

Marsupial Madness and the Batty Media

by **Jocelyn Chey**

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Reliable sources of information on Australian ties with China do not include the ultra-nationalistic PRC [Global Times](#) when it applauds Australia receiving a "slap to the face," or the [Vision Times](#), which reports that people have recovered from COVID-19 after reciting the "Nine Sacred Words" of the Falun Gong sect. Nonsense spreads like wildfire through social media. Those looking for objective or nuanced reporting have to work harder.

The *Global Times* is published by China's national newspaper, the *People's Daily*, that was once described to me by a local interpreter as the "mouth organ of the Party" – he actually meant "mouthpiece," but I did not correct him, feeling it was an accurate description. It is usually regarded as channelling the hard-line faction of the Chinese Communist Party and recently [has endorsed](#) "Wolf Warrior" statements by spokespersons of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a number of overseas diplomats. Its comments on Australia-China relations should be discounted. Right now, when Xi Jinping is chairing the vitally important National People's Congress, that Ministry and all branches of government are vying to demonstrate their political credentials.

The *Global Times* is not simply writing for an international audience. Its editors know that its domestic reception is more important to their paper's future and to their careers. It is important not to take their blustering as a whole-of-government statement, whether it is this "slap to the face" or the description in the same commentary of Australia as a "giant kangaroo that serves as a dog of the US." This latter phrase was actually quoted from an unnamed "netizen," according to the *Times*, and was not their own words or from a government spokesperson, although Australian media have taken it as an insult from an official Chinese spokesperson.

It is equally important to evaluate properly all statements by the *Vision Times* in Australia and its other embodiment, *Kan Zhongguo* (Eyes on China), which is a free paper available from Chinese groceries. The *Vision Times* is not a reliable source of information on China. Its commentaries adopt a highly critical standpoint. Following Trump's line, it has taken to enlarging on the evils of what it labels the "PRC virus." Launched in 2001 in the US, *Vision Times* is apparently linked with the Falun Gong sect, as the "Nine Sacred Words" story above demonstrates.

Falun Gong has valid reasons to attack the PRC, where it is a banned "heretical movement" and its members liable to arrest and enforced re-education. Its own

publication, the multi-language *Epoch Times*, an online daily paper, also has print versions that are being distributed for free in some Sydney suburbs and regional centres including Wagga Wagga. Recently the *Epoch Times* gave strong editorial encouragement to Canberra's campaign for an international enquiry into the origin of the Covid-19 virus. It has posted numerous advertisements on YouTube [such as this](#), attributing the virus and its spread to "Chinese Communism" and blaming all deaths from the virus on the Party, and it is also active on social media such as WeChat and Twitter. It has paid for [pro-Trump ads](#) on Facebook and has greatly extended its reach through conservative elements in the US.

Falun Gong teaches that its Nine Sacred Words and spiritual practices can heal sickness, as reported in *Vision Times*, where the article quoted above said that coronavirus patients in Wuhan who recited the Falun Gong credo recovered from infection. The sect's ultimate goal is not simply to heal the sick, but to save the world from communism because only those who reject that evil system will win eternal life. This Falun Gong ambition seems to be supported by the US government. The sect's founder Li Hongzhi, who lives in upstate New York, received an award from the US government-supported Freedom House organisation, which has also backed numerous civil society and secessionist organisations in mainland China and Hong Kong.

Given this political background, it is unwise to rely on *Vision Times* or *Epoch Times* for advice about how to relate to the government and people of China, any more than on how to deal with viral infections. They belong in the same category as other conspiracy theories floating around in social media, each battier than the one before. Some of these are disinformation from China or Russia, and some undoubtedly push the interests of certain political or social groups and do have some influence in Canberra. We must take particular care to avoid being influenced by views arising from an unholy alliance between some such and the "Donald. J. Trump School of Diplomacy." Recently, [evidence has emerged](#) that may link one of the most dangerous of these, the American far-right QAnon group, to the inner circles of Prime Minister Scott Morrison, through a family friend who tweets for QAnon under the name of Burn Notice.

So far, it seems that Morrison has not been unduly influenced by this craziness, but the Press Gallery has certainly been infected and the contagion is spreading. Trade Minister Simon Birmingham's press statements have been headed "trade war." The press has accused Ambassador Cheng Jingye of "gangsterism," and those who speak up for rational discussions with China, of "appeasement." Peter Hartcher, Chris Uhlmann, Philip Coorey have warned of the dangers of respectful and level-headed discussions between Canberra and Beijing. As [Hamish Mcdonald has written](#), the journalists have taken to the ramparts and are preparing for war. They have fallen in line with the hawks of ASPI and it seems that the new line for relations with China will take no prisoners. Maree Ma, the General Manager of *Vision Times* was recently appointed to the new Foundation for Australia China Relations by Foreign Minister

Marise Payne. This does not bode well for any attempt to repair relations with our important trade and strategic neighbour.

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