour revolutions” through his powerful organisations, which have toppled governments targeted by the US and UK neoconservative agenda, had endowed his “Fund for the Reform and Opening of China” with US\$1 million (a large sum in China at the time). By 1989 Chinese authorities suspected Soros’s funds were a CIA tool, an allegation which had previously surfaced in 1987. As Roberts reported, [events around Tiananmen had the flavour of a colour revolution](#): a top CIA operative experienced in regime change, James Lilley, stationed as US ambassador to China; CIA logistical support of student protestors; Gene Sharp, author of the colour revolution manual, moved to Beijing by the CIA; and US government-funded Voice of America radio broadcasting information on the protests towards Chinese audiences. NED opened two offices in Beijing the year before Tiananmen, and mailed thousands of incendiary letters from Washington to China. After the protests, the CIA’s Operation Yellowbird exfiltrated four hundred Tiananmen leaders to Western countries.

In an obviously calculated insult, [Hamilton launched](#) a Chinese-language edition of *Silent Invasion* to coincide with the 30th anniversary of Tiananmen Square. Hamilton wrote contemptuously, “The CCP remains deeply anxious about ‘ideological infiltration’ by hostile forces bent on regime change in China.” Is it any wonder? [In 2006, NED acknowledged](#) Chinese news reports associating American NGOs with the European colour revolutions, which, according to NED, had “alarmed authoritarian governments, alerting them to the precariousness of their hybrid, pseudo-democratic regimes”.

Jasmine revolution

In 2011, a wave of pro-democracy protests broke out across China. Famous dissident Wang Dan (recipient of NED’s 1998 Democracy Award) declared this “Chinese Jasmine Revolution” was modelled on the then-recent revolutions of the Arab Spring, a series of destabilising “pro-democracy uprisings” [which were actually US- and UK-backed regime-change operations](#), funded by NED.

The Chinese Jasmine Revolution was ignited by an anonymous call for pro-democracy protests, posted on US-based Chinese language website Boxun, and disseminated through activists’ social media. Boxun’s founder, Weican Meng, has received significant funding from NED through his organisation, China Free Press. Through Boxun, Jasmine organisers said the movement would experience three

stages: warming up, protest, and battle. The evolving situation was closely monitored by Stratfor, a private intelligence agency contracting with defence corporations and the US government. Internal emails obtained by WikiLeaks reveal an anonymous source told Stratfor an informal group inside the USA, who had been involved in the “1989 Pro-democratic Movement”, had initiated the movement. Stratfor analysts considered that although small, the protests were significant, as they represented crossregional organisation. The analysts insisted the Jasmine movement was instigated outside of China, communicating with domestic participants: “This is not a popular movement. It is an attempt at foreign manipulation.” Curiously, Jon Huntsman, the US ambassador to China, “inadvertently” [happened to be present](#) at the first Jasmine protest. According to Stratfor’s analysis, “Protests are extremely common throughout China”, but are usually locally focused and not “calls for democracy or for any sort of new government, they are simply asking for good governance on the part of the CPC.”

The US-based NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) chided the Chinese government for their “[disproportionate response to a non-existent ‘revolution’](#)”—arresting activists, deploying large numbers of police and increasing online censorship— which ultimately caused the attempted Revolution to fizzle out.

Revealingly, a Stratfor analyst acknowledged the Chinese government believed the “Jasmine people” were “being directed by the CIA to launch Tiananmen II”, notably in the wake of violent US/NED-backed revolutions of the Arab Spring. Whatever the merits or otherwise of its methods, this paints the Chinese government’s “disproportionate” response in a different light—no government would tolerate a foreign-directed insurgency.

One of the Jasmine activists arrested and imprisoned was Wu Lebao, a “cyber-dissident” who now resides in Australia, deemed “[China’s lonely voice of dissent](#)” by Australian media. Wu attended university with Alex Joske, who published an article about the activist. The youths co-authored a student newspaper piece alleging CCP influence on their university campus, which Hamilton referenced in *Silent Invasion*.

Wu, a [former coordinator](#) at Liu Xiaobo’s NED-funded Independent Chinese PEN Centre, told ABC in 2008 he was involved in “dissident activities” and was questioned by authorities over whether he had “connections with foreign powers”. In 2011, 27-year-old Wu was arrested under suspicion of leading the Jasmine Revolution, [inciting netizens](#) (online citizens) “to subvert state power and overthrow China”. Wu maintains he was wrongfully imprisoned by authorities, who claimed his social media posts were evidence of plans for sedition. Wu’s Twitter posts throughout the period were replete with jasmine-related code words activists allegedly used to communicate: “[For the first time](#) since Jasmine, I didn’t drink tea and sprinkled flowers on the weekend”. On Twitter, Wu [recounted](#) his father coming to him in the middle of the night and telling him not to lead the Jasmine Revolution.

Wu denies leading the Jasmine movement, however in 2013 he [tweeted](#): “The Ministry of Public Security is the reason why I started to mobilise people.” [Later, Wu said](#): “Unlike the Jasmine Revolution [sic] in the Middle East and North Africa, China’s dissident social network Twitter is regarded as the true main battlefield of the revolution....”

Wu’s Wikipedia page, which is linked in his Twitter bio, says he is suspected of leading the Jasmine Revolution with dissident artist Ai Weiwei, whom Wu knows well and was staying with at the time. Ai has turned dissidence into a lucrative arts career, [speaking at](#) the US-based Anglo-American establishment think tank, the Council on Foreign Relations; [collaborating with](#) Amnesty International and [receiving awards from](#) HRW—both powerful weaponisers of “human rights” for the regime-change apparatus. During the Jasmine Revolution, Wu [quoted Ai](#): “This country may end in the hands of a group of people who don’t like to sleep at night”.

In 2011, NGO the Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) [reported Wu’s “arbitrary detention”](#). The [Grayzone has revealed](#) that CHRD receives funding from NED, and shares an address with the Washington, DC office of Human Rights Watch. [US government-funded](#) Radio Free Asia (RFA), part of what the 26 December 1977 *New York Times* called the “[Worldwide Propaganda Network Built by the CIA](#)”, has [quoted Wu as an anti-CCP source](#) since RFA first reported Wu was “tortured” during his 2011 detention.

Clive Hamilton’s advocacy of prominent Chinese dissidents and the Dalai Lama (recipient of NED’s 2010 [Democracy Service Medal](#)) aligns with the agenda of anti-China agitator-in-chief, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Pompeo has reverently quoted Liu Xiaobo and thrown his support behind dissidents including Wei Jingsheng, whom Pompeo named the “[father of the Chinese democracy movement](#)”. Wei was the recipient of NED’s 1998 Democracy Award and his foundation has received significant NED funding for years.

