

Dan Southerland, former executive editor of Radio Free Asia

Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission

**Hearing on Chinese Information Control, Global Media Influence, and Cyber Warfare
Strategy**

Panel on China's Global Media Influence

May 4, 2017

I've been asked to comment on China's global media influence as well as on the current challenges facing both foreign and local journalists working in China. I'll focus my written testimony first on the foreign correspondents and Chinese journalists and then on China's global media influence. I'll save many of my recommendations regarding the journalists working in China for my oral presentation.

I'll devote the lengthiest part of my written testimony to China's global media influence and save a number of my comments and recommendations regarding the foreign and domestic media in China for the oral presentation.

At the end of this written testimony I'll describe China's media influence on two continents—Australia and Africa. Australia's experience illustrates the lively debates which China's influence on domestic Chinese-language media can arouse. It also reveals the many factors that can cause resistance to Chinese "soft power" influence in its many forms. Africa's experience illustrates China's ability to invest in local media partnerships and to broadcast Chinese state media content across a continent embracing more than 50 countries.

First, a summary of what I see as the challenges facing local and foreign journalists in China:

When it comes to the challenges facing foreign reporters, the Foreign Correspondents Club of China's "Working Conditions Report" for 2016 says it all:

"The reporting environment for foreign journalists is proving hostile for yet another year in China—a situation that correspondents judge to be distant from basic international standards. Intimidation of sources and local staff, growing harassment and obstruction are major challenges for journalists conducting their work.

"The annual Working Conditions survey ... finds an alarming new form of harassment against reporters, some of whom have been called into...meetings with the State Security Bureau. The survey also finds an increase in the use of force and manhandling by authorities against journalists performing their work.

“Vast areas of the country remain inaccessible to foreign reporters. Those who took part in government-sponsored trips to Tibet...expressed mixed satisfaction about the degree of access obtained. It is still largely impossible for foreign journalists to report from Tibet, Tibetan areas or Xinjiang without incurring serious interference.”

The good news is that several foreign reporters whose visas were denied have now been able return to China and once again begin reporting there. A notable example is Chris Buckley of *The New York Times*, a fluent Chinese speaker who has spent many years reporting from China. He was forced to leave the country in 2012 after *The Times* reported on the wealth accumulated by the family of former Premier Wen Jiabao.

Expulsions of foreign reporters have been relatively rare in recent years. No reporter whom I know of has been expelled since Ursula Gautier, a French reporter for the *L’Obs*, was forced to leave in 2015.

This was the first expulsion since 2012, when Melissa Chan of Al Jazeera’s English Service was forced out, apparently for reporting on China’s hidden black jails, or detention centers, and on land grabs by provincial Chinese officials.

Difficult though conditions might be for foreign reporters, conditions for Chinese reporters have been even more challenging in recent years. When I reported from China for five and half years in the 1980s and again for several months in 1995, my colleagues and I knew that the worst that could happen to us was to be expelled, and a few colleagues were expelled.

But Chinese reporters could be jailed, and several were. As recently as 2015, Zhang Miao of the German weekly *Die Zeit* went to prison for nine months. She had accompanied a reporter for *Die Zeit* on a visit to Hong Kong so that she could help to cover the pro-democracy protests occurring there. When she returned, Ms. Zhang shared some photos of Hong Kong demonstrations on the social media service WeChat.

Since China’s president, Xi Jinping, took power in 2012, several Chinese journalists who have offended the state or the CCP have been forced to engage in televised confessions regarding their alleged wrongdoing.

Investigative reporting by Chinese journalists, the most difficult kind of reporting to pursue in China, has been in decline for a number of years, with many top reporters dropping out.

As David Bandurski of the China Media Project (CMP) in Hong Kong explained in a post on April 25, “Over the past few years, it has been increasingly clear that much of the experience that the journalism profession in China has gained since the 1990s is being hollowed out by deeper economic, political, and technical shifts in the media industry.”

Many factors, from poor pay to the digital transformation of the industry and the vagaries of censorship, have driven the exodus of experienced reporters from China's media, according to Bandurski.

A 2016 PR Newswire report showed that more than 80 percent of the "front-line journalists" reporting the news in China were 30 years old or younger.

Following the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 in March 2014, many Chinese Internet users were appalled by the inability of Chinese journalists to get scoops such as those reported by CNN, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, says Bandurski.

