

# [***Australian court convicts businessman of planning political interference for China in legal first***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69X8-2661-JBSS-S0BC-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Sydney (CNN) &#8212; An Australian businessman has been found guilty by a Melbourne court of covertly working for the Chinese Communist Party, the first verdict of its kind under the country's [*foreign influence laws*](https://www.cnn.com/2017/12/05/opinions/australia-foreign-donations-intl/index.html).

Di Sanh Duong, 68, a prominent figure in the Chinese community in Melbourne, was convicted by a jury Tuesday of preparing for or planning an act of foreign interference, which carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison.

He is the first person to be convicted under laws introduced by the Australian government in 2018 to counter foreign influence in domestic ***politics***. The legislation, which came after a series of scandals involving Beijing's alleged attempts to influence Australian ***politics***, [*deepened tensions*](https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/12/asia/australia-china-tensions-intl/index.html) with China, the country's largest trading partner.

Duong was charged in 2020 by Victoria state police. On Tuesday, the County Court of Victoria ruled that he had attempted to secretly influence former federal government minister Alan Tudge with a large donation to the Royal Melbourne Hospital three years ago.

Photographs from an event at the hospital on June 2, 2020, show Duong presenting Tudge with a novelty check for 37,450 Australian dollars ($25,000). The money was raised by the Oceania Federation of Chinese Organizations from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, a Chinese diaspora group headed by Duong.

Federal prosecutors alleged Duong had used the donation to curry favor with Tudge. Tudge was not accused of any wrongdoing.

Lawyers for the government relied in part on an intercepted phone call between Duong and an associate in April 2020. In the recording, the court heard Duong discussing the value of a relationship with Tudge, who he considered as a potential future prime minister of Australia.

Prosecution lawyer Patrick Doyle argued in court that Duong, a former member of the Victorian state branch of Australia's Liberal Party, would be an "ideal target" for China's United Front Work Department.

The United Front is a vast organization run by the ruling Chinese Communist Party that is tasked with cultivating relations with elites outside the party, including the Chinese diaspora. It has long been [*accused by researchers*](https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/how-chinas-united-front-system-works-overseas/) and Western nations, [*including the United States*](https://2017-2021.state.gov/chinas-coercive-tactics-abroad/), of plotting global foreign influence operations on behalf of the Chinese government.

"A main goal of this system is to win over friends for the Chinese Communist Party, it involves generating sympathy for the party and its policies," Doyle told the court.

The prosecutors argued that Duong had been in contact with Chinese state security officials. In the recording of another wiretapped phone call played in court, Duong was heard telling an associate: "When I do things it never gets reported in the newspaper, but Beijing will know what I'm doing."

Duong will be sentenced next year.

CNN has reached out to Duong for comment through his defense lawyer.

Australian Federal Police issued a [*statement*](https://www.afp.gov.au/news-centre/media-release/first-foreign-interference-guilty-verdict#:~:text=The%20verdict%20was%20handed%20down,security%20priority%20for%20the%20AFP) Tuesday welcoming the verdict.

"The AFP thanks its partners in the Counter Foreign Interference Taskforce during this complex investigation. Foreign interference remains a significant national security priority for the AFP," the statement said.

In a [*statement*](https://x.com/SenPaterson/status/1737214821572190259?s=20) on X, formerly Twitter, opposition home affairs spokesperson James Paterson said he welcomed the guilty verdict in "Australia's first ever foreign interference case."

"Successful prosecutions are key to deterring further attempts to interfere in our democracy. The AFP and prosecutors should continue to enforce the law robustly," he said.

CNN has reached out to the Australian Home Affairs Ministry for comment.

By Angus Watson and Nectar Gan, CNN

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