The Chinese “dissidents” feted by Hamilton and much of the Western media are part of a vast network of activists, with NED—the US government-funded regime-change plotters— at the centre of the web. Their goal is not achieving democracy and human rights, but to destabilise China and overthrow its government. Or as “cyber-dissident” Wu Lebao tweeted, in terms reminiscent of British geopolitical schemers: “This evil empire must be divided.”

By Melissa Harrison, Australian Alert Service, 26 August 2020

The China narrative part three: Espionage and interference

Clive Hamilton's books *Silent Invasion* and *Hidden Hand* are important, not because of the quality of the content—paranoid propaganda—but because the influencers behind Hamilton's crusade reveal his role as a cog in a vast narrative management machine. (Part three of a series. Other instalments are available here: [part one](#); [part two](#); [part four](#); [part five](#).)



Chinese defector Chen Yonglin and *Silent Invasion* author Clive Hamilton. Chen is the source of Hamilton's allegations of widespread Chinese infiltration of Australia, but authorities have dismissed his wild claims. Photos: Screenshots

When Charles Sturt University public ethics professor Clive Hamilton published *Silent Invasion* in 2018, alleging a vast Chinese infiltration operation in Australia, it dramatically escalated mainstream media hysteria over Chinese influence on Australian politics. The book and the hysteria it fuelled justified the controversial espionage and foreign interference legislation the Malcolm Turnbull government pushed into law that year. Yet mainstream reporting exhibits a curious inconsistency: some Chinese “spies” are zealously exposed with only dubious evidence, while others are staunchly defended from official espionage allegations—seemingly to prevent uncomfortable attention falling on their powerful friends.

Silent Invasion alleges that in a 2005 meeting at the Chinese embassy in Canberra, officials were instructed to determine how China could attain “comprehensive influence over Australia ... in all ways”. According to Hamilton, “We know all this because my informant Chen Yonglin ... was at the meeting and read the documents.” The credibility of this claim has been taken at face value by most politicians and media in recent years, but closer investigation reveals that Australian authorities had dismissed it years earlier. As this article will show, face value acceptance is a common feature of most claims by anti-China agitators in Australia in recent years.

Hamilton's “informant”, Chen Yonglin, was a former diplomat at the Chinese embassy who sensationally defected in 2005, claiming there was a network of over 1,000 Chinese spies in Australia. Chen claimed dissidents were kidnapped by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), but a September 2005 report of the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee revealed the Australian Federal Police had determined the allegation had “no substance”. The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), Australia's domestic spy agency, would only say Chen's claims were “being looked at closely”. If these 1,000 spies existed, we've heard nothing of them from ASIO since.

Chen also claimed to ABC-TV in August 2005 that a Chinese hit squad had travelled to assassinate him in retaliation for defecting, “a three-member team to conduct an operation called decapitation strike”. The 17 August 2005 *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that Australia's Foreign Minister at the time, Alexander Downer, had declared Chen's claim “highly improbable”. The alleged hit squad was apparently unsuccessful, as Chen, now an Australian permanent resident, continues to serve as a supposedly authoritative source on China, despite his lack of credibility. This includes [expert interviews](#) with *Silent Invasion*'s “ghostwriters”, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI)—the think tank partly funded by the US State Department and NATO which is the source of virtually all of the anti-China analysis the Australian media pumps out daily.

Hastie hysteria

Liberal MP Andrew Hastie, Chair of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS), sensationally announced another Chinese “spy” defection in 2019. As reported in a series of 25-29 November 2019 articles in *The Australian*, Hastie alleges he was contacted by an intermediary of “self-proclaimed” Chinese spy Wang Liqiang, while at an Australian-American Leadership Dialogue meeting in the USA. This curious setting already raises questions, as Australia's relationship with the USA is the source of the political pressure to be more confrontational towards China. Hastie said he decided to “hand it off to the intelligence services”, leaving the conference for a nearby US military base where he “brokered” Wang's contact with ASIO using “secure” US military communications equipment.

On his return to Australia several weeks later, Hastie apparently changed his mind. Rather than

leaving Wang to ASIO, as was appropriate, Hastie appeared on a sensationalist 24 November 2019 60 Minutes “World Exclusive” with Wang, declaring the alleged defecting spy was a “friend to democracy”. Hastie demanded the Australian government—of which he is an influential member—grant Wang political asylum. Underscoring the close coordination behind these stories, the 60 Minutes reporter, Nick McKenzie, fronts regular sensationalist anti-China stories (for which more than once his employer has had to settle defamation suits), and Clive Hamilton’s research assistant on Silent Invasion, ANU graduate-turned-ASPI analyst Alex Joske, worked with McKenzie and 60 Minutes as a 22-year-old “strategic analyst” to verify Wang’s story.

THE AUSTRALIAN

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Wang Liqiang: Beijing bit player at best as cloak-and-dagger claims fall away

By PAUL MALEY
NATIONAL SECURITY EDITOR



After a few days of hysterical media coverage, Andrew Hastie’s November 2019 Chinese “spy” claims regarding Wang Liqiang fell apart.

As reported by *The Australian* on 29 November, several days after the 60 Minutes story ASIO declared Wang was “not the high-level operative-turned-defector he claimed to be”. According to Hastie, ASIO had been in contact with Wang for around six weeks before his 60 Minutes appearance, ample time to assess his credibility. However, ASIO delayed reassuring the public—resulting in diplomatic damage and rampant espionage hysteria.

According to Dr David Brophy, Senior Lecturer in Chinese history at the University of Sydney, speaking in *The Australian* on 30 November, the espionage panic gave Hastie “a valuable media platform to posture as a defender of democracy, and at the same time push for an increased role for unaccountable security agencies in Australian public life”. Evidently, both ASIO and Hastie benefited from cultivating unfounded espionage fears.

And disregarding even ASIO’s assessment, ASPI’s anti-CCP wunderkind Alex Joske stands by his “strategic analysis” of Wang’s story. Months later, on 13 July 2020, Joske tweeted he had only become more convinced Wang’s story was genuine.

