



Interview Summary: Jenny Kwan

Jenny Kwan, Member of Parliament for Vancouver East (NDP), was interviewed by Commission counsel on February 15, 2024.

Notes to reader

- Commission Counsel have provided explanatory notes in square brackets to assist the reader.
- This summary contains information that relates to the Commission's mandate under clauses (a)(i)(A) and (B) of its Terms of Reference. Information provided during the interviews that relates to other aspects of the Commission's Terms of Reference has been omitted from this summary, but may be adduced by the Commission at a later stage of its proceedings.

1. Background

- [1] Jenny Kwan is the Member of Parliament for Vancouver East. She is a member of the New Democratic Party and was first elected to the House of Commons in 2015. She was re-elected in 2019 and 2021. She was previously a member of the British Columbia Legislative Assembly from 1996 to 2015 with the provincial NDP, and was a provincial cabinet member from 1998 to 2001. She entered politics in 1993, when she was elected to the Vancouver City Council.

1.1 Life before politics

- [2] Ms. Kwan immigrated to Vancouver from Hong Kong with her family at the age of 9. Her parents struggled to find work and housing as new Canadians, and the first few years in Canada were difficult.
- [3] Before entering politics, Ms. Kwan was a community legal advocate, working primarily in Vancouver's Downtown East Side. She advocated for community members who faced barriers in interacting with government agencies due to a variety of reasons,

including mental health and addiction issues, lack of education and language barriers. One of her main areas of advocacy was housing.

1.2 City Council and B.C. Legislative Assembly

- [4] Ms. Kwan ran for Vancouver City Council in 1993. She won and became the youngest Councillor to be elected in Vancouver.
- [5] In 1996, she ran for Member of the B.C. Legislative Assembly and was one of two Chinese Canadians elected that year. She became the first Chinese Canadian in the history of British Columbia brought into Cabinet when she was appointed Minister of Municipal Affairs. She later held positions as Minister of Women's Equality and Minister of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers.
- [6] Ms. Kwan left provincial politics in 2015, when her mentor, Libby Davies, stepped down as MP for Vancouver East. Ms. Kwan was encouraged to run by those around her and her constituents overwhelmingly supported her decision to do so. She was elected as the Member of Parliament for Vancouver East in 2015 and re-elected in 2019 and 2021.

1.3. Riding of Vancouver East

- [7] Ms. Kwan sees her constituents as active community members who are socially and politically engaged. They often push the envelope and come together to effect positive change in their communities.
- [8] Many different areas make Vancouver East distinct, including Commercial Drive, Main Street, Hastings Sunrise (also known as East Village), the Downtown East Side, Japantown, and Chinatown.
- [9] Ms. Kwan explained that Vancouver East is one of the most diverse communities in Canada, and home to Vancouver's historic Chinatown, which is the largest and second oldest Chinatown in Canada and second largest in North America. "Benevolent Associations" or "clan associations" were established by Chinese immigrants to provide support and friendship to each other. This was particularly important when Chinese people were faced with significant discrimination and isolation.

1.3.1 The “Big Five” Chinese Community Associations

[10] According to Ms. Kwan, while there are many Chinese community organizations in Vancouver East, in light of Canada’s historical discriminatory attitude towards Chinese people, five organizations emerged as lead organizations in organizing major events in the community.

[11] The organizations she describes as “the heart of the Chinese community” are:

- a. The **Chinese Benevolent Association of Vancouver (“CBA”)**
- b. The Chinese Freemasons of Canada
- c. The Chinese Cultural Centre
- d. The Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association
- e. The United Chinese Community Enrichment Services Society (S.U.C.C.E.S.S.)

[12] Ms. Kwan refers to these organizations as the “Big Five”. These organizations, and others, were established and historically provided support to Chinese immigrants arriving to Canada, providing housing and supporting them in opening businesses, as well as offering resettlement services.

[13] The Big Five can have a significant political influence within the Vancouver Chinese community and, specifically, in Ms. Kwan’s riding, where they are generally headquartered.

2. Speaking out against PRC Government

[14] Ms. Kwan has always stood in support of human rights, for example, in commemorating the Tiananmen Square massacre. She has participated in many community rallies as an activist and as an elected official.

[15] Ms. Kwan’s concerns regarding the PRC’s policies, specifically with respect to Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Uyghur community, escalated around 2019. As her concerns with these policies grew, so did her advocacy around them.

