

NewsRoom

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Section: News

Crown high-roller extradited to China

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The Crown casino high-roller and junket partner known as "Mr Chinatown" - who is also a business partner of the Chinese president's nephew - has been arrested and extradited to China for suspected money laundering and corruption.

Crown Resorts regarded Tom Zhou as a "very, very important person" and paid him tens of millions of dollars to lure high-rollers from China to Australia even though he was implicated in foreign influence operations, extortion, money laundering and had associations with drug and human traffickers.

Zhou was detained in Vanuatu late last year but then flew to Japan and onto Fiji where he was detained again before being deported to China earlier this year as part of a longstanding international "red notice" arrest warrant. Fiji police confirmed yesterday that Zhou, a dual Australian and Chinese citizen, was held by immigration authorities before being flown to China.

His dramatic detention comes as his multimillion-dollar gambling empire in Australia - built on the back of his dealings with Crown - is collapsing due to media attention and investigations by the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission.

Corporate records show Zhou was a business partner of Ming Chai, the nephew of Chinese President Xi Jinping. In Australia, Zhou set up a network of Chinese Communist Party influence organisations under the auspice of the Chinese Communist Party's United Front operation and supported by the Chinese consulate in Melbourne, even though he was subject to a long-standing Interpol red notice.

According to court files and briefings from security sources, Zhou also operated with the triads - Chinese organised-crime groups that run money-laundering, human-trafficking and drug-trafficking rackets in Australia and Asia and who have historically run casino high-roller tours known as junkets.

Zhou's activities ultimately drew intense attention from ASIO, as revealed in an expose by The Age, The Sydney Morning Herald and 60 Minutes in 2019 that sparked a series of state and federal investigations.

His detention and extradition from Fiji appears to be a byproduct of efforts by the Australian **Criminal** Intelligence Commission to attack **organised crime** groups who penetrated **Crown** and other **casinos**, forcing figures such as Zhou to move their operations overseas.

At the height of his powers, Zhou was flying around Australia with Ming Chai on private jets chartered by Crown or other Australian casinos. He donated \$26,600 to NSW Labor in 2015, met Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews at a 2012 function that Zhou helped host and, in 2014, formed a business with the premier's former adviser, Mike Yang.

Leaked casino files show Crown paid Zhou and his agents tens of millions of dollars to lure high-roller gamblers from China. Crown paid Zhou's representative at its Perth casino \$28 million in one financial year. Between 2012 and late 2016, Crown was keen to please Zhou and the high rollers he brought to Australia by vouching for them through the visa process. Crown so valued its relationship with him that casino contractors told The Age the casino agreed to let him run a boutique gift shop on its premises.

Court files allege that Zhou had a second source of funds through suspected organised crime activity, including extortion and money laundering. He has been accused in various Chinese courts of extortion, standover tactics and arranging for acid to be thrown in a man's face.

Although law enforcement agencies in Australia never charged Zhou, multiple sources said he likely laundered tens of millions of dollars through Crown.

In 2016, Crown banned Zhou from casino grounds due to his erratic behaviour, but he was still able to run his high-roller business at the casino via sub-agents.

In previous statements, Crown's now former executive chairman John Alexander stressed the firm complied with anti-money-laundering laws and maintained rigorous auditing procedures. Mr Alexander, who stood down from his position in January, also previously attacked reporting about its relationship with Zhou and other alleged organised crime figures as misleading and sensationalist.

BUSINESS Crown a takeover target after Melco deal falls through

— **Index References** —

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