

Effectiveness of Xi's Anti-Corruption Campaign in China: A Preliminary Study

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Article Information	Abstract
Received: October 11, 2021 Revised: June 26, 2023 Accepted: June 29, 2023	Corruption is considered a phenomenon which can be seen in every country and region. It is a curse and a cancer for the economy of the country. It is unethical and unacceptable behavior and the use of power for individual and personal gain. The objectives of this research are to analyze the level of corruption in China and the efforts to curb the corruption. The anti-corruption campaign of China is popular among the scholars and analysts not only in China but also internationally. Xi Jinping came into power in 2012 and started crackdowns upon tigers and flies. Xi gives importance to the party discipline and behavior of party cadres. The Communist Party of China set strict rules and regulations to curb the corruption. This research is based on qualitative methods and data was collected by secondary sources which provide better understanding of Chinese anti-corruption efforts. This research provides the history and present situation of corruption in China.
Keywords <i>China</i> <i>Corruption</i> <i>Anti-corruption Policies</i> <i>Marxist-Leninist ideology</i> <i>Party Discipline</i>	

1. Introduction

Corruption is defined as “use of public offices for private gain” (Asencio, 2019; Philp, 2017) and “an unacceptable behavior committed by public officials for the private gain and damage of public interest intentionally or unintentionally at the expense of public” (Ko & Weng, 2011). Corruption is a challenge which is not limited to one country, rather it is a highlighted problem for all the countries whether they are developed or underdeveloped.

Corruption increases with economic growth. It is important for every country to make plans to control corruption when it plans to grow the economy. China's economy has rapid growth since last few decades and corruption has also arisen as a big challenge because government officials were entrusted with more powers and lack of supervision lead towards more chances of corruption (Kwok, 2018). It is somehow using the public offices and funds for the private gain. It can be seen as a largest barrier to the economic growth of the country.

Corruption is one of the big challenges faced by the Communist Party of China while dealing with the poverty and inequality. This hurdle arises with the economic reforms in 1970s and opening era. Therefore, war against corruption and crackdowns is important for China to continue its economic growth. Xi Jinping has managed his power and enjoyed his power by managing the corruption in the country, especially by the crackdowns and other strict measures.

In recent years the corruption situation has become better in the country. Perhaps it is the public trust upon the government and rule of law by the nation. The anti-corruption campaign by Xi Jinping is also providing him with big support from the public. It is also important for Communist Party of China to manage his power for the stability of single-party state.

General Secretary of CPC has made dramatic changes in the system of China, but the most popular effort is to curb the corruption. The Chinese anti-corruption campaign under the leadership of Xi Jinping is not only popular into China but it has also attracted the other countries and international

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media. Xi assured to deal with the corruption in Chinese government which includes all high officials not only the lower rank officials. Xi's strategy to fight against Tigers and flies won the heart of the people (Fisher, 2015).

The Chinese sense of corruption is different and unique especially when it comes to the causes of corruption. The research identifies that one party system is one of the reasons for high degree of corruption and the second reason is guanxi network which is based on mutual connections. The concept that one party system is weak to control or reduce the corruption shows that single party has complete control in China and majority of corruption cases are reported from party cadres.

The others who believe guanxi is a reason of corruption say that corruption in China is historical and deep rooted. As they see that Chinese traditional politics was based on nepotism. Historically the Chinese politics was practiced through ruling class and their children. Corruption in China does not include only illegal activities but also includes the moral and questionable behavior (Fisher, 2015).

2. Research Questions

- i. Has the corruption situation improved with the passage of time and with new policies in China?
- ii. How does the CPC meet with the corruption challenge?

3. Research Design and Methodology

This study is based on qualitative methods and data collected from secondary sources which are published online by different scholars and institutions. This published data helps to investigate the research questions related to the effectiveness of Xi Jinping anti-corruption campaign and CPC's efforts to curb the corruption in China.