He cites columnist Sun Letao who noted evidence of some young journalists' inexperience when covering a National People's Congress meeting at the time. "What audiences witnessed were great numbers of young reporters, looking like they had just stepped out of college...stopping representatives to ask the same stereotyped questions, and writing the same stereotyped reports." Some were pulling aside delegates to pose with them for selfies—not a sign of professional behavior.

By "stereotyped reports" Sun apparently meant, "safe reports" lacking in new or challenging insights and reports that would not offend the censors.

Since 2014, the Chinese media have remained "virtually silent on major stories, says Bandurski. Only the Tianjin explosions of August 2015 have offered "a truly notable exception to the lull in quality reporting by China's domestic media," he says.

"The explosions were a story of such immense scale, unfolding in a highly populated urban area, that coverage was impossible to quell entirely."

All of the reasons cited in a recent WeChat article on journalism becoming a profession dominated by the young and inexperienced "might be resolved if the industry was permitted to develop a sense of professional purpose," says Bandurski.

He cites President Xi Jinping speech on media policy of February 2016, in which Xi stressed that the media must "sing the main theme and transmit positive energy."

Positive stories are the order of the day for the Chinese media at home and abroad as China stresses positive stories and "soft power" image-building.

Given the restrictions faced by the Chinese media, it's no wonder that many prominent Chinese journalists have simply dropped out or gone into business. Following a golden era of investigative reporting in the 1990s, one of the most famous among them, Wang Keqin, began devoting himself to philanthropic efforts on the part of the Chinese coal miners who suffered injuries but received little compensation in the end for their injuries. In some cases, they received no retirement pay or experienced long delays before they could receive it.

One thing that the Party still has difficulty blocking is videos provided by citizen reporters from all over China, whose work reaches the outside world. Foreign reporters can use these videos as tips for stories. The videos sometimes provide information regarding issues on China's taboo list, such as popular protests against provincial officials who grab farmland without providing villages with adequate compensation. The videos are particularly helpful when they come from restricted regions such as Tibet and Xinjiang.

But the citizen journalists who send these videos to the outside world risk imprisonment for doing so. In April 2016, a Tibetan blogger was jailed for sharing "sensitive news" and a video showing police beating people in the streets. In December of last year, a Tibetan monk was sentenced for sharing "information and images."

Finally, I should stress that the Chinese assistants who work for foreign reporters often come under pressure and run the greatest personal risks in pursuing sensitive stories.

News assistants conduct research, translate materials, and arrange interviews. As Yaqiu Wang, correspondent for the Committee to Protect Journalists explained in late 2015, "their role is a precarious one, and they must straddle the expectations of their employers and the pressures of China's security apparatus." They are on occasion invited for intimidating "chats," or tea, and questioned about their employers, and their sources. In some cases, the security police have been known to go to the assistants' families in an attempt to pressure them.

But as a former correspondent for Agence France-Presse told the Asia Society, "Most foreign bureaus would be nothing without their Chinese news assistants."

China's global media influence

Working with a budget many times larger than that which the United States devotes to international broadcasting, China has expanded and transformed its overseas operations with the aim of improving China's image while downplaying outright propaganda.

All of this fits in with China's larger aim of expanding its "soft power" alongside its growing economic and military power.

China is spending billions to improve its image across the world, but the results so far are mixed. The reach of Beijing's overseas media is impressive and should not be underestimated. And, as Shanthi Kalathil has noted, with the help of world-class international journalists, China's CCTV has developed the capability of producing "sophisticated long-form reports on complex international issues such as climate change."

At the same time it might be a mistake to regard such state-media developments as simply part of a juggernaut, or irresistible force.

While some efforts to diversify and create more engaging websites, such as the new “Sixth Tone” appear to be smart moves, many people in many countries are still quick to detect hidden propaganda when they see it.

A fairly recent flawed move by China’s main overseas television outlet, until recently known as China Central Television, or CCTV, shows how things can go wrong.

In December 2016, Beijing rebranded its main overseas television outlet, until recently known as China Central Television, or CCTV. But the rebranding, or makeover, has several shortcomings, according to media experts.

In an apparent effort to show that it has modernized and gone global, the network needed to stop using the acronym CCTV, which might remind some people of surveillance cameras. So the network came up with a new name: China Global News, or CGN TV.

One problem arose at the outset. CGN is difficult to remember, and it sounds vaguely like CNN.

David Bandurski, the widely respected editor of the China Media Project at Hong Kong University, describes CGN’s new website as unattractive and “ill conceived.”

