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Dim Sam won't stop Wong Show

By WILL GLASGOW AND CHRISTINE LACY

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For NSW Labor politician **Ernest Wong**, Tuesday night was a case of “the show must go on”, despite the turmoil that was engulfing **Sam Dastyari**, the Laborite who recruited Wong to Australia’s oldest party.

Displaying the professionalism that made Wong such a hit on the wedding singer circuit, the state NSW politician was in place to host the launch of the Federation of Australian Shenzhen Community, Chinese Australian billionaire **Xiangmo Huang**’s latest push for influence in his adopted country’s democracy.

The property developer — who insiders say is worth \$1.2 billion thanks to his Yuhu Group empire — was getting on with business as the shadow ministerial career of Dastyari (the recent beneficiary of Huang’s considerable wealth) neared its end. On Monday, Huang incorporated the new community group ahead of its Tuesday launch at the NSW parliament.

It remains unclear whether Wong, who is deeply connected with Sydney’s Chinese community, sang his signature tune — believed to be **R. Kelly**’s “Ignition (Remix)” — at the event.

Huang will use the foundation to facilitate connections and networking opportunities with politicians. He registered his new federation with the corporate regulator ASIC on Wednesday, hours before Dastyari’s resigned in an effort to give clear air to his leader, **Bill Shorten**.

Yuhu serious

Yuhu billionaire **Xiangmo Huang** is also the main source of funds for the Australia-

China Relations Institute, the think tank that **Bob Carr** runs at Chancellor (and FIRB chair) **Brian Wilson's** University of Technology in Sydney.

The institute has come under ferocious attack during the outrage over **Sam Dastyari** because of the Huang connection on the Labor senator's Register of Members' Interests.

Huang has been generous to both sides of politics, tipping huge sums into both Labor and Coalition coffers.

And he seems to be after balance at the institute.

We can reveal that Liberal grandee **Philip Ruddock** has been asked to join the Australia-China Relations Institute advisory board, which was recently joined by former ALP national president **Warren Mundine**.

Ruddock, the recently retired member for Berowra, has been asked to chair the advisory board.

"He and I have seen one another at Chinese community functions going way back," Carr told us over the phone from Xiamen, in southeast China. "No one on the conservative side of politics has worked harder in the multicultural space than Philip."

Ruddock, always a stickler for process, has run the appointment by **Julie Bishop** and her Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to make sure the chair doesn't clash with his gig as Australia's first special envoy for human rights.

"As long as the government has no problem with me doing so, I will accept it," the hard-working 73-year-old told us, while packing his bag for overseas special envoy duties.

Before you ask: no, Ruddock never accepted personal donations from Yuhu.

And, yes, Ruddock's daughter **Caitlin Ruddock** works at Chancellor Wilson's UTS as the university's director of corporate relations.

Huang parliament

Xiangmo Huang's political reach is far and wide in Canberra, Macquarie Street and beyond.

The property developer has also populated his internal ranks with former politicians and their staffers.

Former NSW Labor treasurer **Eric Roozendaal**'s Australia-based role at Yuhu Group started as vice chairman but has morphed into a chief executive role for the developer, which he joined in May 2013.

But Huang targets both sides of politics.

Former NSW deputy premier, the National's **Andrew Stoner**, started a part-time, paid advisory position with Yuhu in November last year. He provides ongoing strategic advice to Huang and the group.

And former Trade Minister **Andrew Robb**'s chief of staff **Cameron Hill** is Yuhu's local mouthpiece. Hill is paid an ongoing retainer to act as consultant to the company, with Huang a significant donor to Robb in his time in politics.

As it happens, both Robb and Opposition Leader **Bill Shorten** attended the wedding of the Huang's daughter in Sydney in February this year. It is not clear if **Ernest Wong** performed wedding singer duties.

Tiger tanks

Western Australia has given an exotic twist to foreign political donations. At the Africa Down Under ministerial dinner at Perth's Kings Park on Wednesday night, WA Premier **Colin Barnett** revealed he had been offered a tiger — yes, a tiger — by his royal highness the **Sultan of Johor** (aka Sultan Ibrahim).

Barnett said that while his wife **Lyn** was keen to accept the cat, he had to knock it back.

We admire his restraint, with the animal surely useful to bring into line recalcitrant party members and plotting Perth business types seeking leadership change.

The dinner attracted a strong political turnout, including federal assistant trade minister **Keith Pitt**, WA State Development Minister **Bill Marmion** and former foreign minister (and failed WA ALP coup leader) **Stephen Smith**.

Also spotted was newly minted member for Perth **Tim “Hammond-Time” Hammond**, who might just be a contender for the “rising star of the Labor movement” title recently forfeited by **Sam Dastyari**.

Hopefully Hammond now knows what to say if the Chinese Communist Party offers him cash.

Also there was Woodside chief **Peter Coleman** and his globetrotting head of exploration **Phil Loader** (who deftly welcomed the African dignitaries), Resolute Gold chief and former Wallaby **John Welborn**, the low-profile head of multi-billion-dollar miner First Quantum Minerals **Phil Pascal**, former WMC head **Hugh Morgan** and arguably Australia’s most prolific director **Mark Connelly** who, not content with his five current board seats, is pushing for an Australian listing for the private gold play Toro Gold that he chairs.

Crosby steals

After serving the Liberal Party’s past four federal leaders, **Andrew Hirst** has had enough of staffing life. Hirst, who was **Tony Abbott**’s former deputy chief of staff, is off to run the Canberra operations for Crosby Textor, the corporate and political campaign firm founded by former Liberal federal director **Lynton Crosby** (the one with the knighthood) and Liberal party pollster and strategist **Mark Textor** (the one with Australia’s biggest road bike collection).

Hirst, who starts on September 19, comes from federal director **Tony Nutt**’s Liberal HQ, where Hirst was communications director during the recent marathon election.

Along with working for Abbott and Turnbull, Hirst worked with **Brendan Nelson** in his brief period as Liberal leader and — before that — **John Howard**. Not a bad apprenticeship.

Itescu catches blast

Billionaire Thorney chair **Alex Waislitz** appreciates the value of enduring friendship.

But even he admits the rollercoaster ride in stem cell company Mesoblast has led to some recent tense moments in the 35-year friendship between he and company founder **Silviu Itescu**.

The pair went to university together and share an office at the top of Collins Street.

"He knows I have his best interests at heart, so I am straightforward with him. I don't sugar coat it," Waislitz told the audience at *The Australian's* inaugural Sharing Success lunch, held in partnership with Credit Suisse yesterday at **Shannon Bennett's** Vue Du Monde.

Waislitz recalled Thorney's Mesoblast journey. Its value peaked at \$2.5 billion in late 2011.

But in June the shares hit fresh six-year lows after the company, in which Thorney still has a six per cent stake, lost the backing of global pharmaceutical giant Teva Pharmaceutical. The shares are back on the climb. "When [Itescu] has messed up or done something I don't agree with, we have a dialogue about it," Waislitz explained, with a smile. "It gets a bit heated, and we are going through that now."

Waislitz was on a panel with Square Peg Capital co-founder **Paul Bassat** and Expert360 boss **Bridget Loudon**.

Among those in the audience were deputy chairman of Myer Family Investments **Peter Yates**, Dulux chairman and former Macquarie director **Peter Kirby**, Aurizon director and former Orica chairman **Russell Caplan**, Arnold Bloch Leibler senior partner **Mark Leibler** and former ASX CEO and ASIC chairman **Tony D'Aloisio**.