

*Silent Invasion: China's Influence in Australia*, by Clive Hamilton. Melbourne: Hardie Grant, 2018, pp. 376. RRP \$34.99 (pb).

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Clive Hamilton is an unusual person to have written this book. An environmentalist of the crusading kind, he founded and ran for almost two decades the left-leaning Australia Institute and was a Greens parliamentary candidate. He explains at the outset that his concern over Chinese influence began in 2008 when he joined a group of Tibetans protesting peacefully outside Parliament House as the Torch arrived on its way to the Beijing Olympics: 'The pro-Tibet protesters, vastly out-numbered, were mobbed and abused by a sea of Chinese people wielding red flags ... What happened that day left me shocked ... And I was affronted. How dare they arrive, on the doorstep of our parliament, the symbol of our democracy, and shut down a legitimate protest?' Revelations in 2016 about Chinese political donations that led to the resignation of ALP Senator Sam Dastyari reignited Hamilton's concern: 'China and Australian democracy had collided again ... I decided to investigate and write a book so that Australians could understand what has been happening to our country'.

In summary, Hamilton's argument is as follows. In relatively recent years the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has heavily promoted the world view that, after being humiliated by the west in the colonial era, China has recovered strength and prestige under Communist rule. It is now on the way to world domination. A new generation has imbibed this anti-western nationalism and equates loyalty to the CCP with loyalty to China. The Chinese Government sees Australia as part of its sphere of influence and a weak link in the western bloc. Its aim is to break the ANZUS alliance and make Australia a tributary state through systematic infiltration. Part of the strategy is to mobilise the local Chinese community as a 'fifth column'. Those not prepared to do the CCP's bidding are at risk of coercion and persecution. Chinese community organisations have been turned into fronts which promote the CCP line. Attempts are being made to place Chinese loyal to the CCP in parliament, key public sector and university positions. Chinese businessmen who flourish with CCP support have been encouraged to buy influence in Australia, particularly in political parties, through large donations. Australia's economic dependence on China makes it vulnerable to coercion.

Early in the book, Hamilton attempts to refute some of the charges he (correctly) anticipated would be levelled against him. In response to those who say, 'The US has dominated Australia for decades, what's new?', Hamilton says, 'The US never had the kind of economic leverage over Australia China has, nor made threats to damage us if we do not toe its line. It hasn't endangered our democratic system of elected governments and its government has never used money to buy off our politicians'. This is something of an over-statement. Favoured Australian trade unionists received free trips to the US during the cold war. The CIA-funded Association for Cultural Freedom waged ideological war against the Australian left. Richard Nixon was so enraged by Gough Whitlam's attempts to forge an independent foreign policy that the Australia-US alliance almost foundered.

Hamilton denies that his book is racist and Sinophobic. He stresses that he is not conflating the Chinese people and their Government; to the contrary, that is a tactic he accuses Beijing of using to solidify its control over the Chinese diaspora. His target is the CCP not the Chinese nation. Hamilton says many Chinese Australians share his concerns about Communist influence. A number are quoted in the book.

A forthright author who is not afraid of controversy, Hamilton writes in a polemical, racy style; for example, 'If money talks in Australia, it increasingly does so in Mandarin'. This makes his book readable, but it does tend to inflame emotions. Hamilton also indulges in some personal attacks which are regrettable and unnecessary. That said, Hamilton has done his research and marshalled the facts to support his thesis. He has courageously raised a key issue regarding Australia's future. Is a resurgent China a benign power, best placated as US influence wains, or a potential hegemon intent on turning Australia into a sham democracy like Hong Kong? It is to be hoped that this book receives the serious consideration it deserves rather than unthinking rejection from vested interests of the left and right.