

Comment by Michael C H Jones

Admittedly it was only a cursory search for biographical details on the SMH/Age correspondent in China John Garnaut - the first three or four pages of Google.

All I could find was:

"Unfortunately we currently do not have any content for *john garnaut*. Business Topics. CompaniesExpand (22569). All Companies (22569); AMP (3927) ...
www.smh.com.au/business/opinion/john-garnaut"

In an age when 'the news' is a commodity to be bought and sold, the property of global media barons like Australian Rupert Murdoch, then the talking heads, equally bought and sold like paper clips, need very close scrutiny indeed. The backgrounds, prejudices and allegiances of say Gerard Henderson (SMH) or Greg Sheridan (Australian) have been known for decades - you know the barrows they push and in whose interests, for example to be critical of the Jewish State of Israel is the kiss of death but to malign in any way possible the Islamic State of Iran is a passport to fame and money.

So to young John Garnaut.

Last October at the beginning of my nine city visit to China - over the last 22 years since February 1989 as President of ACCCI I have visited/spoken at meetings in over 50 cities of China (what I was doing in the previous 27 years from late 1962 I leave to your research) - I sat next to John at the official table of a Chinese Government Banquet in Beijing. A photo was taken by the retired Commander of Tasmanian Police who was on the delegation.

Garnaut is a diffident and quiet man who does not look you in the eye - I can understand that posture is often taken for arrogance. He was not interested in the reasons for my visit to China, like most journalists today he was probably too busy to do any research such as visit the ACCCI website - I found this somewhat amusing as he is alleged below in a bio backgrounder for a Human Rights 2010 Conference in Melbourne to have once been a commercial lawyer.

You see we at ACCCI try to do our research - note the five Monitors on the ACCCI Website Homepage.

Anyway since the election of the Rudd Federal Labor Government at the end of 2007 and the new directions in Australia's Economic Relations re foreign/trade/industries policies Chamber has regularly placed the speeches of and commentaries on Ministers Rudd, Smith, Crean, Emerson, Turnbull, Abbott and Bishop, and more recently Gillard, on our website homepage as well as run a large section on Global Economic Relations and Governance from a Chinese perspective.

Thus there have been a significant number of links to Garnaut's articles over the last three years and more. Most have been insightful and reasonable even if you do not agree. But the language is the interesting facet re does he really believe in what he is writing or is his terminology what is required by his masters at the SMH - Israel "good" Iran "bad".

For example this article today: "Lurching to the left in a moral maze". Why would the "Slaves of the West" Chinese-language website "set a new high water mark in China's leftist resurgence". Do they brand themselves "Left" and if so are they really "Left"? Does Garnaut and/or the SMH brand them "Left" and are they correct? To answer these questions obviously you have to determine what is "Left" and date your decision re the Thirty Years War, the Napoleonic Wars, 19th and/or 20th century Germany, Soviet Russia, Britain, USA, PRC etc. One gets the impression that Garnaut and Co. are living well and truly twenty years out of date at least.

Is the featuring of "a photo gallery of China's leading liberal thinkers, ranging from the editor Hu Shuli to the philosopher Qin Hui and the Nobel prize winner Liu Xiaobo, each pictured with a

hangman's noose around their neck" any different to the calls by leading US Tea Party and "Right Wing" political figures for the assassination/imprisonment of Australian WikiLeaks Julian Assange?

Garnaut's whole article is a riddle of emotive language and contradictions - it is almost as if he is suffering from a journalistic "attention deficit disorder"? I especially liked the paragraph containing the sentence "Whether it is business, justice, non-government organisations, universities, media or almost any field involving power, money or public discourse, China increasingly resembles a battleground in a leftist war to defend state power".

In fact Garnaut's entire article is a defence of Princeling Qin Xiao, the brother of the wife of the son of revolutionary general Marshal Chen Yi, and former head of CITIC and China Merchants Group with full ministerial rank. According to Garnaut in July 2010 "shortly before stepping down, Qin marked himself as one of the country's most prominent advocates for liberal political and market-based reform. He told Tsinghua University students that "nationalism and stability" were being used as pretexts "to smother universal values such as liberty, individual rights and democracy". If Qin is "Left" why would the Left "Slaves of the West" website be maligning him? If the Communist Party Government of China is "Right" why would they not censor the Left "Slaves of the West" website?

Qin's alleged criticisms of the authoritarian capitalism aspects of the "China model", "which many use to rationalise their iron grip on wealth and power", can be equally applied to other countries. "Authoritarian capitalism" comes also with US characteristics re "a pretext for accumulating political power and public property for private gain" - the ALP in NSW had a very successful track record from 1941 until last Saturday.

The attacks on Qin for corruption may or may not be accurate but this paragraph is simply childish, a Sydney/Melbourne "shock jock" flourish - "The spiritual home of China's resurgent New Left movement is a website, Utopia, backed by several princelings. The site is now hosting 59 separate commentaries dedicated to bringing Qin down". This reminds me of the 30 odd journalists/stable at the Australian newspaper which ran a daily/weekly tag team for years to bring down Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and did it very successfully. Was Rudd Left or Right and what about his Christian Socialism - I suppose this made him New Left? To worry about these labels is as silly as saying we/someone must "resist the Communist Party's lurch towards the left". Like most Australian Opinion writers those at the SMH are becoming day dreamers.

Finally if his wife and daughter really are now living in Australia he is definitely planning his retirement/escape - I only trust it is Sydney where he will find quiet a few former "suspect" political and business leaders like Bob Askin.

Human Rights 2010
The Annual Castan Centre for Human Rights Law Conference
Friday 16 July 2010
State Library of Victoria
Session 3: 1:25 pm - 2:40 pm

Limiting freedom

Mr John Garnaut
Fairfax China Correspondent

'The rise of China and human rights'

[Audio recording available here](#)

(To listen to this recording using Mediaplayer you will need to download the [plug-in](#))

Abstract: In the past two years China has tightened political controls on institutions that are

necessary to protecting human rights in China including the justice system, media and non-government organisations. At the same time Chinese people have growing expectations of their government and a rising sense of entitlement to rights of citizenship that Australians tend to take for granted. John Garnaut will talk on how human rights in China are progressing despite China's political system.

Bio: John Garnaut is China correspondent for The Age and Sydney Morning Herald, and a former commercial lawyer. He has won the prestigious Walkley Award for "scoop of the year" in 2009 and was a finalist in the Graham Perkins Australian Journalist of the Year award in 2010. Most importantly John is a former student of Professor Sarah Joseph's human rights course at Monash University.