In contrast, Beijing’s smartest media move over the past year or two might have been the creation of *Sixth Tone*, an English-language site spin-off from *The Paper* in Shanghai.

Sixth Tone is edited by Colum Murphy, an experienced former *WallStreet Journal* business reporter, who is described by one of his former colleagues as “a very capable editor.”

While subject to censorship, Sixth Tone enjoys a bit more freedom than most Chinese state media, because it’s in English.

Foreign Policy magazine said after *Sixth Tone*’s kick-off a little more than a year ago in April, 2016, that if the U.S. media start-up Vox were acquired by the Chinese Communist Party, “it might resemble *Sixth Tone*.”

Reasons for focusing on China’s media influence in Africa and Australia

When it came to China’s global influence, I decided to focus on Africa, partly because, CCTV, now known as CGN TV, and the official Chinese news agency Xinhua have established good relations with governments as well as media partnerships with African media across the continent. This seems partly due to Chinese efforts to present African developments in a favorable light while countering what some African governments regard as mostly negative news reports carried by Western media.

While CGN and Xinhua have made heavy investments in Africa and have secured a number of media partnerships, few quantitative studies are available to precisely measure China’s impact in Africa. And the impact obviously varies from county to country. In a continent with a total of

more than 50 nations, research in one of them might not apply to the others. But looking at it from Beijing's point of view, China can boast of some media success stories in Africa.

Meanwhile, a number of African academics and human rights advocates say that China's media links and African government connections are encouraging some African leaders to feel that they can control, harass, and repress African journalists with impunity.

I chose to focus on China's media influence on Chinese-language media in Australia, partly because that influence has been extensive. But I also think Australia is worth looking at because of its alliance with the United States. China has been trying, unsuccessfully and not so subtly so far, to win Australia's support or at least its neutrality regarding China's expansionist activities in the South China Sea. Some say that China might be trying to drive a wedge between Australia and the United States. Australians have been debating every aspect of China's involvement in Australia from Confucius institutes, donations by local Chinese to political parties and universities, and even the smallest matters, such as lift-outs, or inserts, of *The China Daily* in Australian newspapers.

The Australian example is also interesting because similar debates over growing Chinese media influence have also taken place in Canada and the United States. But nowhere, it seems, is there more debate and talk of it than in Australia.

Here are my findings regarding Chinese media influence in Africa and Australia:

China and Africa

China's media outreach in Africa has been part of a worldwide effort aimed at breaking what Beijing regards as a "monopoly" over international media discourse.

This was laid out clearly in late 2013 by the then Chinese ambassador to Kenya, Liu Guangyuan, when he stated at a seminar in Nairobi that Chinese and African media "...must break the monopoly of the current international discourse." (See JHU's 2016 Policy Brief No. 12)

Ambassador Liu described this alleged monopoly as part of a Western "conspiracy." But it's not clear how many Africans believe that Western media narratives are part of a conspiracy.

The ambassador's comments have to be placed in the context of a multi-billion dollar effort that began nearly a decade ago when then President Hu Jintao gave priority to "soft power" at a Communist Party Congress. Once he took power in 2012, President Xi Jinping gave even more attention to making soft power a part of his vision of a rejuvenated China regaining national greatness. Under Xi, this also involves countering Western concepts, such as "universal values," which is now on China's media taboo list.

Africa is the continent where China's efforts to promote its values through media and counter Western narratives appear to be most visible. These efforts include a major expansion of Chinese

state media offices and broadcasts throughout the continent; training for African journalists; and perhaps of most long-range significance, Chinese partnerships with and investments in African media organizations.

According to a research report conducted or sponsored by the China Africa Research Initiative at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS-CARI), Chinese media outlets are now present across Africa. Among foreign media outlets, Xinhua bureaus “in many cases” have become a primary source of news alongside Western news agencies such as Agence France-Presse, the Associated Press, and Reuters.

The English-language *China Daily* has an office in Kenya and can be obtained for free in several African countries.

China has been training African journalists, some of whom have been offered scholarships. China has also invited African journalists to cover special events in China and to take expenses-paid tours of the country.

In a report prepared with support from SAIS-CARI, researcher Jakup Emil Hansen says that while “the Chinese do not appear to be directly or overtly attempting to influence journalists through their training programs, it is clear that courses are intended to indirectly influence participants by promoting China’s view of media’s role in society.” But he concludes that the extent to which they’ve succeeded isn’t clear.