The Corruption Perception Index (CPI) also helps to evaluate the corruption situation in China. The secondary data includes the published books, journals, newspapers, and governments reports. This research covers the corruption issue in China, anti-corruption campaign in China and hurdles to eliminate the corruption. Discussing the corruption and its elimination is important for every state to grow its economy because it causes many other problems in the country. This research provides the analysis of anti-corruption efforts in China.

4. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Marxism-Leninism Ideology

Ideology is very important for the China as it belongs to the history of a nation and party especially when we talk about the Communist Party of China. The party has strong bases of ideology during the Mao era and post-Mao era. During and after the reform and opening up era the Marxist-Leninist thoughts were dominated and still matters today. With the second largest economy, China has managed its attitudes towards ideology. Although the Chinese system is complicated and diverse today and created spaces between the general public and political elite. China is in the era of growth and development and it arises the question how the Communist Party of China will manage the faith of people and ideology (Brown, 2018b).

The Communist Party of China is based on Marxist-Leninist principles and it was clearly declared in 1959 at 8th party congress. Later, in 1969 at the 9th congress Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thoughts were adopted as a guiding principle of party and ideology (Mar, 2019). This revision and universal principles were adopted in the context of revolution and to accomplish the tasks successfully. In 1997 there was addition of Deng Xiaoping theory with the Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong (Wang, 2021). These changes and new requirements arose and a powerful weapon for self-promotion and party building and also the development of China. When Xi Jinping took the charge in 2012 party added new standers as party ideology. Under this guiding ideology the party will

follow the 20th party congress. Whenever the revisions are made it affected the power and policy. The Chinese ideology Marxism-Leninism is the struggle against the reactionary classes and imperialism (Thorton, 2015). The Communist Party of China is the party of working class and it works for the interests of people. The leadership works are representing the development of China and defines that communism is the ideal and highest goal for the party.

3.2 History of Anti-Corruption Campaigns in China

Corruption and anti-corruption efforts in China always remained important and serious challenge for the leadership. China has its own domestic norm, unique culture and political heritage which are different from the world. It has found its own way and roadmap to curb the corruption. China has history of anti-corruption campaigns and the first campaign was started to target economic crimes in 1982 in which thousands of cases were investigate and many of them surrendered because they violated the party discipline and they were also engaged in corrupt activities. In 1988 the third anti-corruption campaign begun and hundreds of officials were convicted because they were involved in different crimes like bribery and grafts. During the third campaign 20,794 persons were arrested (Dai, 2013) and almost 482 million Yuan were recovered during this campaign. Another anti-corruption campaign was started in 1993 with the objectives of strengthening the investigation and self-regulations of officials. After 1995 the Transparency International reported positive effects of these anti-corruption efforts. But the situation remained alarming for the anti-corruption agencies (Dai, 2013).