Hastie habitually sensationalises “intelligence” received while visiting the USA. As part of a 2017 PJCIS delegation to Washington, Hastie met with US intelligence agencies. On return to Australia, he used the defamation protections of parliamentary privilege to accuse a Chinese-Australian businessman, Dr Chau Chak Wing, of bribing UN officials. Hastie’s accusations, based on “intelligence” received from US agencies, were discredited by a federal court. Media and journalist sued by Dr Chau for defamation, including Nick McKenzie, used Hastie’s speech to unsuccessfully defend their articles reporting the alleged bribery conspiracy, but the 27 June 2018 *Sydney Morning Herald* reported federal judge Justice Steven Rares denounced their reporting as “totally embarrassing” and a “fantasy”.



Fanatically anti-China duo Liberal MP Andrew Hastie (left) and SMH/60 Minutes reporter Nick McKenzie coordinate their stories. Photos: Screenshots

Such are the cases that constitute the evidence for the claim now taken as given that China is interfering in Australia. The very people behind the incredible claims have given them the imprimatur of official acceptance. In a 2018 inquiry into the Turnbull government's espionage and foreign interference laws, Hastie's Committee reported "compelling evidence" Australia was "facing an unprecedented threat from espionage and foreign interference". Clive Hamilton told Hastie's Committee the legislation was designed to "protect our freedoms" and "safeguard democratic rights that are under threat in Australia from the incursions of an authoritarian foreign power".

On the other hand ...

Hastie's attitude towards the "unprecedented threat" of espionage reverses when it involves potential Australian espionage against China. In January 2019, Chinese authorities detained Chinese-Australian blogger and academic Dr Yang Hengjun over allegations of espionage. A 24 January 2019 *Sydney Morning Herald* article by Nick McKenzie quoted Andrew Hastie declaring Yang's arrest "arbitrary" and demanding his release. Ironically for someone who is openly hostile to Australian journalist Julian Assange, currently detained by the UK on behalf of the USA for exposing US war crimes, on 7 April 2019 Hastie commented on Yang to Nick McKenzie again: "Mr Yang is an Australian citizen. He enjoys the rights and responsibilities of Australian citizenship. And so his detention, in a sense, is a detention of us all." The Australian government repeatedly denied Yang was a spy working on its behalf, with Prime Minister Scott Morrison calling the allegations "absolutely untrue" (*The Guardian*, 29 August 2019).

In March 2020, China formally charged Yang with espionage. Intriguing details about Yang's murky past surfaced: Yang worked for Chinese intelligence for fourteen years until 2000, including spying in the USA, prior to allegedly becoming an Australian resident in 2002, yet the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) was unable to clarify whether Yang was in fact a dual citizen. In apparent damage control, the ABC published an article titled "A spy and a democracy pedlar: The complicated truths in the life of Australian citizen Yang Hengjun" on 23 March 2020: "Shedding some light on his background may also help Australians understand that while Yang was at one time a Chinese spy, according to friends and those who've studied his case he has since turned on Beijing and become a dedicated advocate of western-style democracy ... [in a] newfound career in Australia as a pro-democracy blogger and activist". The ABC's scramble to defend Yang is at odds with the Australian media's history of fanatically alleging Chinese foreign interference in Australia. The ABC quoted anti-China zealots Hamilton and Chen, who defended Yang, offering detailed explanations as to why he was no longer a Chinese government spy.

Garnaut and ASIO



ASPI's 22-yo "strategic analyst" Alex Joske with former journalist-turned government advisor and ASIO collaborator John Garnaut. Photos: Screenshot

There is reason to suspect that Yang may have been spying on China. That is because of his relationship with aggressive anti-China journalist turned government espionage advisor John Garnaut, whom multiple sources have pointed to as the instigator of the Australian government's sharp turn in foreign policy against China. Upon Yang's arrest, Garnaut wrote to DFAT officials to advocate for his "close friend" Yang.

In 2011, while then-Fairfax correspondent Garnaut was stationed in China, he broke the story of Yang's 48-hour disappearance during the time of the so-called Jasmine Revolution—a series of "pro-democracy" protests in China suspected to have been directed by US agencies. Yang's disappearance triggered international outcry; however, anti-climactically, he resurfaced and claimed it was all a "misunderstanding".

There's now reason to suspect Garnaut and Yang were involved in an intelligence operation. Garnaut in 2016 experienced an unprecedented rise from journalist to advisor to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, where he worked closely with spy agency ASIO—and through ASIO the "Five Eyes" spying partnership dominated by the USA and UK—to influence Turnbull's adversarial shift towards China. In 2017, Garnaut and ASIO produced the classified "Garnaut-ASIO report", which provided the "official" justification for Turnbull's controversial espionage and foreign interference laws championed by Hastie and Hamilton. In April 2019, Garnaut claimed to Nick McKenzie and Fairfax Media that Yang was one

of two Chinese-Australians targeted by Chinese officials to glean information about the Garnaut-ASIO inquiry. According to Garnaut, prior to a Sydney meeting Yang had with him, Chinese officials had intercepted and questioned Yang about his relationship with Garnaut.

Yang has an affinity for spy craft. In addition to pro-democracy blogging, he has authored a series of spy novels based around a character also named “Yang”. [A 2017 book review](#) described the plot: a US-China double agent “works for neither side but on his own account, and feeds false information to both sides in order to serve his own agenda—the precipitation of a US-China conflict.” [A 2009 CIA/national security intelligence cable](#) obtained by WikiLeaks revealed: “In one [blog] posting, [Yang] warned those who have no knowledge of espionage not to write books on the subject, clearly implying that he has such knowledge.” The cable noted Yang’s connections to influential Chinese officials, observing that he had “an interesting bio for someone who paints himself as a controversial critic of the Chinese government”. Although Yang’s writings would not catalyse radical change in China, it stated, “he does represent a gradual opening of the political discussion here that could pay dividends farther down the road.”



Dr Yang Hengjun and Dr Feng Chongyi are both suspected by China of espionage due to their close links to John Garnaut and ASIO. Photos: Screenshot

Prior to Yang’s 2019 detainment in China, he resided in the USA for two years. Weican Meng, Yang’s “close friend” of eighteen years, was interviewed by the ABC about his arrest, and revealed the friends dined together in New York City the night before Yang’s departure for China, when Meng saw his friend off to the airport. Meng’s organisation, China Free Press, has received substantial funding from US government-funded regime-change agitator the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Meng is the founder of Boxun—the US-based Chinese-language publication central to coordinating the 2011 Chinese Jasmine Revolution protests, which, according to private intelligence company Stratfor, the Chinese government believed was an attempted CIA-instigated “Tiananmen II”. ([“China narrative part two”](#), AAS, 26 August 2020.)