One area in which the Chinese media might be succeeding is in broadcasting Chinese language lessons. According to Kenneth King, a scholar and author of a book on “China’s Aid and Soft Power in Africa,” starting in 2008 China Radio International (CRI) began broadcasting short lessons in Chinese. This, King says, is one of the resources that played a part in “encouraging young people to become interested in China and in studying Chinese.”

Most significantly perhaps, China has also made gains through media investments and partnerships.

One example of a Chinese media partnership stands out. In early 2015, two South African billionaire entrepreneurs launched the African News Agency (ANA), with the aim of carrying more positive stories than Western news agencies provide. Those stories would portray Africa as a continent of hope and opportunity.

ANA said that it would be using China’s Xinhua News Agency for international news as well as photos along with other partners, such as Germany’s Deutsche Presse Agentur (DPA).

In South Africa, China now has a 20 percent stake in one of the country’s largest media entities, the Independent Newspaper Group, which launched ANA in 2015. As an online report said at the time, the 20 percent will go to a new entity to be incorporated in tax haven Mauritius called Interacom Investment Holdings. Its shareholders are China International Television Corporation

(CITVC) and the China Africa Development Fund (CADF). The ruling African National Congress (ANC) supported the Chinese investment. Some journalists feared that China would now be able to exert undue influence over the English language newspapers in one of Africa's most robust media environments. (See correspondent Geoffrey York of the Toronto *Globe and Mail* for extensive reporting from Johannesburg on Interacom and its shareholders.)

South Africa has Africa's most developed economy, but it has been mired in corruption scandals, which contributes to doubts about the ANC's relations with China.

According to Corruption Watch, the South African chapter of Transparency International, South Africa has consistently ranked among those countries perceived to have a "serious corruption" problem.

Although South Africa's dealings with China may lack full transparency, the country is also the site of ongoing debates over what China's growing influence might mean for press freedom.

Emeka Umejei, a doctoral candidate at the University of Witwaterstrand University in Johannesburg, says that "China's media expansion in Africa has elicited widespread debate among scholars and practitioners on its impact on journalism and democracy on the African continent."

Umejei notes that China media organizations based in Africa make sure that content provided by their African employees doesn't offend Chinese interests on the continent. Story ideas proposed by African journalists have to be approved or rejected by Beijing.

A story on China's controversial activities in the South China Sea is likely to quote high-ranking Chinese officials but fail to quote Southeast Asian officials who protest those activities.

Mohamed Keita, the former advocacy coordinator in Africa for the U.S.-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) says that China's influence in African affairs has been "very toxic for democracy."

Anne Nelson, an author, lecturer, and international media consultant, warned in a report four years ago on CCTV's international expansion that "China's integrated approach to media investment could provide it with a high level of control. African leaders are assured that they can practice censorship with impunity."

But aside from any Chinese influence, African journalists have long faced difficult challenges in doing their work in a number of African countries.

The CPJ has documented numerous cases of African journalists who have been harassed, intimidated, jailed, and even killed by repressive governments and their police forces while trying to carry out their media work.

In the CPJ's 2016 prison census, Egypt, Eritrea, and Ethiopia respectively were among the top countries jailing journalists, after Turkey and China. Eritrea is the most censored country in the world, according to the CPJ, with Ethiopia coming in number 4.

The repression of African journalists is a story in itself that could use more coverage but it's not likely to be covered by the Chinese media.

In the meantime, international media organizations with foreign correspondents based in Africa have been cutting back.

It's worth noting, however, that U.S.-funded Voice of America has a strong media presence in Africa alongside the BBC, Al Jazeera, Deutsche Welle, and Radio France International. VOA claims to be reaching more than 60 million people a week online, on shortwave radio, and through television and radio partners across the continent in English, French, Portuguese, and 10 African languages and dialects.

Zimbabwe takes Western broadcasting seriously enough to use radio jamming equipment provided by China in order to block shortwave broadcasts from the VOA, the BBC, Deutsche Welle, and an exile Zimbabwean group based in London. Ethiopia apparently did the same at one point.

VOA has focused heavily on reaching young Africans through radio, television, and social media. Young people, who account for nearly 70 percent of the population, are the most vulnerable to violent extremism.

According to Anna Quintal, Africa program coordinator for the CPJ, while some international media organizations have indeed cut back, local African correspondents, or stringers, have been filling gaps by providing content to foreign news organizations.