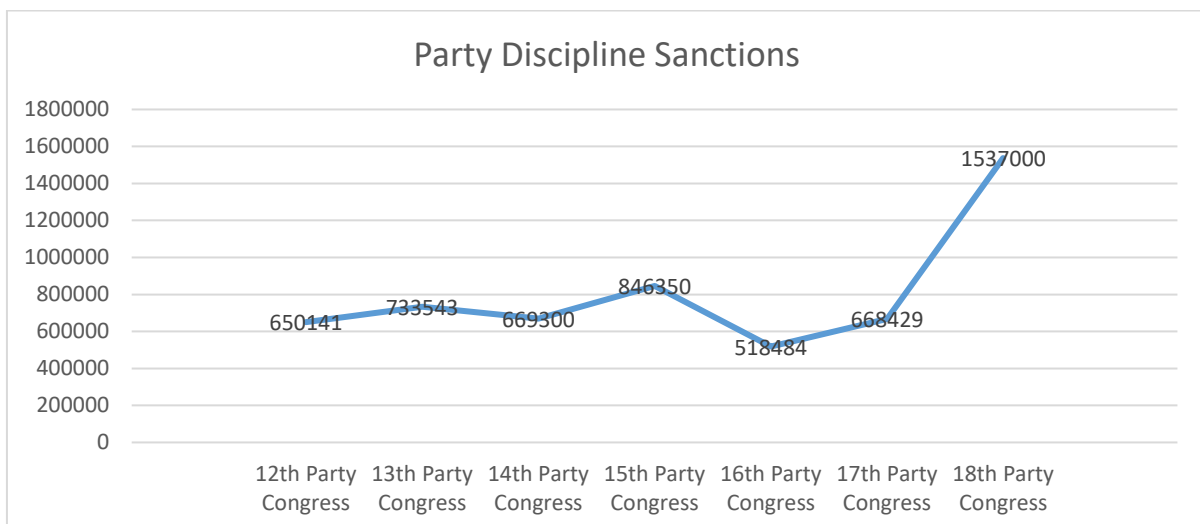


Figure 1: Party Discipline Sanctions (L. Li, 2019)

The presented graph shows that party discipline sanctions were imposed in every era but these numbers were less before the Xi era. The data presented here is from 1980s to 2012 when Xi took the charge. In 12th Party Congress 650,141 discipline sanctions were imposed and these numbers were little high in 13th party congress which was 733,543. During 14th and 15th party congress these numbers were 669,300 and 846,350. There were decline in party sanctions during 16th and 17th party congress as the numbers were 518,484 and 668,429. But we can see that in 18th party congress number of sanctions were increased as the total number were 1,537,000 which is high than all previous party congresses. Chinese Communist Party always tries to focus on party discipline and sanctions to improve the party system and cadres.

3.3 Xi’s Anti-Corruption Efforts

As it is mentioned earlier that China has long history of anti-corruption campaigns but Xi's campaign is most popular among the public and other countries. Xi took the charge in November 2012 in 18th party congress and started a new fight against the corruption. Xi stated many times that corruption will destroy the party and state. His statement clearly shows that he is much concerned about the corruption phenomena. He did not only state that but practically many senior officials were charged during his power. The ordinary public, all officials and analysts take his statement seriously because just after two years of assuming power Xi showed serious crackdown on not only junior officials but it also includes high profile officials. Xi's anti-corruption campaign has investigated provincial and minister level officials and one highlighted case is Zhou Yongkang who was the member of politburo and until his fall it was commonly believed that it is hard to investigate him as a criminal (Wu, 2015). It was claimed by Chinese and international media that Xi's campaign is for real and corrupt officials were the first who sensed its seriousness. These officials were running to hide their corrupt properties and money (S. Li, 2017). Xi is more confident than his predecessors that he can eliminate the corruption from the country. His priority is to clean the party from corruption that the party will be able to rule the market economy forever under the absolute power. However, it is believed that he is well aware that corruption is unescapable phenomena under single-party leadership so he should bear reasonable corruption in the country. But it is true that the current level of corruption is not reasonable and cannot be tolerated by the leadership.

Some scholars believe that in a single party rule the corruption is high because party cadres are corrupt, if cadre A grabbed then the cadre B does it the double. So, these practices should be punished as Xi did. It is important for Xi to maintain the supervision and protect the party at every cost. Party discipline is also important for the leadership as the case of Bo Xilai who challenged the top leadership and violated the party discipline (Bulman & Jaros, 2020). Bo was rising star and he was also involved in corruption but the reason of his fall was not corruption rather his challenge to the top leaders who were campaigning. Xi's anti-corruption campaign is also a political movement; he is earning public support by this campaign. The anti-corruption campaign is popular among the ordinary people who want corrupt officials to be investigated. Xi's this move can increase his popularity among the public because there is anger for corrupt officials. The Communist Party of China has set up rules and regulations to curb the corruption in party. This campaign is a strong battle to fight against the corruption and has received remarkable results. It is important for the leadership to curb the root cause of the corruption. Currently they are focusing on symptoms of corruption to get some time to eliminate the root causes of corruption (S. Li, 2017).