After Yang was detained, his PhD doctoral supervisor and longtime friend, University of Technology Sydney (UTS) Professor Dr Feng Chongyi, produced a letter which Yang allegedly authored back in 2011, to be safeguarded by Feng and released if Yang were ever arrested. He released it to Nick McKenzie, who reported it for Fairfax Media on 28 January 2019. Yang’s impassioned pro-democracy letter included a confession, claiming he lied about his 2011 arrest “misunderstanding” as reported by Garnaut, and that he was actually abducted by government agents.

Feng is a Chinese-Australian academic, who is the second of the two Chinese-Australians John Garnaut claims China targeted for information about the Garnaut-ASIO espionage inquiry. Feng has outspokenly defended Yang: while once a Chinese spy, he claimed, Yang is today “an Australian citizen committed to democratic ideals and deserves the protection of the Australian Government”.

Feng was the introductory speaker at the launch of the Chinese-language edition of *Silent Invasion*. Hamilton maintains *Silent Invasion* can’t be racist, because Chinese-Australians such as Feng have praised it.

Feng is a longtime supporter of Liu Xiaobo, the late Nobel Peace Prize-winning Chinese “dissident” who was in fact a pro-Iraq war neoconservative colonialist, who had received millions of dollars in NED funding. Alongside Yang, Feng was a signatory to Liu’s “Charter 08” democracy manifesto. (Notably, Yang’s lawyer, Shang Baojun, also formerly represented Liu Xiaobo.) Writing about a 2003 conference on Chinese liberalism in Sydney, Feng included a photo of himself pictured with a number of “pro-democracy” intellectuals linked to hawkish US thinktanks and the CIA-linked regime-change apparatus, NED.

In 2017, Chinese authorities detained Feng for a week and questioned him over his alleged connections with overseas intelligence agencies. Interestingly, writing for the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 29 May 2018, Nick McKenzie reported authorities specifically questioned Feng about his connections with his “longstanding friend”, John Garnaut. Chinese state-owned media outlet *Global Times* reported that according to a Chinese law enforcement agency source, Feng was “an informant to Australian security intelligence agencies” and “played the role of a ‘China studies expert’ to stigmatise and smear China”. In an interview with *Sky News*, Feng denied the accusations; however,

an astonishing 12 September 2019 Twitter post by Clive Hamilton casually outed Feng as an ASIO informant: “And much of the evidence on the operations of CCP in Australia is generated by Chinese-Australians themselves”, Hamilton tweeted, adding: “Such as Professor Feng Chongyi at UTS and others operating under the radar. *Where does PM [Scott Morrison] think ASIO gets its information from?*” (Emphasis added.)

Feng maintains he was detained for meeting with Chinese human rights lawyers for his academic research. In 2017, UTS hosted a screening of “709 Documentary”, a film alleging human rights abuses of lawyers by the CCP, directed by a NEDlinked activist. The event was co-organised by Feng and the Chinese Human Rights Lawyers Concern Group (CHRLCG).

CHRLCG has received substantial NED funding and collaborates with the Chinese Human Rights Defenders, revealed by *The Grayzone* as a NED-funded activist group headquartered in Washington DC. NED’s grant databases show millions of dollars allocated to “support the work of Chinese human rights defenders”.

It is evident that Australians are being bombarded by a tightly-coordinated disinformation and public manipulation campaign that hysterically hypes Chinese actions in Australia as threats, but covers up real ASIO- and Five Eyes-directed intelligence operations targeting both China, and Australian foreign policy decision-making. This narrative management, involving a relatively small circle of actors—including author Clive Hamilton as the academic expert, Andrew Hastie in Parliament, Nick McKenzie in the media, John Garnaut in government, ASPI and ASIO—has had a sinister outcome: the invention of the China “threat” has created a pretext to justify harmful laws such as the foreign interference legislation that demonises any overtures of friendship as interference and thus destroys any chance of normalising relations; and Australia has undergone a radical turn in foreign policy aligned with a US-UK geopolitical agenda that is leading to war.

By Melissa Harrison, Australian Alert Service, 9 September 2020

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The China Narrative Part Four: ASIO's disinformation campaign

Part four of a series. Other instalments are available here: Part [one](#); part [two](#); part [three](#), part [five](#).

There is mounting evidence that Australia's domestic spy agency, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), is behind the spiralling paranoia over alleged Chinese foreign influence in Australia. A stream of well-timed leaks of classified material, journalistic tip-offs from anonymous ASIO sources, and evidence of blatant coordination between the spy agency, media and government make it abundantly clear: the anti-China disinformation campaign that has destroyed Australia-China relations is a spook-run operation, and the real foreign interference in Australia is coming through ASIO from the US- and UK-dominated Five Eyes spying alliance, which is dragging Australia into a neoconservative Anglo-American strategy to confront China, even at the risk of war.

ASIO is a clandestine organisation and reporting on its operations can land journalists in jail for 10 years; it has shaped public opinion through a small circle of academics, journalists, think tanks and politicians who cite each other's unproven claims as evidence for their increasingly strident allegations against China. As evidenced in his reporting, Fairfax/ Nine journalist Nick McKenzie is a primary recipient of confidential tip-offs from national security agencies, and is apparently privy to intimate details of ASIO's activities. McKenzie has peddled the Chinese foreign influence narrative for years, through a series of inflammatory newspaper and television "exposés" and sensationalist reporting, conveniently timed to justify ASIO-empowering legislation, and to deflect unwanted attention from ASIO's misconduct.

McKenzie provided wide coverage for Australian academic Clive Hamilton's McCarthyite anti-China book, *Silent Invasion* (2018), which heavily references McKenzie's articles. To mark the release of Hamilton's follow up book, *Hidden Hand*, McKenzie and Hamilton were co-participants in June 2020 in a "lively conversation" [event](#), discussing alleged Chinese foreign interference in Australia.

Nick McKenzie's 'Power and Influence'

In a 5 June 2017 Four Corners/Fairfax exposé, *Power and Influence*, McKenzie sensationally insinuated Australian politicians were unduly influenced by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) through political donations from two prominent Chinese-Australians businessmen, Dr Chau Chak Wing and Huang Xiangmo. Displaying an unusually informed knowledge of ASIO's clandestine activities, McKenzie reported in an accompanying article for the *Sydney Morning Herald* that ASIO Chief Duncan Lewis conducted private meetings with senior figures in major political parties in 2015, where Lewis "secretly briefed" politicians on foreign influence; in those briefings Lewis used a document featuring pictures of Chau and Huang as a warning "prop", according to McKenzie. Curiously, despite waving around their photos, Lewis was "careful to stress that neither Dr Chau nor Huang Xiangmo was accused of any crime and that Mr Lewis wasn't instructing the parties to stop taking their donations." (Emphasis added.) Despite this careful disclaimer, which any thinking journalist should have realised meant ASIO had nothing to back up its insinuations, McKenzie's reporting of Lewis's stunt achieved its desired effect in the ensuing media uproar and foreign influence hysteria.



