

## — Rear Window

# Not even WeChat escapes Clive Palmer

China's internet censors are among the most Draconian in the world, but not even they could stop Freedom, Freedom, **Max Mason** Freedom!  
*Senior reporter*



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To call the deal between **Clive Palmer** and China state-owned conglomerate CITIC a shotgun marriage hardly captures the reality of the uneasy relationship.

Palmer's Mineralogy outfit reaps more than half a billion dollars a year in royalties from CITIC's Cape Preston operations, [https://www.afr.com/companies/mining/palmer-loses-us200m-court-case-wins-on-us400m-a-year-in-royalties-20200214-p540ux]while clashing with the company in court and labelling the Chinese government "mongrels" who "shoot their own people".

Which is why we thought it odd that an undefined slice of Palmer's United Australia Party's recent \$100 million federal election advertising campaign went to Chinese-owned social media and payment app WeChat.

The matter is no less curious given WeChat claims political advertising is banned from its platform.

### China's internet censors

[https://www.afr.com/world/asia/wechats-privacy-issues-mean-you-should-delete-chinas-nol-messaging-app-20180221-h0wgct] are among the most Draconian in the world, but not even they could stop "FREEDOM, FREEDOM, FREEDOM!"

WeChat is part of China's largest technology company, Tencent, and has been accused of spreading Chinese Community Party propaganda around the globe.

But we're uncertain if the CCP would willingly bandy about UAP's ads (unlike the newspapers published by our parent company, Nine Entertainment).

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) did not actively monitor WeChat during the federal election, which meant any misinformation about various policies could easily spread on the platform.

Palmer's non-election campaign spending has included a \$4 million campaign against former ASIC chairman **James Shipton** [https://www.afr.com/rear-window/palmer-s-anti-shipton-ads-worth-4m-20210418-p57k7t], which Palmer dismissed had anything to do with the corporate regulator's various disputes against him and his businesses, and full-page ads and TV interviews spruiking the 32.9 million doses of malaria drug hydroxychloroquine he brought into the country in April 2020 as the "best hope for those suffering COVID-19". [https://www.afr.com/rear-window/was-clive-palmer-an-agent-of-the-health-department-20220222-p59y1f]He refused to get vaccinated, but don't call him an anti-vaxxer.

In any case, Palmer managed to secure only a single federal representative in Victoria's sixth and final Senate spot, which went to Melbourne real estate agent



Not even China's internet censors could protect us from the unstoppable force of Clive Palmer's advertising.

## **Ralph Babet.**

Palmer's man in Canberra reckons the science of climate change isn't settled and will not support any cuts to Australia's current emissions, something not even the culture warriors at News Corp's Holt St bunker argue against anymore [<https://www.smh.com.au/business/companies/rupert-murdoch-newspapers-24-hour-news-channel-to-champion-net-zero-emissions-20210905-p58oyx.html>]. Well, mostly, anyway.

Babet's personal views also don't seem to gel with **Xi Jinping** though, and he tells this newspaper: "We need real true capitalism, not crony capitalism, where the political class and the business elites get together and find different ways to stitch up the average Australian."

Which is perhaps why he hasn't relinquished, since the election, his position as director of his real estate firm, which services Melbourne's outer-ring suburbs. His mobile number is still listed on the company's website

[<https://babetbrothers.com.au/contact-us/>], where you can contact him 24 hours a day

And judging by the \$53,350 Rolex Babet is sporting, keenly spotted by Open Politics' **Sean Johnson**, "real true capitalism" is in rude health.

Following our discovery of Palmer ads on WeChat, it leaves us wondering if the AEC will step up its game given the coming referendum on the Voice to Parliament (and the large Australian Chinese user base for the social media service). We'll wait and see.

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**Max Mason** covers insolvency, courts, regulation, financial crime, cybercrime and corporate wrongdoing. A Walkley Award winner, Max's journalism has also received awards from the National Press Club of Australia, the Kennedy Awards and Citibank. *Connect with Max on Twitter. Email Max at [max.mason@afrc.com](mailto:max.mason@afrc.com)*