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As the spectre of China's meddling spreads, another MP claims he is a victim

Kevin Vuong was a rising Liberal candidate in the last election with an anti-communist history. How it quickly came to an end

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Independent MP Kevin Vuong (Spadina-Fort York) in his office in Ottawa, Ont. on Thursday, March 23, 2023. PHOTO BY BRYAN PASSIFIUME /National Post/Postmedia Network

During the 2021 federal election in the downtown Toronto riding of Spadina-Fort York, the young, progressive, ethnically Chinese candidate seemed a shoo-in for the Liberals.

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Independent MP Kevin Vuong asked Prime Minister Justin Trudeau abo...

A rising political star with a history of youth advocacy, a university lecturer, entrepreneur and a reserve officer in the Royal Canadian Navy, Kevin Vuong was an ideal candidate for a party aspiring to better represent today's Canada.

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But it quickly came to an end.

An eleventh-hour revelation of a withdrawn sexual assault charge prompted the Liberals to drop him from the party just days before the Sept. 20, 2021 vote — an allegation he tells the National Post was made up.

Vuong would end up winning the riding but sit as an independent candidate. He now claims he was the target of Chinese meddling.

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With the full scope of China's alleged meddling in Canada still to be revealed, the whole matter has sowed confusion, uncertainty and doubt in the foundations of Canadian democracy.

Experts say that is the intention of foreign infiltration.

“Why are Chinese intelligence services wasting resources targeting members of Parliament in Canada?” asks Marek Posard, a researcher at the U.S.-based RAND Corporation and professor of public policy at the Pardee RAND Graduate School. He was contemplating the general issue of foreign meddling in Canadian affairs.

“Once you expose that, it's embarrassing to the country, and that's a really effective strategy.”

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What's most insidious about these sorts of operations generally, he said, is that they don't need to be all that successful to have an impact.

“These are cheap operations to run, you don't need to invest hundreds of millions of dollars into a major weapons system, you don't need to deploy tens of thousands of people to a far-away land,” he said.

“You can literally stand up a server and maybe have a relatively small number of people running operations that have a huge impact — either directly by influencing people, or by making people think that you are more effective than you actually are, which can lead people to think their government isn't functioning as it should, or they're not able to address threats in a timely manner.”

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McGill University Professor Benjamin Fung — again, speaking to the phenomenon more generally — said that while Beijing's foreign interference programs often target individuals or parties, the main goal is to sow confusion and mistrust.

"Sometimes, they just want to make people have less trust, or make the system to be less trustworthy," he said. "This is their long-term strategy."

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BENJAMIN FUNG

If Canadian citizens have less trust in the government, it opens more opportunities to infiltrate and interfere with the democratic process, Fung said.

"That's exactly what they want to do."

Neither expert offered an opinion on Vuong's allegations.

The independent MP said the pieces started falling together for him several months ago when allegations of foreign interference began making headlines.

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He described the alleged attempt to bring him down as clumsy, particularly since the eleventh-hour timing of his ouster meant his name would still be on the ballot for both advance polls and election day voting.

Vuong's sexual assault charge was laid by a woman he briefly dated a few years prior. He told the National Post he met the woman via a dating app in November 2018, and the two embarked on a two-month relationship.

After calling things off, Vuong says he didn't see her again until a chance encounter in April 2019, which culminated in an invitation to her apartment to spend the night. The sexual assault charge arose from this encounter.

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In a [Toronto Star story](#) published Sept. 16, 2021, just days before the election, the unnamed complainant alleges the two were watching a movie, went to bed and fell asleep. The Star reported she said she was woken up by Vuong touching her sexually. She said she locked herself in the bathroom and contacted a friend who came over and told Vuong to leave, and he left without confrontation.

In Vuong's version of events, he said he was woken in the early morning hours by the woman explaining she had to leave to help a friend in need, and that he was welcome to stay until morning. However, shortly before 2 a.m., Vuong said a second woman arrived at the apartment and told him he had to leave. "So I went home," he said.

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“I met with the complainant in this matter for some time, and the officer-in-charge. (The complainant) had a number of personal issues happening right now,” Crown Prosecutor Louise Collins told the court on Nov. 27, 2019, according to court transcripts obtained by the National Post.

“I have reviewed this case again and decided that it would not be in the public interest to proceed any further, and I am asking that this charged be noted as withdrawn.”

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Vuong sustained no legal consequences over the allegations, although the Royal Canadian Navy levied him a \$500 fine for failing to report the charge to his superiors — mandatory under Canadian military law.