Power and Influence demonstrated the convenient timing of McKenzie's revelations. Just ten days earlier, Lewis had testified before a Senate Estimates hearing that espionage and foreign interference were occurring on an "unprecedented" scale, but he did not name any specific countries. *Power and Influence* allowed the media to put two and two together— China must be Lewis's unnamed foreign influence threat. Chau later sued McKenzie and Fairfax for defamation, and the subsequent 2018 [federal court ruling](#) revealed the speculative and unsubstantiated nature of McKenzie's reporting.

As reported by McKenzie for the 5 June 2017 *Sydney Morning Herald*, in the wake of *Power and Influence* Attorney-General George Brandis declared foreign interference was a worsening threat to Australia's sovereignty and "promised a package of amendments to Australia's espionage and foreign interference laws by the end of the year". These would become the Malcolm Turnbull government's controversial espionage and foreign interference laws designed to re-cast normal friendly overtures by China (and Russia) as attempts at foreign interference.

The official justification for the foreign interference laws came from a still-classified report by ASIO and Turnbull's advisor John Garnaut, a former Fairfax colleague of McKenzie's who went from being a foreign correspondent in China to an ostensible espionage expert in the prime minister's office. Garnaut had similarly maligned Chau in an October 2015 *Sydney Morning Herald* article that alleged Chau was guilty of conspiring to bribe a UN official. Chau successfully sued Garnaut and Fairfax for defamation. A February 2019 federal court ruling was damning of Garnaut's credibility and character. The judge declared: he had "serious doubts about the honesty and reliability" of aspects of Garnaut's

evidence, and his credibility as a witness; Garnaut “appeared to approach the task of publishing a ‘big hit’ on Dr Chau with some considerable enthusiasm, if not glee”; Garnaut “was at times prone to exaggeration and hyperbole ... [and] showed signs of arrogance, if not smugness, concerning the article”; and Garnaut’s evidence about Chau “was far from impressive”, with some conclusions appearing to be “highly speculative and exaggerated”, given “the relatively limited amount of actual research he had conducted”.

The scathing assessment of Garnaut’s credibility raises serious questions over the Garnaut-ASIO report; yet regardless of the court ruling’s poor reflection on Garnaut’s character, on 2 March 2020 the *Herald Sun* reported Attorney-General Christian Porter had hired Garnaut to “prepare evidentiary briefs against people suspected of being undeclared agents of influence”, as part of Porter’s overhaul of the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme. (“[China narrative part one](#)”, AAS, 12 Aug. 2020)

MP Andrew Hastie: ‘non-declared member of the unofficial dark state’

On 22 May 2018 Liberal MP Andrew Hastie, another of the small anti-China circle around ASIO, used the defamation protections of parliamentary privilege to repeat Garnaut’s now publicly discredited accusations against Chau. The chair of the



Andrew Hastie (centre) speaking at a Henry Jacskon Society event in London.

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS), Hastie announced he was privy to confidential information from US intelligence agencies which confirmed Garnaut’s allegations. Hastie declared the matter posed a “threat to our democratic tradition”, warning of the “threat of foreign interference in our political institutions”.

On 24 May 2018, the ABC reported that the “avowedly anti-Communist” Hastie made the defamatory allegations because he was an “ultra-patriot”. The ABC revealed Hastie to have had a long involvement with intelligence agencies, describing him as a “non-declared member of the unofficial dark state, a former member of the Special Air Service Regiment who has been embedded in the intelligence community for more than a decade. For a number of years he was a member of SAS’s 4 Squadron, a clandestine intelligence unit within the most elite of Army squadrons that blurred the line between military and intelligence.”

During a Senate Estimates hearing that same day, ASIO Chief Duncan Lewis, who had served with Hastie in the SAS, revealed Hastie had informed him of the prospective speech against Chau 90 minutes before it happened. Lewis made clear that whilst Hastie was not seeking authorisation or clearance, ASIO made no attempt to intervene or alert the government. Hastie’s speech caused diplomatic shockwaves and a media frenzy, requiring Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to seek ASIO’s advice on possible repercussions. Revealingly, Hastie had given a “heads up” to ASIO, but not his own prime minister.

Writing in *Pearls and Irritations* on 27 July 2018, former Australian diplomat and public service chief John Menadue said the situation indicated Lewis had been acting behind the scenes, with Hastie apparently reporting to the ASIO boss. “I cannot see how either Hastie or Lewis can remain in their positions as head of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, and ASIO”, Menadue wrote.

Towards the end of his term as ASIO Chief, Lewis emerged as a vehement anti-China agitator. In the 22 November 2019 *Sydney Morning Herald*, Lewis was interviewed by another anti-China Fairfax journalist, Peter Hartcher, to whom he declared knowledge of “insidious” Chinese foreign interference operations, instigating widespread media alarm. Two days later, Nick McKenzie fronted a sensationalist “World Exclusive” for *60 Minutes*, “China’s Spy Secrets”, which ignited Chinese foreign influence hysteria, and backed up Lewis’s claims.

Hastie starred in McKenzie’s production, using the weight of his standing as chair of the PJCIS to announce two alleged Chinese “spies”. One “self-proclaimed” spy, Wang Liqiang, was later publicly discredited by ASIO (albeit ASIO waited long enough to allow rampant espionage hysteria throughout the media). (“[China narrative part three](#)”, AAS, 9 Sept. 2020) Hastie’s second “spy”, Nick Zhao, had allegedly been groomed to infiltrate the Australian parliament as a Chinese Communist Party agent though the Liberal Party, before his untimely death in March 2019; however that story also fell apart.

In the wake of McKenzie’s *60 Minutes* exposé, despite the dubious credibility of these alleged “spies”, ASIO Director Mike Burgess made the unusual step of releasing a formal statement confirming ASIO

was “actively investigating” the *60 Minutes* report, stating that “[h]ostile foreign intelligence activity continues to pose a real threat to our nation and its security.” *The Australian* on 27 November 2019 noted that “There [was] no overstating the impact” of Burgess’s statement and the 60 Minutes exposé “across federal parliament, into the bureaucracy and on the intelligence community. ... Burgess also guaranteed the stories could not be ignored.... It meant Morrison was not the one out there accusing China of nefarious activities. Burgess was enabling everyone from Morrison down to tuck in behind him, taking refuge in his statement....”