- [16] In August 2019, after a police crackdown of peaceful protestors in Hong Kong against the controversial Hong Kong extradition law, Ms. Kwan spoke at an organized community rally in support of Hongkongers, calling for an end to police brutality, an independent investigation and the withdrawal of the law. She was the only elected official of any level of government to attend or speak.
- [17] In 2020, she voted in support of a motion in the House of Commons recognizing the Uyghur genocide. The motion was moved by MP Michael Chong, following the conclusion of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development that China's treatment of its Uyghur populations amounts to genocide. In March 2021, China sanctioned MP Chong and the subcommittee.
- [18] In July 2020, Ms. Kwan spoke at a rally in front of the Chinese Consulate, standing on a flatbed truck. The consulate has security cameras installed outside by its gate, which had not occurred to her at the time. She saw the cameras move around, which meant they captured images of people rallying around the area. Some protestors wore masks and hoodies to avoid being identified. Others held placards high to block the cameras. Some protestors stood across the street for fear of being captured on camera. Ms. Kwan was the only elected official to attend. She did not take any steps to conceal her identity and spoke prominently on the back of a flatbed truck.
- [19] Around this time, in 2020 and 2021, she was also vocal in her support of Taiwan. Taiwan was looking to get observer status in the World Health Organization and the World Health Assembly during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Ms. Kwan supported Taiwan's desire to join the international community and offer its knowledge and expertise in response to the pandemic.

3. Influence of Chinese-Language Media

- [20] According to Ms. Kwan, the two most prominent Chinese-language newspapers within the Chinese Canadian diaspora are the Ming Pao Daily and the Sing Tao Daily (the latter now only published online). These newspapers have been used by some Chinese community associations to express support for PRC policies.

- [21] For example, on August 20, 2019, the CBA coordinated a coalition of Chinese community groups, including the Hong Kong Canadians on Hong Kong Situation Association founded by Pak Hang Tse, the Chinese Freemasons, and other groups and bought advertising space in these two newspapers. The ads spoke in support of the Hong Kong administration and the police crackdown against protestors that had happened two months earlier.¹
- [22] On June 2, 2020, the CBA also coordinated 300 organizations to band together and place an ad in these papers in support of the PRC's National Security Law for Hong Kong, which had passed only days earlier, on May 28, 2020. The organizations included the CBA, the Hong Kong Canadians on Hong Kong Situation Association, and the Chinese Freemasons.
- [23] In the summer of 2020, the CBA and the Hong Kong Canadians on Hong Kong Situation Association organized a petition opposing a petition before the House of Commons calling for sanctions against the passing of the PRC's National Security Law for Hong Kong. On August 11, 2020, the petition was sent to Members of Parliament and included 130 Chinese groups with 20,000 members.²
- [24] CHMB AM 1320 is a radio station based in Vancouver that airs Chinese-language programming. According to Ms. Kwan, Chinese state media has been able to buy airtime on this station to broadcast messages which espouse its narrative. CHMB has many pro-PRC commentators, including former CBA chairs and two members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, who echo the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) messages on a variety of issues, including the Hong Kong National Security Law and the denial of the Uyghur genocide.
- [25] Ms. Kwan expressed concern that Chinese-language media originating in Canada is being used to propagate PRC talking points.

¹ See JKW0000067.

² See JKW0000067_Attachment01.

4. CSIS Meetings

- [26] On August 6, 2021, CSIS met Ms. Kwan and her staff to bring to their attention potential foreign interference issues.
- [27] On October 8, 2021, Ms. Kwan spoke with CSIS regarding a possible instance of foreign interference in the 2021 election (described further below).
- [28] On May 26, 2023, CSIS provided Ms. Kwan with a classified briefing, and advised her that she is a target of foreign interference by the CCP and will be an “evergreen target” for the CCP for the rest of her life, even after she retires from politics. Ms. Kwan did not share any classified information from the CSIS briefing during the interview.

5. Shift in Ms. Kwan’s Relationship with Community Organizations

- [29] Ms. Kwan indicated that her relationship with Chinese community organizations, including the Big Five, has evolved over time. When she was in municipal and provincial politics, she worked with many different organizations and collaborated with them. They had a good relationship and would find common ground to support the community.
- [30] Ms. Kwan stated there was a “seismic shift” in her relationship with these organizations. It began in 2019 and deteriorated with the escalation of the Hong Kong protests. The shift was most obvious in the change in invitations to community events, which are usually interpreted as a sign of respect or disrespect and signals of approval or disapproval.

6. Shift in Ms. Kwan’s Experience with Constituents

- [31] Ms. Kwan has noticed more fear and apprehension from her constituents over the last five years, starting around 2019.