Meanwhile, Quintal says, vibrant online media, including Quartz Africa and some African media groups, have online subsidiaries that go beyond a tendency of some African media to focus only on their own countries and not invest in covering other countries on the continent.

New York-based Quartz launched its second international mobile-first design website in Africa in 2015. Its first international launch was in India. Quartz calculated that the high penetration of mobile devices in Africa would allow it to reach a growing population of African entrepreneurs and innovators. Quartz focuses on technology and business news in contrast with more crisis-driven media.

“So the idea that China is helping to feed the void left by Western media who no longer maintain a network of foreign correspondents in Africa is a bit superficial,” says Quintal.

But the staffing cutbacks by some Western media organizations hardly fits with the idea promoted by China—and some Africans—that the West is involved in a conspiracy to perpetuate a monopoly over Africa-related information flows.

China and Australia

Australia would appear to be a country where China would have a good chance of winning hearts and minds, partly through China's strong trade ties with Australia but also through Beijing's media connections there.

But a debate not always favorable to China is underway in Australia at the moment over what is seen by some as Chinese government attempts to promote pro-Beijing views through the country's Chinese-language media and through a local Chinese "patriotic association."

Australia's debate over Chinese influence is worth examining, partly because it shows how Chinese media influence can backfire. It also shows how unforeseen events, such as China's recent detention for more than a week of a Chinese permanent resident of Australia, tend to undermine China's efforts to win potential friends in Australia.

More broadly, signs of China's media influence among Chinese residents are raising questions in Australia over China's "soft power" and whether it is to be feared.

Australian journalists at *The Sydney Morning Herald* have reported on possible Chinese influence on a "patriotic association" called the "Australian Action Committee for Peace and Justice."

The committee, which purports to represent Australia's Chinese community, drew attention a little more than a year ago when it urged the country's "political elite" to avoid criticism of China's controversial claim to most of the South China Sea.

The committee called on Australia's leadership take care when discussing sensitive issues in April of 2016 just as Malcolm Turnbull prepared to make his first trip to China as Australia's prime minister.

Australia's debate has been partly fueled by a political scandal that erupted in September of last year. Senator Sam Dastyari of the opposition Labor Party resigned on Sept. 7 after acknowledging that he'd received funds from Chinese companies to pay off debt and a legal fee. After having supported the U.S. position on the South China Sea, Dastyari later stated that Australia should take a neutral position on China's claims to most of the sea. Prime Minister Turnbull said that Dastyari's change of position on the issue was a case of receiving "cash for comment."

Dastyari had accepted funds from the Yuhu Group, a property development company headed by Huang Xiangmo, a wealthy Chinese businessman known to be a supporter of China. Huang has contributed funds over the years to both of Australia's major political parties.

Huang was the founding donor of the Australia-China Relations Institute (ACRI) at the University of Technology in Sydney, self described as a think tank whose work is "based on a positive and optimistic view of Australia-China relations."

Huang resigned as the head of ACRI in September 2016, saying that he didn't want "unfair" publicity about his political donations to distract from the "good work" that Institute was doing.

Some Australian scholars have called ACRI a "propaganda vehicle" for Beijing.

Chinese media in Australia

On July 10, 2016, *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that Beijing had gained control over "messaging and propaganda" appearing in nearly all of the Chinese-language newspapers published in Australia. "Politically sensitive or unfavorable coverage of China and the ruling Communist Party has been effectively stopped outside all but a couple of Chinese language outfits..." said reporters Kelsey Munro and Philip Wen. In addition, they said, the Chinese government had stepped up efforts to filter what Chinese readers in Australia saw online through social media and through WeChat, a popular mobile phone application developed by China's Tencent Inc. which censors sensitive subjects.

Wanning Sun, a professor of media and communication at University of Technology, Sydney, published a 62-page paper last year for ACRI titled "Chinese-Language Media in Australia," which takes a less alarming view of Chinese media influence.

Despite the criticism of ACRI's apparent pro-China leanings, Professor Sun makes some interesting points.

She notes that the Chinese-language media had shifted over the past decade or so from a focus on Cantonese speakers to a focus mainly on a Mandarin-speaking migrant community from the People's Republic of China.

At the same time, Chinese state media's "going global" initiatives have dovetailed with the business acumen of elite Chinese migrants..." Sun says.