ASIO cashed in from the ensuing foreign influence hysteria that Burgess’s remarks had amplified. A week later, on 2 December, ASIO was awarded \$88 million in federal funding for a new Counter Foreign Interference Taskforce, an elite intelligence taskforce led by ASIO. (“[Australia fails the whistleblower test](#)”, AAS, 15 Dec. 2019)

ASIO media misdirection

Nick McKenzie’s sensational “exposés” also appear timed to deflect unwanted attention from ASIO. The 2019 Christchurch shooting by an Australian right-wing extremist raised uncomfortable [questions about ASIO and the rest of the Five Eyes apparatus](#): given all their unprecedented surveillance powers, how could they miss the terrorist’s obvious trail of online breadcrumbs?

At the next Senate Estimates following the shooting, Duncan Lewis denied that ASIO’s focus required a “dramatic reset” towards preventing right wing extremism, insisting “unprecedented” foreign interference and espionage were the real threat. Supporting Lewis’s determination to stay on-script was the happy coincidence of McKenzie’s highly publicised 60 Minutes exposé, *Interference*, which aired the *same evening* Lewis testified. *Interference* clearly made an impression: Senators had seen the previews and referenced the exposé, which starred a raft of intelligence-linked individuals, including John Garnaut, Andrew Hastie, and Chinese-Australians



Dr Feng Chongyi and Dr Yang Hengjun, who provided sensational, albeit anecdotal, evidence of Chinese influence in Australia. (“[China narrative part three](#)”, AAS, 9 Sept. 2020)

A 22 June 2020 episode of ABC’s Q&A, titled “Australia: Secret State?”, exposed revelations of ASIO’s prior misconduct: secret trials, secret prisoners, “overreach” by intelligence agencies and raids on an Australian journalist who revealed plans to increase domestic spying on Australians. The ensuing media coverage was damning, with Australia [likened to North Korea](#). Four days later, all was forgotten in the wake of a well-publicised raid conducted by ASIO and 40 Australian Federal Police officers on the home of NSW Labor MP Shaoquett Moselmane. The raid was conveniently captured by a camera crew fronted by McKenzie, and sensationally reported in the 26 June *Sydney Morning Herald*. (We now know that on the same day, ASIO raided the homes of four Chinese journalists, which ASIO was able to ensure the Australian media didn’t report, p. 6.)

Spy chief Duncan Lewis claimed in [Senate Estimates](#) on 18 February 2019 that he had “the greatest confidence” that ASIO officers “do not leak information to third parties”. If true, how is it that McKenzie’s camera crew managed to travel from Melbourne to Sydney in time to catch the beginning of an Attorney General-approved AFP dawn raid, under direction of ASIO, whose investigation alleged that Chinese government agents had infiltrated Moselmane’s office? Rather, the hyped raid is evidence of close cooperation between law enforcement, government and media, apparently under ASIO’s guidance. Writing for the 7 August 2020 *Pearls & Irritations*, Moselmane personally revealed that a month later, no federal officer had yet questioned him in regards to foreign interference, or even suggested he was a suspect—a strong indication the raid was for show to reinforce the foreign interference narrative in the minds of the public.

ASIO, as an arm of the Five Eyes intelligence apparatus, appears to be imitating the CIA’s infamous Operation Mockingbird, a program recruiting journalists as public-influence assets since the 1950s, which was exposed by the US Senate’s 1975-76 [Church Committee](#). ASIO’s intensive anti-China PR campaign, accomplished through coordination with biased and possibly compromised reporters, is intended to herd the Australian public and politicians towards a Five Eyes-determined foreign policy.

By Melissa Harrison, Australian Alert Service, 17 September 2020

The China Narrative, Part Five: All roads lead to ASIO

Part five of a series. Previous instalments are available here: Part [one](#); part [two](#); part [three](#); part [four](#).

The freeze in Australia's relationship with its biggest trading partner China is blamed on the assertiveness of President Xi Jinping. As the *Australian Alert Service* has demonstrated in this five-part China narrative series, however, the blame mostly lies on the Australian side, where the main culprit is Australia's domestic spy agency, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), and its Five Eyes spying alliance with US, UK, NZ and Canadian intelligence organisations.

ASIO claims on its website that "political independence remains central" to its activities. In ASIO's 24 February 2020 "Annual Threat Assessment", Director-General Mike Burgess claimed defensively that ASIO is "not a secret organisation operating as a law unto itself, conducting shadowy business around the margins of our democracy and our law. Nothing could be further from the truth." Yet a September 2020 discussion paper by Bill Browne of the Australia Institute notes that ASIO has much less parliamentary oversight than even its Five Eyes counterparts; and there is mounting evidence ASIO is attempting to extend its control over Australia's foreign policy, trade, economy and academia by stealth.

As reported in 2 December 2019 *Australian Financial Review*, ASIO's 2018-19 annual report "perplexed some foreign affairs experts and economists" because of the expanded scope of ASIO's interest. The report identified "foreign investment, joint ventures for foreign entities to acquire intellectual property, commercial partnerships with foreign players, relationships with university academics and technology sharing" as potential threats to Australia's "economic prosperity and future capability". This means that any sector where there is potential for mutually beneficial cooperation and peaceful trade with China, and other countries, is now subject to ASIO's suspicion and influence.

Espionage laws potentially hide ASIO's misconduct

In his 24 February "Annual Threat Assessment", ASIO Chief Mike Burgess referred to the "robust public discussion on the threats posed to our safety and prosperity by espionage and foreign interference", which he welcomed as a "vital part" of "strengthening the resilience" of Australia's democracy. As revealed in part four of this series, "ASIO's disinformation campaign" (AAS, 16 Sept. 2020), there is evidence ASIO directing this "robust public discussion" as the source of the extensive media disinformation that has whipped up hysteria about alleged Chinese foreign interference in Australia. Although the Turnbull government ostensibly introduced its controversial 2018 espionage and foreign interference laws in response to sensationalist media reporting and the findings of the still-classified 2017 Garnaut-ASIO report, a 10 December 2018 media release from Attorney General Christian Porter revealed the legislation was actually "requested by our national security agencies", i.e. ASIO.



Mike Burgess, ASIO Director-General of Security.