- [32] She has had Chinese Canadian constituents ask her whether she had protested in front of the consulate. During the 2021 election, constituents, donors and supporters told her that because she protested in front of the consulate, they were fearful about voting for her. They were worried that the Chinese government would find out they had voted for her or supported her, and that this would compromise the safety of their families in China. They would raise these issues in hushed tones with her.
- [33] Some constituents have made oblique comments to her such as, “focus on local issues, not on international issues.” Ms. Kwan interprets such comments to mean she should not speak out against China. Other constituents tell her directly that she should not be speaking out against China.
- [34] Ms. Kwan senses a particular fear in elderly seniors within the Chinese community. She has tried to reassure them that no one knows who they voted for. While she did not sense that fear in the 2015 federal election, she noticed it in 2021.

7. Complaint to Commissioner of Canada Elections

- [35] During the 2021 federal election campaign, it was brought to Ms. Kwan’s attention that a prominent member of the Chinese community in Vancouver, Fred Kwok, was hosting a free lunch in support of Ms. Kwan’s Liberal opponent.
- [36] Ms. Kwan described Mr. Kwok as a significant figure in the Chinese community. He was president of the CBA at the time, Chair of the Chinese Cultural Centre, and an honorary national leader of the Chinese Freemasons. The event was hosted by him in his individual capacity, and it took place on August 29, 2021.
- [37] Ms. Kwan used to have a collaborative and cordial relationship with Mr. Kwok. Shortly after she became an MP, and as she began to speak out more on issues involving the PRC, Mr. Kwok became more distant and would no longer speak with or acknowledge her.
- [38] Ms. Kwan indicated there were WeChat messages [a Chinese instant messaging platform popular with the Chinese diaspora] inviting community members to come to the

lunch to support her Liberal opponent. According to Ms. Kwan, screenshots taken on August 28, 2021 of those messages state:

Just over two weeks left in the federal election. Throughout these years, the Chinese community and the Chinese people have long been neglected. The Chinese people must show their voting power in this election. ... The **Chinese nationals** must shows solidarity. ... No matter how many, no need to pay. You all may bring some friends there to show that you care. When the future victory comes, at least there will be a few more MPs who would care about issues of the **Chinese nationals**.³ [emphasis added]

[39] Ms. Kwan understands the two references to “Chinese nationals” to mean to persons whose main political concern is China.

[40] On September 7, 2021, NDP party lawyers filed a complaint with the **Commissioner of Canada Elections (“CCE”)**, alleging that Mr. Kwok had violated third party election rules.⁴ In response, Mr. Kwok reported the cost of the luncheon to be \$1,500. However, based on the accounts of some of those who attended about the number of tables, as well as the restaurant’s quote of how much it would cost per table to host a similar event around the same time, Ms. Kwan believes the actual cost of the luncheon significantly exceeds the \$1,500 reported by Mr. Kwok.

[41] Shortly after the 2021 election, Ms. Kwan contacted CSIS to let them know about the incident with Mr. Kwok. She spoke with a CSIS representative on October 8, 2021 about the incident, including her concerns regarding the costs of the lunch. In light of a media report about transfer of funds from the Chinese Consulate in Toronto to campaigns, she wonders whether the Chinese Consulate in Vancouver may be operating a petty cash slush fund to finance events, such as the lunch hosted by Mr. Kwok.

[42] On September 20, 2022, Ms. Kwan’s office had a further follow up with the RCMP regarding the Fred Kwok incident.

[43] On July 17, 2023, the CCE contacted Ms. Kwan about potential foreign interference concerns, with particular emphasis on social media activities. Ms. Kwan once again

³ JKW000076 (emphasis added).

⁴ JKW000076.

raised the Fred Kwok incident. The CCE then followed up with her office on July 20, 2023.

[44] On August 10, 2023, Ms. Kwan followed up again with a letter to the CCE on the Fred Kwok incident.

[45] After almost two years, Ms. Kwan does not know what became of the NDP's complaint to the CCE.

8. Lasting Impact

[46] Ms. Kwan expressed that it is alarming and unsettling to know that she will continue to be the subject of foreign interference for the foreseeable future. She knows this is a way to try to silence her. She is a very proud Canadian and she has a platform as an elected official, and will not allow herself to be silenced.

[47] More than anything, she fears for her family. Her parents are elderly and they are worried for her. She wants to take her children back to China to show them their grandmother's ancestral home, but she fears for their safety. She is also worried about traveling; she will register with Global Affairs Canada if she and/or her children travel to countries with close ties with China, and check whether the country she travels to has an extradition agreement with China, even if she is just in a country for a layover. She was once asked to travel to Italy with an official Parliamentary delegation but hesitated because Italy has an extradition treaty with China. She decided to go because she was going to Italy in her official capacity and was assured she would be safe. Once she is no longer in politics, Ms. Kwan states she will be less protected, and this troubles her.