The new campaign is working fast and effectively as 100,000 officials were charged within four years from 2012 to 2016 and there was a 9 percent increase annually in 2013 for the economic crimes. The most important is that senior officials were targeted and there was a 46 percent increase in 2015 seems that no one is immune (Brown, 2018a). Xi's anti-corruption campaign is different from his predecessors in terms of its size, idea, model and seriousness. Those officials who were caught during the period of 2012-2015 were transferred to the prosecution and majority of the cases are concluded with the prosecution and conviction (Deng, 2018). The recent anti-corruption campaign focuses upon the institutional reform and pushing the anti-corruption agencies to work forward. Xi's statements about this campaign show that it is a large scale plan of reforms. This campaign is making the officials afraid from corruption and also making them unable to be corrupt. It was decided to establish the supervision commission and according to this plan the previous dual track system of investigation would become the single-track investigation system. The new institutional reforms help to reduce the interference in the investigation system and strengthen the capacity of the system. This new system intended to reduce the repetition in the investigation process and to curb the corruption more effectively. Although China has a strong system of anti-corruption but still it is concerned for the supervision. Making policies and implementing is important but supervision of the system is always more important. The new anti-corruption system is decided when China is going through many changes. At every stage of the development China faces different challenges. This phenomenon of corruption has also been changed with the passage of time.

During the era of Xi, the Central Committee of China suggested to increase the investigation of the corruption cases and to deter the corruption effectively. It was decided in the session of Central Commission for Discipline Inspection in 2013 (Blancke, 2018), that focus should be given to both the flies and the tigers. Xi made it clear that there is no exception regarding the state law and party discipline no matter what is the status or power of the person. Every person would be investigated who violates the party discipline or state law. In November 2012, since the 18th National congress of CCP the anti-corruption agencies have increased the strength (Gong & Tu, 2022) of the investigation. Many senior officials were removed from their posts and they were from the provincial and ministerial level. Practically the Central Commission for Discipline Inspections has investigated all level of officials called flies and tigers. Such a large-scaled anti-corruption campaign has deep impact on CPC. There is strong message given by the anti-corruption campaign that to eliminate the corruption from all level is the top priority of the leadership. This serious attitude toward the anti-corruption policies shows that party has adopted zero tolerance policy (Guo & Li, 2015).

China's system had many loopholes in the period of economic transition which were increasing the chances and opportunities for corruption. Currently, the large-scaled anti-corruption campaign and in-depth measures are adopted to curb the corruption. China's growing economy is creating opportunity for corruption but the economic reforms are also playing role to reduce the corruption. China has also improved its administrative system. As it is mentioned that China has adopted zero-tolerance attitude for corruption and to investigate the social elite and general public corruption, it has divided corruption into different categories black corruption, gray and white corruption. In black corruption category, they include types of gift, fraud and bribery etc. while in gray corruption they include misuse of government vehicle, foreign tour with public fund etc. and in the white corruption category is defined as strict sense which does not include the corruption by general public. Some categories or types of corruption are reasonable to accept socially but strict sensed corruption may not be accepted and cannot be avoided.

The CPC has strong commitment to combat the corruption and to improve the party working style. CPC has introduced many rules and regulations for self-discipline and to improve the behavior of party cadres. The CCDI has suggested the idea to construct the party style this "three style construction" includes work, life and style of thoughts. Party believes that improving the moral behavior among the cadres can reduce the corruption in Party. China has achieved remarkable success to reduce the corruption in last few years but still it faces many challenges. The system has improved its strength to handle the cases. With the passage of time and with the progress of Xi's anti-corruption campaign Xi had achieved success to remove his rivals who were involved in anti-corruption and violation of discipline. At the end of Xi's first term there was a clear decline in the number of Tigers and flies. The reforms are introduced and system is working to deter the corruption. Before these reforms the system was working (CDI) as dual track system as one by the party institution called Commission for Discipline Inspection and the other by state institute named procurator ate.