The contentious espionage and foreign interference legislation which *the national security agencies requested* inhibits the intelligence watchdog's monitoring of potential misconduct by these same agencies. The 31 January 2018 *Sydney Morning Herald* revealed that the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security (IGIS) had "raised fears that because of the way the legislation has been drafted, spies might have doubts about whether they can safely talk to the watchdog without falling foul of laws that prevent their divulging secrets to outsiders". Whistleblowers breaking secrecy provisions to report ASIO's misconduct to the IGIS face 20 years' jail if they can't satisfy the legislation's reverse burden of proof provisions. The Attorney-General's office dismissed the IGIS's concerns, saying it was "satisfied" none of these issues would be a problem.

Pretext for more powers

The 2018 espionage and foreign interference legislation established the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme (FITS), run out of the Attorney-General's office. Despite claims that legislating the FITS was urgent to protect Australia's democracy, its 2018-19 first annual report revealed FITS had not once used its powers to issue formal transparency notices to potential foreign influence operations. Instead of concluding, reasonably, that the claims of foreign interference may have been exaggerated, the government handed management of FITS to the people who would find it, whether it was there or not.

The 2 March 2020 *Herald Sun* reported that Attorney-General Christian Porter had replaced the entire FITS leadership team, assembling a "crack team of experts ... to unmask secret agents covertly pushing foreign interests on our soil", with John Garnaut hired to "prepare evidentiary briefs against

people suspected of being undeclared agents of influence.” The co-author of the 2017 Garnaut-ASIO espionage report, Garnaut was a former Fairfax foreign correspondent in China, who became the advisor to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull who influenced his hostile turn against China and his foreign interference laws. Yet when a federal judge in 2019 tested the credibility of Garnaut’s China claims in a defamation suit brought by Chinese-Australian businessman Dr Chau Chak Wing (for claims later repeated by Andrew Hastie, see below), the judge declared he had “serious doubts about the honesty and reliability” of Garnaut’s evidence.

What followed Garnaut’s appointment to the FITS was a rapid-fire series of apparently coordinated events, which justified further foreign influence legislation.

As reported in the 26 August 2020 AAS, on 6 August 2020 Minister Peter Dutton’s Home Affairs Department released a discussion white paper, *Protecting Critical Infrastructure and Systems of National Significance*, which foreshadowed the expansion of Home Affairs’ definition of “critical infrastructure” to encompass a number of industries, including universities, providing a pretext for the ASIO to interfere in these organisations for “national security”.

On 20 August, hawkish anti-China think tank the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), for which Garnaut is a consultant, published a report by Alex Joske titled *Hunting the Phoenix*, which alleged the Chinese Communist Party government uses talent recruitment programs to gain clandestine access to technology, specifically naming China’s Thousand Talents Plan. (22-year-old Joske was the researcher for Clive Hamilton’s 2018 book *Silent Invasion*, which alleged widespread Chinese infiltration of Australia.)

Four days later, *The Australian* ran a sensationalist exposé claiming: “Australian academics are giving China access to their inventions amid concerns they could be used for military or intelligence purposes.” The article, which quoted Joske and published intimidating mug shot-like photographs of 30 of the accused researchers, quoted China-agitator FBI Director Christopher Wray’s description of the Thousand Talents program as “economic espionage”.

That same day, China-hawk MP Andrew Hastie, who chairs the Parliamentary committee that provides what little oversight ASIO does receive, personally wrote to Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton expressing concerns about foreign interference in Australia’s universities. Hastie told the 28 August 2020 *Guardian* that China’s Thousand Talents Plan may be “designed to harvest research and talent and intellectual property from other countries for the benefit of the Chinese government”, saying his Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS) was willing to conduct an inquiry into the matter. Despite the fact that international research at Australia’s universities is already subject to at least seven different pieces of Commonwealth law, Hastie got his wish. On 31 August Dutton formally wrote to Hastie requesting the PJCIS inquire into potential foreign interference in Australian universities.

Despite Joske’s and Hastie’s dire warnings about the Thousand Talents program, in a 14 September interview with *Business Now Asia Pacific*, James Laurenceson, Director of the Australia-China Relations Institute at University of Technology Sydney, said the program was “entirely unremarkable”, noting countries all around the world, including Australia, have recruitment programs to attract academic talent. Laurenceson addressed media reporting over intellectual property and technology transfer concerns, noting money-conscious universities would protect their own interests if they thought particular patents had promising commercial application.

While Australian media were hysterically alleging Chinese interference in universities and research through the Thousand Talents program, the 27 August *Sydney Morning Herald* reported the Attorney General’s office [finally] used its powers under the FITS to “[demand] a Confucius Institute at an Australian university explain why it shouldn’t be on a federal foreign influence register ...” *SMH* reported this was the first action of its kind against a university body, of only three total instances of transparency notices exercised under the FITS since the scheme’s 2018 implementation. Evidently, ASIO-collaborator John Garnaut has made use of his new role with the FITS.

The attack against Confucius Institutes, which teach Chinese language and cultural programs in universities globally, was foreshadowed by John Garnaut’s 2018 testimony before US Senators, where he claimed the institutes were connected to CCP propaganda and foreign influence. Australian academic Clive Hamilton’s China-hawk propaganda book, *Silent Invasion* (2018), referred to Confucius Institutes as “Academic Malware”.



All this well-coordinated hype provided justification for new foreign interference legislation. On 3 September the government introduced the Australia's Foreign Relations (State and Territory Arrangements) Bill 2020, a bill purportedly intended to promote transparency through federal oversight of state arrangements with foreign governments and "associated entities", yet which actually introduces sweeping powers for federal veto of state and local government trade, academic, and cultural exchange programs with other countries.

Writing for the 7 September 2020 *Conversation*, Melissa Conley Tyler, a Research Fellow for the Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne, said the Bill should not pass Parliament, as "Not only has the government failed to identify any specific problem with the status quo, the bill rests on a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of modern diplomacy." She said the government had "failed to pinpoint a real problem", noting "Australia already has the ability to protect itself, with existing laws on espionage, foreign interference and foreign investment and a University Foreign Interference Taskforce." The bill "badly overreaches", Conley Tyler said. "We made it through the Cold War without needing this type of legislation. ...if, as many believe, the bill is directed at China, the irony is that fighting the Chinese Community Party seems to bring out the Australian government's authoritarian tendencies."

Conley declared the legislation "badly overreaches by seeking to regulate activities across education, culture, research and trade. For example, it treats a visual artist exchange between Victoria and Jiangsu or a library agreement between the City of Sydney and Guangzhou as issues of foreign policy. ... the legislation sends exactly the wrong message to the wider community: to be uneasy about international engagement."