"As a result, migrant Chinese media—and for that matter—mainstream Australian media... have been willing to lend their platforms as carriers of China's state media," she says.

"Also, for business reasons, she adds," some Chinese media may from time to time engage in a certain degree of self censorship."

And finally, she says, Chinese-language media have shifted from representations of China that were once mostly critical to representations that are “sympathetic or even supportive.”

But Sun argues that the view that much of the Chinese-language media “has now been ‘bought off,’ ‘taken over,’ or is owned or directly controlled by China’s propaganda authorities is simplistic...”

There is, however, she says, “clear evidence that Chinese propaganda has moved offshore from the mainland and become to some extent integrated with Chinese media in Australia. But this does not necessarily mean that such ‘localized’ propaganda has a direct impact on Chinese-speaking audiences.”

Sun says that better-educated Chinese migrants get their news from a wide range of sources; that the circulation of Chinese newspapers in Australia is “relatively small;” and that they can easily get Chinese propaganda content directly from mainland Chinese media.

The real problem, she says, is that many PRC residents in Australia “mostly side with China if there is a potential clash between the two nations on matters of national pride, sovereignty, and territoriality,” presumably a reference to disputes over Taiwan as well as China’s activities in the South China Sea.

Driving a wedge

In his 2007 book “Charm Offensive; How China’s Soft Power is Transforming the World,” Joshua Kurlantzick wrote that China might drive a wedge between America and its closest allies. He singled out Australia as an example.

Ten years later, China doesn’t appear to have succeeded in driving that wedge, but at times statements emanating from China make it seem to be trying to do so. And some such statements aren’t taken well by many Australians.

In 2016, China’s *Global Times* newspaper, which is part of China’s Communist Party mouthpiece, *The People’s Daily*, blasted Australia for urging China to abide by an international tribunal in the Hague that disputed China’s claims to most of the South China Sea.

Euan Graham, director of the international security program at Australia’s prestigious Lowy Institute, said that threats of revenge against Australia and harsh and insulting language used by the *Global Times* amounted to “bullying.” In an opinion piece written for *The Australian* newspaper, Graham added that whatever the *Global Time*’s intention, “its crassly phrased effort at intimidation should awaken more Australians to China’s growing chauvinism and the strategic risks it poses.”

China seems to have managed to have alarmed much of Australia’s defense and security establishment. *Time* magazine correspondent Charlie Campbell in Beijing reported on March 29

that “Australia’s wariness is partly prompted by China’s ham-fisted attempts of gaining domestic political leverage.”

In 2013, Campbell says, Chinese hackers stole the blueprints for the Australian Security Intelligence Organization’s (ASIO) new \$480 million headquarters.

According to Campbell, “the Dastyari case prompted Australian intelligence services to map the flow of Chinese money and businessmen into Australia, augmenting demands for an end to donations to political parties.”

There are also calls to ban China-funded Confucius Institutes from Australian universities. Australian critics say that the institutes promote Beijing’s political agenda.

So it’s clear that despite China’s influence among Chinese-language media in Australia, a number of elements make it difficult for China to influence Australia as much as it would like, much less drive a wedge between Australia and its U.S. ally.

Australian attitudes are affected, for example, by Chinese purchases, or “buy-ups,” of high-cost housing in the Sydney area. Rich Chinese are seen as driving the costs even higher.

The possible impact of Chinese money going to Australian politicians is obviously another concern.

But interestingly, Huang Xiangmo, sometimes described as China’s point man in Australia or the “Reigning Emperor of the Chinese Community,” has said that he doesn’t think he’s getting his money’s worth.

In an interview last September with Australia’s *Financial Review*, Huang said that he’d received no benefit from his donations and contacts with Australian politicians. He acknowledged paying Senator Sam Dastyari’s legal bills but denied getting any benefit from it.

The *Financial Review* cited an editorial written by Huang for *The Global Times* that suggested that the Chinese community would demand “a greater say in Australian public life after being used as a ‘cash cow’ by both sides of politics, then ignored.”

Helen Clark is an Australian journalist and former foreign correspondent who reports on Asia-Australia relations and writes on China and Australia for varied publications.

Clark says that when viewing Chinese influence in Australia or a lack thereof one must take into account much more than expanding Chinese-language media influence.

She concludes that “despite the strong economic relationship, China is unlikely to be able to mount a front-on charm offensive in Aussie media aimed at the general populace as there remains too much fear and mistrust.”