The relationship between the campaign and institution are dynamics and mutual. Most of the cases were from the party cadres which were investigated by CDI who enjoyed their high ranks and status. The Commission for Discipline Inspection transferred the cases to procurator for prosecution. Therefore, before the reforms the procurator had task of prosecution and also its own investigation with the evidences provided by the CDI. After the reform, the system turns into single tracked which means that it would significantly reduce the resources and investigation time. There was great concern after the reform's announcement regarding the legal framework. The was concern about the use of power for party advantages as the system would be single track it means that party can use this institution and evidences as abuse of power because investigation process would be more concentrated by one institution which is headed by the party.

The debate was started that these reforms will increase the Xi's power upon the party as no one had achieved this power before. Xi's campaign including ideological and disciplinary are interlinked. It provides the political outlook and disciplinary framework to the party. The anti-corruption campaign

becomes more intensified in term of enforcement of political discipline. Another important point is Xi’s campaign has impact on cadres and they have sensed the seriousness of campaign. The party cadres know that they should not to be corrupt otherwise they will have great consequences. Xi’s campaign is complete guideline as for party discipline and moral education of party cadres. The anti-corruption campaign has increased the trust of public for Xi and also increased the party loyalty (L. Li, 2019).

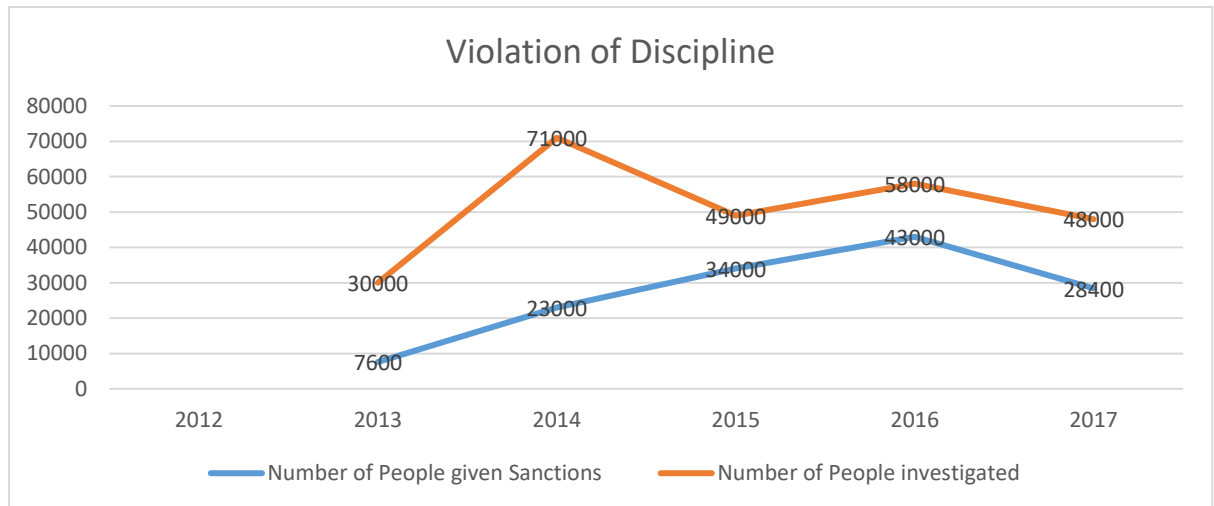


Figure 2: Violation of Party Discipline (L. Li, 2019)

This figure shows that during the era of Xi Jinping from 2012 to 2017 a large number of people were investigated who violated the party discipline. Almost 30,000 people were investigated in 2013 who and 7600 were given the sanctions. In 2014 almost 71000 cases were investigated and 2300 people were punished.