In his 14th September interview with *Business Now Asia Pacific*, James Laurenceon expressed concerns the proposed Bill could be used by media or the government itself in "some kind of McCarthyist witch hunt", discouraging academic talent from working with Australian universities: "Say you're a top Chinese-Australian scientist at a leading Australian university, why would you cop that sort of vilification? You're going to go elsewhere".

ASIO's many talents: advising foreign investment and economic policy

ASIO's "scope creep" has expanded to foreign investment. ASIO's 2013-14 Annual Report, written under Director David Irvine in his last year at the agency, did not mention the words "foreign investment" or the Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB).

In 2015, Irvine was assigned to FIRB, and two years later was unexpectedly appointed chair of the organisation, despite having no background in economics or business. As reported in 21 October 2019 *Australian Financial Review*, in the years between Irvine's move from ASIO to FIRB, there has been a 12 percent annual rise in FIRB reviews by ASIO, which conducted 275 foreign investment assessments the previous year, providing advice to the FIRB.



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Five Eyes expanded to focus on economic pact

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Treasurer Josh Frydenberg announced a new Five Eyes "economic dialogue", according to the 7 June *Australian*.

ASIO's scope is broadening from advising foreign investment boards, to influencing Australia's entire economy. As reported by the Citizens Party, (24 June 2020 AAS), the Australian government is moving to allow security agencies to determine economic policy, with Prime Minister Scott Morrison announcing in June 2020 that Australia was working to take the Five Eyes spying alliance "into the commercial sphere" in order to "build trusted supply chains".

In June 2020, Treasurer Josh Frydenberg announced major reforms to Australia's foreign investment framework, introducing a national security test for foreign investors, and increased powers for the Treasurer to control foreign investment on national security grounds.

ASIO's shadow foreign policy agenda

ASIO's "scope creep" has also expanded to foreign investment and other areas of economic policy, which is allowing the Five Eyes apparatus to shape Australia's economic relationships with other countries.

In ASIO's 24 February 2020 "Annual Threat Assessment", Director-General Burgess declared parliamentarians were a potential target for foreign interference, echoing an ongoing media narrative supported by anonymous leaks from ASIO itself (see "[ASIO's disinformation campaign](#)", AAS 17 Sept.). Contradicting Burgess's professed concerns, however, there is mounting evidence that ASIO uses proxies to influence politicians and run a shadow foreign policy agenda, completely at odds with its claim of "political independence".

On 22 May 2018, Andrew Hastie triggered diplomatic shockwaves when he used parliamentary privilege to accuse prominent Chinese-Australian businessman Dr Chau Chak Wing of involvement in a bribery conspiracy, claims later discredited by a federal court. As reported by ABC on 24 May 2018, Hastie is a former member of the SAS's 4 Squadron, an elite military intelligence unit. Hastie's decision to forewarn then-ASIO chief Duncan Lewis about his intended speech, rather than his own prime minister, alarmed former diplomat and public service chief John Menadue. In a 3 January 2019 *Pearls and Irritations* article titled "Our intelligence agencies are out of control" Menadue warned: "The Chair of the parliamentary committee supposedly supervising ASIO (Hastie) and the head of ASIO (Lewis) are old SAS colleagues. Hastie has become a mouthpiece for ASIO rather than its supervisor. It is extraordinary and dangerous."

Hastie's inflammatory speech with its resulting media frenzy was curiously timed, derailing Australian government attempts to repair the Australia-China relationship. Only hours prior, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop had met with her Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, intending to smooth over diplomatic ties with China, which were strained in the wake of the foreign influence and espionage legislation Hastie himself championed.

This diplomatic sabotage wasn't a one-off. In January 2019, Defence Minister Christopher Pyne was in China attempting to repair strained bilateral ties, the first Australian defence minister to visit China in four years. The 28 January *AFR* reported Pyne's efforts to carve out a diplomatic line for Australia in regards to the US-China relationship and the contentious South China Sea; Pyne said: "In an age of increasing interdependence, a 'might is right' approach serves the long-term interests of no country." Was it a coincidence, then, that as Pyne was on his mission, a Chinese-Australian closely linked to John Garnaut and ASIO, Yang Hengjun, also visited China, where his longstanding intelligence connections likely led to his highly publicised arrest and the subsequent formal charges of espionage by Chinese authorities? The ensuing Australian media uproar strained Pyne's diplomatic efforts to repair the China-Australia relationship.

This question must be asked because a similar incident had happened to Yang previously. In 2011, right before Prime Minister Julia Gillard's first trip to China, Yang was sensationally reported missing in China, assumed detained by China's security police, by then-Fairfax journalist and his long-time friend, John Garnaut. Yang reappeared 48 hours later claiming his disappearance was a "misunderstanding", but it was enough to create a diplomatic problem for Gillard. Internal emails of the private intelligence agency Stratfor, which were obtained by WikiLeaks, reveal Stratfor's analysts thought the timing of Yang's alleged arrest by Chinese authorities was "odd", given the detrimental impact on Gillard's diplomatic visit.

Another case shows a definite pattern. Chinese-Australian Professor Feng Chongyi, also associated with John Garnaut and ASIO (see part 3 of this series, "[Espionage and interference](#)", AAS, 9 Sept.), travelled to China in March 2017, where he was detained and questioned over his connections to foreign intelligence. Feng's trip, and the ensuing Australian media uproar over his detention, coincided with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's five day visit to Australia, intended to ratify an extradition treaty which had been in the works for a decade. Li was pushing for closer trade ties, and cautioned Australia against picking sides between the USA and China, which he said could result in a return to "Cold War" mentality. ASIO-linked Feng's detention derailed the treaty.

The China narrative

This "China narrative" series has examined the influencers behind Australian academic Clive Hamilton's crusade against alleged Chinese "interference". As this author explored the background behind the China narrative, it became evident that themes prevalent in Hamilton's McCarthyite books, *Silent Invasion* and *Hidden Hand*, are revealing in their reflection of ASIO's disinformation campaign—particularly targeting and disparaging any area where friendly relations or cooperation with China could be extended.

ASIO claims "political independence", yet is expanding its influence over Australia's economy, foreign policy and academia, justified by media hysteria over Chinese "foreign interference" from a disinformation campaign directed by ASIO itself. ASIO's unprecedented "scope creep" means Australia's future is determined by the agenda of a largely unaccountable intelligence agency, which is under instruction from the Anglo-American Five Eyes apparatus—the real foreign interference in Australian politics. Unravelling the China narrative makes it abundantly clear: behind the "China threat" smokescreen, all roads lead to ASIO.

By Melissa Harrison, Australian Alert Service, 23 September 2020

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