

Canberra casts out its fake ‘Chinese spy’ Wang Liqiang

Of all the Australian establishment’s lunatic anti-China propaganda of the past five years, there has perhaps been no case more over-egged than that of purported Chinese spy Wang Liqiang. In late 2019, Nine Entertainment’s flagship current affairs program 60 Minutes and its newspapers *The Age* (of Melbourne) and the *Sydney Morning Herald* sensationally presented Wang as a hotshot young master spy who had defected to Australia. Despite immediate refutations of Wang’s story by experts including a retired senior Taiwanese intelligence official, followed within days by public scepticism on the part of Commonwealth counterintelligence agency the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), proponents of anti-China hysteria continued to promote Wang’s story, and denounce anyone who questioned it—or dared mention that according to Chinese officials, Wang was in fact a wanted fraudster who had fled the country on a fake passport—as an agent or “useful idiot” of Beijing. But as usual, we “idiots” get the last laugh. According to an exclusive in the 8 January *Sunday Telegraph*, the federal Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) has in effect accepted Beijing’s side of the story, as have the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) and ASIO, by rejecting Wang’s asylum claim and ordering that he be deported to China.

When they reported his story on Sunday, 24 November 2019, following his appearance on 60 Minutes the previous night, the *Age* and *SMH* described the then 26-year-old Wang as “A Chinese spy [who] has risked his life to defect to Australia and is now offering a trove of unprecedented inside

intelligence on how China conducts its interference operations abroad.”¹ He had “revealed the identities of China’s senior military intelligence officers in Hong Kong”, they reported, “as well as providing details of how they fund and conduct political interference operations in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Australia ... [and] revealed in granular detail how Beijing covertly controls listed companies to fund intelligence operations, including the surveillance and profiling of dissidents and the co-opting of media organisations.” Among other things, Wang claimed to have personally directed the October 2015 operation to abduct “dissident” Hong Kong booksellers to the Chinese mainland. Later, “His handlers in China issued him a fake South Korean passport to gain entry to Taiwan and help China’s efforts to systematically infiltrate its political system, including directing a ‘cyber army’ and Taiwanese operatives to meddle in the 2018 municipal elections”, *SMH* reported.

As the AAS reported at the time, however, none of Wang’s claims stacked up. A bookseller abducted in the operation Wang claimed to have led, who had since returned to Hong Kong, told the 25 November 2019 *South China Morning Post* that Wang’s description of the operation did not match his own experience. In the same article, retired deputy director of Taiwan’s Military Intelligence Bureau Weng Yen-ching noted that at just 26, Wang was even then far too young to have been in charge of sensitive operations, let alone four years earlier when he supposedly ran the clandestine abduction operation in Hong Kong. Yun Jiang, a former Australian Government policy adviser, and Macquarie University researcher Adam Ni noted the same day in their online newsletter *China Neican* that at least three times during his appearance on 60 Minutes, Wang had “called by the wrong name the Central Military Commission’s Joint Staff Department (or its predecessor, the General Staff Department), which conducts military intelligence operations. On each one of the three occasions, he used a different wrong name.” That is, he did not remember the name of the Chinese government department he supposedly worked for. And finally, the 27 November 2019 *Australian* reported that whilst Wang’s fake Korean passport had the name “Gang Wang” written on it in English, two linguists had independently verified that the Korean lettering read “Cho Kyung-mee”, and moreover the latter is a feminine name. In short, the document was a crude and obvious forgery—as Nine would have known, had it bothered to do basic fact-checking.

Hastie too hasty

The now Shadow Defence Minister Andrew Hastie MP, then chairman of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJICIS) which ostensibly oversees Australia’s intelligence agencies, abused his position to promote Wang’s story, in the aid of spreading anti-China hysteria. As reported in a 25-29 November 2019 series of articles in the *Australian*, Hastie claimed to have been contacted by an unnamed “intermediary” of Wang’s while at an Australian-American Leadership Dialogue meeting in Hawaii, and to have brokered Wang’s contact with ASIO from a secure US military communications facility graciously provided by his hosts.² But rather than leave Wang to ASIO, as was appropriate, Hastie appeared on 60 Minutes to declare him a “friend to democracy” and demand the Australian government grant him asylum. As for ASIO, by the time Wang’s story went to air it had been in contact with him for about six weeks, more than long enough to assess his credibility. It waited until five days after his 60 Minutes appearance, however, to declare him “not the high-level operative-turned-defector he claimed to be”, allowing media hysteria and diplomatic damage to ensue in the meantime.

Responding to the *Age* and *SMH*’s reports of 24 November 2019, the Chinese embassy in Canberra issued a statement later that day noting that in October 2016 Wang had been convicted of fraud in his native Fujian Province, and sentenced to one year and three months’ jail with a further eighteen month sentence suspended. In April 2019 the Shanghai police had opened another investigation into Wang after he “allegedly cheated 4.6 million yuan (about US\$654,339) from a person surnamed Shu through a fake investment project involving car import in February [2019]”, the embassy said,

whereupon he fled to Australia via Hong Kong carrying a fake Chinese passport and Hong Kong residency card.

At the time, Nine publications and other assorted China-bashers painted the embassy's statement as a clumsily fabricated smear. Embarrassingly for them, however, the *Sunday Telegraph* reports that two years later the DHA wrote to Wang to reject his claim for a refugee visa on exactly those grounds. No doubt his former backers, having long since wrung him dry of propaganda value, will be hoping the authorities treat Wang harshly upon his return to China so they can squeeze out a few last drops. In the meantime, we await (surely in vain) a show of contrition from his erstwhile champion Hastie, who is once again exposed as either a liar or a gullible fool, unfit for such a high office as he currently holds.

Footnotes:

[1.](#) "Nonsensical 'Chinese spy' report vindicates Keating's scorn for media, intel agencies' China-bashing", AAS, 27 Nov. 2019.

[2.](#) "[The China Narrative, part three: Espionage and interference](#)", AAS, 9 Sept. 2020.

By Richard Bardon, Australian Alert Service, 11 January 2023