

Chinese Spies and Defectors

by lao lin *Thursday, Jun 9 2005, 9:08am*

international / social/political / commentary

The recent bid of a disaffected Chinese consular official to defect in Australia has displayed some curious behaviour from all concerned, not the least being the ineptitudes of Chinese government officials. Representatives of sovereign powers are not usually intimidated by journalists; however, during an interview (on the Australian media) the Chinese ambassador's response to a question regarding the claim that three thousand Chinese 'spies' were operating in Australia, exhibited all the inexperience expected from Chinese officials in matters of international espionage.

An example of a standard response would be as follows: "Our consular officials are engaged in duties similar to that of any other consulate, as to specifics, I am not at liberty to discuss these matters as I'm sure you can appreciate." For those trained or familiar with methodologies of analysis, social penetration, surveillance and information acquisition, the usual evasive and non-committal answer would have sufficed. However, the Chinese ambassador displayed a peculiar cultural response by embarking on a long convoluted explanatory diatribe (excuse) of how it wasn't possible for the claim to be plausible. The ambassador's excuse/explanation was more incredible than the exaggerated claim made by the prospective defector!

The claim of three thousand operational espionage agents, made in panic mode by a defector terrified at the prospect of failing in his bid to defect, is easily appreciated as an absurd exaggeration. It was obviously made in the hope that it would strengthen his case and make him more attractive to a foreign power as a valuable source of information. He has also demonstrated an amateurish tendency to 'spill the beans' to the local media which would indicate that he is of little value. Nevertheless, he would probably succeed in gaining some sort of protective status - one wonders whether Australian officials would be willing to compromise a strengthening relationship with China over a very 'small fish' in intelligence terms.

The Australian media is having a feast at the moment, "three thousand spies" makes great (if not absurd) copy, the tradition of not allowing anything to get in the way of a good story will always prevail in Australia. A closer relationship with reality would suggest that no embassy or consulate ever deploys more than a relative handful of highly trained operatives; however, these agents do enlist the support of numerous informants willing to oblige for a multitude of reasons. It must not be forgotten that authoritarian regimes deploy numerous tactics to secure information - those who wish to advance in the system will voluntarily supply information; the option of 'spy' is available to all members of society in these regimes. Informants should never be confused with professional highly trained operatives.

Authoritarian regimes also use intimidation to secure information; a typical example would be a consular official 'visiting' with 'news' from a relative in China and a request for a 'document' or other 'small favour' etc. If every person on the 'books' were counted then every embassy or consulate would be running thousands of 'spies'.

The 'defection' attempt has prompted a number of other Chinese to volunteer information in the hope of obtaining residency - the latest is an ex-police officer, certainly no grounds for refugee

status, but that decision rests with our Department of Immigration, who have also been popular with the media lately. Professionals would view the whole sequence of events as a skit from a keystone cops movie.

Chinese methods of information acquisition among their own citizens usually amount to some form of psychological or physical intimidation. Their practices with foreigners are entirely different. In this sphere the Chinese are subtle, painstakingly persistent and patient; they tend to exploit the opponent's weaknesses rather than develop innovative techniques. Their successes in Silicon Valley and the fiasco (for the US) that surrounds Katrina Leung are more the result of the ineptitudes of the US than Chinese expertise in espionage techniques, but this is exactly the point - this is the Chinese technique! Slowly is the rule not the exception, contrast this approach with US agents who feel obliged to deliver immediate results.

Information has just been released that the 'defector' is a Falun Gong member or practitioner. This is an unspectacular revelation as this group, which has been described as a "meditation sect" by a Canberra China expert, is in actuality a political movement masquerading as a religion. China has a long history of quasi-religious political movements, the nineteenth century abounded in them, the 'Boxers' were probably the most prominent. It may surprise some in the West to learn that the Triads were originally formed as a political movement two thousand years ago; perhaps their degeneration to the status of organised criminals (today) presents a good example to various 'experts' who would hastily draw obvious conclusions in their 'analysis'.

Whatever the outcome, the present entanglement of Chinese and Australian 'intelligence' agencies is sure to provide excellent copy for quite some time. We can be sure of a continued display of ineptitudes from both parties.

Cleaves Alternative News. <http://cleaves.lingama.net/news/story-87.html>