Vuong says he met with CSIS in March to discuss his concerns. While Vuong has no proof he was the target of what he calls a honey trap, he maintains the pieces add up.

In espionage tradecraft, “honey traps” involve luring a potential target with the promise of sex or romance — a well-used tactic by the People’s Republic of China.

In 2020, online news outlet Axios reported on the activities of alleged female Chinese intelligence operative Christine Fang, who, between 2011 and 2015, managed to befriend several up-and-coming politicians across the United States — most notably California congressman Eric Swalwell.

Elected to his local city council in 2010, Swalwell would become one of the youngest people elected to Congress after his 2012 win, and was seen as a

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As for Vuong, in the Star story, the unnamed complainant said she was not aware Vuong was running for the Liberals until returning to Toronto and seeing his face on election posters.

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Vuong maintains his anti-communist history makes it clear he's not a Beijing-friendly politician.

Vuong grew up in Brampton, the child of refugees who fled the horrors of the communist uprising during the Vietnam War. Despite his Vietnamese surname, Vuong's family is ethnically Chinese — part of the diaspora who emigrated to Vietnam from China over the centuries.

Vuong states he was the only MP of Chinese heritage who marked Taiwan's 111th anniversary of independent statehood. He's met with democratically elected members of Hong Kong's former government, and was a former director of the Chinese Canadian National Council.

Duy Ngoc Nguyen, who served as vice-president of the Vietnamese Association, Toronto, told the National Post he recruited Vuong to serve on the association's board in 2017.

"Kevin knows better than most other young people how precious democracy, freedom and human rights are and how they must be defended," Nguyen said.

"Like his parents, I lost my country to an oppressive and murderous regime — the Vietnamese Communists — and fled Vietnam to seek freedom in 1980 and was accepted by this great country."

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Earlier this year, former B.C. MP Kenny Chiu — a politician with a track record of criticizing China — told reporters he suspects an organized Beijing-sponsored campaign was behind his 2021 election loss.

“The aim of the (Chinese Communist Party) regime’s shadow operation is to exploit what they see as weakness to advance their interests and influence in our decision-making process,” Chiu testified before the house ethics committee on March 31.

Former Conservative MP Kenny Chiu. PHOTO BY JASON PAYNE/POSTMEDIA/FILE

NATIONAL POST

this country's political and business world, as well both Chinese-born immigrants and citizens.

These reports allegedly came from top secret intelligence assessments from CSIS, that newspaper reported.

The Globe and Mail also alleges that Chinese operators had taken “specific actions to target Canadian MPs,” apparently including Conservative MP Michael Chong.

Conservative MP Michael Chong. PHOTO BY ADRIAN WYLD/THE CANADIAN PRESS

“You don't want to obsess over these things, but you also don't want to ignore them, either,” Posard said.

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“If we try to call out every attempt, it can seem as if the country is constantly under attack.”

Compared with Russia — a nation whose allegations of foreign meddling are wide-ranging and persistent — Posard described China’s interference program as far less experienced and seasoned than those of other nations, but more surgical in its aims and goals.

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but you also don't want to ignore them,
either,

MAREK POSARD

“In some cases, China in the past has not been very good at this kind of stuff, because they have a closed media environment,” he said. “They’re learning how to adapt to an open media environment that we see in places like the U.S. and Canada.”

Meanwhile, Vuong says he’s managed to do some good work as an independent MP, but still lives with the fallout of his ouster — with even Prime Minister Justin Trudeau publicly reminding him of it.

“I can only feel bad for the citizens of Spadina-Fort York, who elected someone they thought was going to stand up for them,” Trudeau remarked during April 19th’s Question Period, in response to a question from Vuong delivered through jeers and catcalls from the Liberal benches that grew so loud, they earned admonishments from Speaker Anthony Rota.

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Vuong said he found the exchange ironic, as the prime minister had spent much of the sitting accusing opposition MPs of levelling personal attacks against him.

“My riding is home to Toronto’s Chinatown, one-in-seven of my constituents are, like me, of Chinese heritage,” he said. “The issue of foreign interference is a significant issue.”

Vuong says he’s met with numerous people — both inside and outside of his riding — who claim to be targets of intimidation and harassment from Beijing.

“They are fed up with people who try to present this as an issue of racism,” he said. “It’s not — it’s a long-term plan of the People’s Republic of China to gain influence and information on all things involving China.”

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