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## Chinese Citizen Charged in Canberra Over Alleged Foreign Interference

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– Categories: Crime



A Chinese national living in Canberra has been charged under Australia's foreign interference laws for allegedly collecting information on a local Buddhist group on behalf of a Chinese government agency.

The woman, a permanent resident of Australia, is the **third person ever charged** under the **Foreign Interference Act**, introduced in 2018. According to Australian Federal Police Assistant Commissioner Stephen Nutt, she is the **first individual accused of targeting members of the general public** under these laws.

Authorities allege the woman covertly gathered intelligence about the Canberra branch of *Guan Yin Citta*, a Buddhist association that is banned in China. The AFP claims the information was collected to assist the **Public Security Bureau of China**, although the specific goals of the alleged operation have not been publicly disclosed.

“We allege the activity was to support intelligence objectives of China’s Public Security Bureau,” Nutt said in a press briefing. “This is the first time the AFP has charged a person with foreign interference that allegedly involves targeting members of the Australian community.”

The suspect was arrested at her home over the weekend and appeared in a Canberra court on Monday. Due to a suppression order, her identity has not been made public. She remains in custody and faces a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison if found guilty.

The Chinese Embassy in Canberra has not issued any official response to the charge as of Monday afternoon.

Australia’s foreign interference legislation was introduced to address growing concerns about covert influence by foreign powers. The laws sparked diplomatic tension with China when first proposed in 2017.

The arrest follows two earlier cases under the same legislation. In 2023, Melbourne businessman and community leader Di Sanh Duong was sentenced to **two years and nine months in prison** for attempting to influence a former Australian government minister on behalf of China. Separately, Sydney-based businessman Alexander Csergo was also charged for allegedly receiving payments from suspected Chinese intelligence operatives. He has pleaded not guilty.

Mike Burgess, Director-General of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), confirmed that the agency had played a key role in supporting the AFP’s investigation.

“Foreign interference of the kind alleged is an appalling assault on Australian values, freedoms and sovereignty,” Burgess said in a statement.

The case unfolds as Prime Minister Anthony Albanese continues to engage in diplomatic talks with China. Last month, Albanese visited Beijing and met with Chinese President Xi Jinping to stabilise bilateral relations.