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China Analysis
Les Nouvelles de Chine

A new impetus for the fight against corruption

Analysis by Jérôme Doyon based on:

- Ren Zhongyuan, ⁽¹⁾ “以科学分权和异体监督反腐” (Systematic separation of powers and ensuring autonomous supervision of the anticorruption fight), *Xin shiji*, 31 December 2012.
- Zhang Weiying, ⁽²⁾ “反腐败的两难选择” (Two choices for the fight against corruption), speech during the second session of the Jingjiguangcha Bao annual conference on reforms in China, held on 19 December in Beijing, reported by *Xinlang Caijing*, 19 December 2012.
- Chen Baocheng, ⁽³⁾ “反腐新动力” (New anticorruption dynamics), *Xin shiji*, 31 December 2012.
- Hu Shuli, ⁽⁴⁾ “反腐难与易” (Ease and difficulties in the anticorruption fight), *Xin shiji*, 17 December 2012.
- Yang Minzhi, ⁽⁵⁾ “限权才能反腐败” (Limiting powers and then resuming the anticorruption fight), *Caijing*, 10 December 2012.
- Wang Jing, ⁽⁶⁾ “广东‘从严治党’进行时” (Advances in Guangdong's policy of ‘the Party's strict supervision’), *Xin shiji*, 7 December 2012.

The 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seems to have opened a new chapter in the history of anticorruption struggles in the People's Republic. The dismissal of Li Chuncheng, deputy Party chief of Sichuan, 22 days after his inclusion as an alternate member of the Party's Central Committee illustrates how times have changed. Never in the past ten years has an alternate member been dismissed so quickly. Xi Jinping's new “eight rules” for rectifying cadres' behaviour – especially the one simplifying the style of official meetings and limiting extravagance in receptions – also symbolise this trend.⁽⁷⁾

While corruption is an old phenomenon, Ren Zhongyuan notes new initiatives that came about in 2012. The Party leadership appears increasingly aware of the extent of the problem and the consequences for its own future if nothing is done. Besides, some major cases such as the Bo Xilai affair are particularly highlighted, despite their rarity. *Xin Shiji* notes that Bo was only the third Politburo member to be dismissed since 1992. The Internet and microblogs have a central place in the anticorruption fight, which raises the issue of the use of such information and its interaction with the CCP's internal mechanisms.

Leaders' awareness and pressure from the Internet

Given the rising number of cases and steep inflation of sums involved, corruption among cadres constitutes a major challenge for the Party's new leadership. According to Yang Minzhi, former head of the Hunan provincial discipline inspection commission, the central commission's report to the 18th Party Congress noted 643,759 corruption cases between November 2007 and June 2012. According to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Blue Book on Fighting Corruption and Upholding Integrity, national-level

supervision organs received as many as 1,345,814 complaints in 2011 alone.

Zhang Weiying notes that on the popular news website Baidu Xinwen, the number of articles tackling the anticorruption topic rose from 11,900 in 2003 to 76,200 in 2004 and reached 246,000 articles in 2010. Similar evolution was evident on the *People's Daily* website. The number of corruption cases, measures to deal with the scourge, and media reports on such affairs has been rising. This coincides with increasing awareness in the top leadership, as confirmed by former General Secretary Hu Jintao at the 18th Party Congress, when he declared that corruption was “a matter of life and death for the Party and the country.” Zhang Weiying comments ironically on this assessment with a popular formula: “Inaction will kill the country but the anticorruption campaign will kill the Party.” Even though, to him, the country is not in danger, it is time to engage in saving the Party through a frontal attack on corruption in its ranks.

In Zhang's view, corruption has not only grown exponentially, but its nature has also changed over the past ten years. In the spirit of Kellee Tsai's work, Zhang describes the passage from a reforming and value-adding corruption to a conservative and counterproductive one.⁽⁸⁾ In the 1980s and 1990s, corruption consisted to a large extent of citizens “purchasing” the

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4. Hu Shuli is editor-in-chief of *Caixin* group, which brings out *Xin Shiji* and *Zhongguo Gaige*.
5. Yang Minzhi is a former member of the standing committee of Hunan's provincial Party committee and former secretary of the province's discipline inspection commission.
6. Wang Jing is a journalist at *Xin Shiji*.
7. Shi Jiangtao, “Xi Jinping's Guidelines to Cut back Extravagance Go into Effect,” *South China Morning Post*, 4 January 2013.
8. Kellee Tsai, *Capitalism without Democracy: The Private Sector in Contemporary China*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2007.

influence of cadres as a means of reducing state pressure. Alongside economic reforms, such illegal practices helped free up resources to which access was limited, and thus facilitated China's adoption of a market economy system.