In 2015, the graph shows that 49000 cases were investigated and 34000 were given the sanctions. In 2016, total number of investigated cases were 58000 and 43000 people were punished. In 2017, almost 48000 cases were investigated and 28400 were given the punishment. These investigated cases were at spike in 2014 and then a clear decline of reported cases can be seen in the given data. To investigate Violation of the discipline is also important to curb the corruption because party gives importance to the ethics and moral values which educated the party cadres.

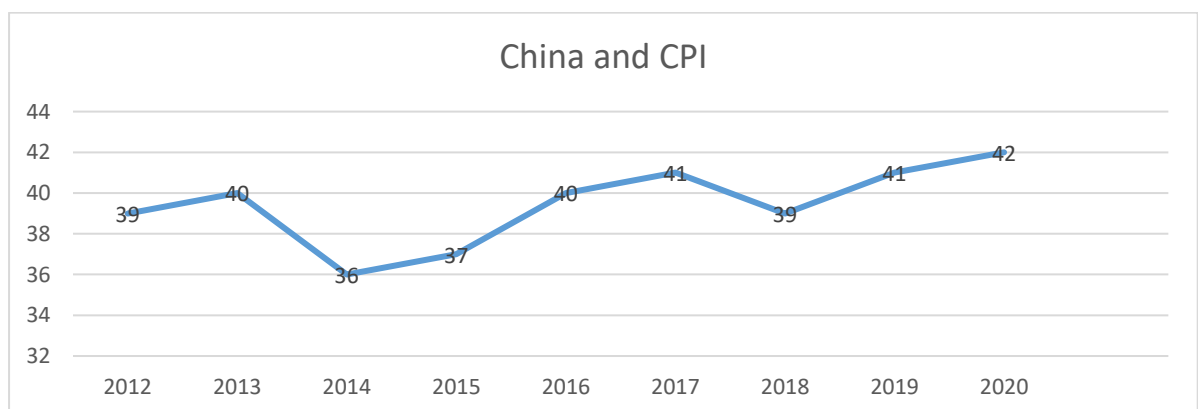


Figure 3: China and Corruption Perception Index (CPI)
 (<https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/table/chn#>)

The above-mentioned data is taken from transparency international. There were total 180 countries by their level of perceived corruption. The scale for the perceived level of corruption is from 0-100 and zero represents highly corrupt country and hundred represents the country is clean from corruption. The presented graph shows that in 2012 when Xi came into power China was ranked at 39 and after one year it improved by one number and ranked at 40. Later in 2014 the corruption situation was worse and China was ranked at 36 and in 2015 it was ranked at 37. With the improvement in the system and different strategies China improved the situation and ranked 40 in 2016 and 41 in 2017. There was decline in the position in 2018 as it was ranked at 39. But with the reforms and strict party policies the corruption situation improved in China and it was ranked at 41 in 2019 and 42 in 2020.

5. Conclusion

Corruption is a disease which eats the roots and economy of a country and destabilizes the state. Corruption is not limited to steal the funds rather it is base of many other problems in the country. Corruption also causes the poverty and restlessness. China is facing the challenge of corruption with the economic growth and this is the reality that every state which is growing its economy has the same challenge. In the history of China there were many reforms and efforts to curb the corruption but Xi Jinping took bold and strict step to reduce the level of corruption in the country. This research gives the analyses of anti-corruption efforts during the different time periods and it clearly shows that Xi's strategies are more successful than his predecessors. When Xi took the charge of the country it was ranked at 39 by corruption index and with his efforts now China has ranked at 42 by CPI. With the party discipline and anti-corruption reforms which have change the dual track system into single track system helps to improve the investigation process in China. China has increased its investigations and many high-level officials were sanctioned by Xi's anti-corruption campaign. Xi has clearly mentioned that all tigers and flies will be investigated and no one is allowed to steal the public fund. The basic purpose of this campaign was to make a pressure on party cadres that they would think not to be corrupt. Although China has improved the corruption in the country but still it needs to work on it as the study shows that it has reduced the corruption but still it is in the average by CPI scale.

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