However, since the beginning of the last decade, corruption has slowed the liberalisation of the economy. Whereas before 2000, corruption helped entrepreneurs "buy" a certain freedom of action from cadres, today it mostly takes the form of cadres corrupting other cadres for personal gain. This highlights cadres' persistently crucial role in the economy, especially in land management and transport, sectors over which the state still retains vast control and where corruption is rife. Chen Baocheng notes that on 25 December 2012, Hu Jun, then deputy director of Shanghai's Municipal Planning, Land, and Resources Administration, was sentenced to a 15-year jail term for corruption. He was the third "landlord" (*tudi fu* 土地爷) in five years to be dismissed in Shanghai. Such scandals are also rife in public transport and railway administrations, particularly in Hunan and Henan provinces.

All the authors note the growing role of the Internet in the anticorruption fight, especially after the 18th Party Congress. Chen observes that in the months following the Party Congress, three provincial-level cadres have been dismissed from their positions because of accusations made on the Internet: Lei Zhengfu, who was Party secretary of Chongqing's Beibei District; Li Yali, who was deputy director of the public security department of Shanxi Province and director of the public security bureau of Taiyuan City; and Dan Zengde, who was deputy director of the Shandong provincial agriculture department. Ren Zhongyuan notes that, despite the problem of information distortion, the Internet helps to widen and speed up the anticorruption fight in a system where press freedom is circumscribed. In particular, it helps correct weaknesses in the Party's anticorruption campaigns that stem from the lack of autonomy of discipline inspection commissions, which are attached to Party committees at different administrative levels.

Institutional remedies

In Zhang Weiying's view, the most urgent step needed to tackle rising corruption is an increased effort to go after corrupt cadres and an implementation of tougher punishments so as to render corruption riskier. Zhang adds that this should go hand-in-hand with deep reforms, because corruption accusations are often used as a tool in power struggles. It is then not always the most corrupt cadres who are arrested; especially when the amounts at stake are significant and when the number of cadres implicated is large, leaks are less likely. Zhang calls for raising cadres' salaries so they are less tempted by illegal activities. Their incomes should also be published. Hu Shuli agrees with this idea, noting that this debate surfaced in China in the 1980s. Since 2009, some 20-odd cities have been chosen to publish local cadres' incomes, an experiment modelled on American sunshine laws. However, Hu adds, the practice has not been made systematic due to the lack of political backing.

All the authors stress the need for profound systemic reforms towards greater press freedom and judicial independence as well as the development of an autonomous structure to carry out the anticorruption campaign. Yang Minzhi goes the furthest in specifying institutional details. Yang shows that the issue goes beyond the training or the morality of cadres. In fact, if some cadres can indulge in illicit activities in a situation of quasi-impunity for years, as in Bo Xilai's case, it is because the problem is systemic. Thanks

to the hierarchical system, any control of superior cadres by their subordinates is impossible in practice. The "number one" (*yibashou* 一把手) at various administrative levels wields such power over his subordinates' careers that they do not dare take the risk of denouncing him. It is at their level that most corruption occurs, say Ren Zhongyuan and Yang Minzhi, adding that the situation can only change with the development of intra-Party democracy.

The current hierarchical structure also raises the issue of the national leadership's system of responsibility. The Party Congress, drawing more than 2,000 delegates, is theoretically the highest entity in the CCP. However, it convenes just once every five years, which makes it a mere registration chamber that only helps select members of the Party Central Committee without being able to supervise their activities. Yang Minzhi suggests giving the Party Congress more power and increasing its role between plenary sessions by forming a standing committee that could supervise on a daily basis the activities of the Party's Central Committee and Central Discipline Inspection Commission and be more active in drafting amended legislation and in the selection of leaders.

Yang also highlights the need to rely on China's Constitution in order to limit the Party's powers. He regrets the impotence of people's congresses at various administrative levels. Their role in supervising government activities at the national or local level often conflicts with Party hierarchy, rendering them obsolete, especially as the head of the local congress generally also leads the Party committee at the corresponding level.

Often a pioneer in reform matters, Guangdong Province developed a five-year action plan for strict Party management (*Guangdong sheng cong yan zhi dang wu nian xingdong jihua* 广东省从严治党五年行动计划) in 2012, well before the 18th Party Congress. Echoing the aforementioned challenges, the plan, while vague in terms of implementation, stresses the issue of the vast powers enjoyed by local "number-ones." The Internet's role in the anticorruption struggle is also highlighted in developing a system to verify the information collected. More concretely, publication of the income of cadres and their families is to become the general norm at the provincial level by 2014. The 18th Party Congress gave new momentum to the anticorruption wave in Guangdong. Chen Baocheng and Wang Jing note that since then, a large number of cadres have been dismissed from their positions, at least four of them at the provincial level.

The various articles analysed here sought to open debate on the anticorruption policies adopted at the National People's Congress plenary session. The profusion of articles and the freedom with which they are published indicate that the new leadership will seize the issue head on, especially now that leaders in Guangdong and Shanghai have publicly called for greater transparency regarding cadres' incomes.

■ Translated by N. Jayaram.