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The Anti-Corruption Discourse on State Media

Legitimizing the CCP

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Abstract

Since January 2013, Xi Jinping has launched a sustained high profile anti-corruption campaign that has targeted Tigers (senior officials) and Flies (rank and file cadres). The thesis uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to look at the ways in which corruption is defined and explained in state media discourse. As the anti-corruption drive is aimed at Party members, the media on corruption is directly involved in the process of delegitimation of a portion of its members. Within this process, the Party launched a public relations campaign in order to counter the impact of the exposure of corruption cases at all levels of the Party and the government body, in order to re-legitimise the political authority of the Party. The thesis analyses a total of 145 corruption articles on Xinhua News from the years 2013-2016. It shows how the Party legitimises itself in four stages: the first and second, legitimating XI Jinping as the moral authority and the CDIC as the “enforcer” of legitimate behaviour; the third stage, delegitimizing a portion of the Party as immoral through interlacing corruption narratives with discourses on moral values and public welfare; and the fourth, legitimation of the Party and the political system, through a comparison with corruption in other countries.

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Introduction

Since January 2013, Xi Jinping has launched a sustained high profile anti-corruption campaign, targeting both Tigers (senior officials) and Flies (rank and file cadres). In the course of the anti-corruption campaign, a number of corruption trends in China have been exposed. The work reports of the Supreme People's Procuratorate, reveal that both the number of corruption cases tried and the amount of money involved in the cases has increased. The exposure of corruption cases has revealed the existence of corruption in a range of industries and institutions such as real estate, infrastructure, universities, the financial industry, the military, transport and energy and the judiciary system. It has exposed vast webs of collaborative corruption in pockets of China. For example, Reuters reported that "Shanxi's top official, Communist Party boss Wang Rulin, said there were nearly 300 vacancies in the provincial government, including three city party chiefs, 16 county party chiefs and 13 county heads" due to the anti-corruption drive.¹ Perhaps, the most shocking, is the case of Zhou Yongkang, the former Security Chief, whose extensive business relationships have stretched across various sectors and regions.² Furthermore, the seniority of the officials such as Zhou Yongkang, and Ling Jihua, former aide to Hu Jintao, reveals corruption at the highest level of authority in China. Corrupt officials have been involved in nefarious activities such as colluding with local mafias, opening gambling dens and drug trafficking³. The anti-corruption drive has been unprecedented in both its scope and the number of high ranking officials that it has seen fallen.

The anti-corruption drive has been accompanied by round the clock media coverage, placing corruption in the spotlight. Aside from news articles, there has simultaneously been a variety of corruption-themed cultural products released, such as books, TV documentaries and the popular TV serial "In the Name of the People." Through media coverage, cultural products as well as in blogs, social media posts to everyday conversations, "corruption talk"

¹ Reuters 2015.

² Caixin Datanews 2014.

³ People's Daily Net 2013

appears to be everywhere. Many studies in criminology point to the relationship between “mass media,” and the perception of crime and the criminal justice system.⁴ Although the exact nature and effect of mass media on perception of crime is inconclusive, it shows that the function of mass media is not only to inform readers about a given issue, but also determine how much importance to attach to the issue from the amount of information in a news story. To give a crude example, simply the number of news articles published related to corruption should serve to demonstrate that there has been a substantial increase in “corruption talk.” (See Item 1)



Item 1 Baidu Index showing the number of articles that use the word 腐败 in the title⁵

Given the exposure of the level of corruption at every level of the government and the Party, the nefarious activities they are involved in, the anti-corruption drive is de-legitimizing a significant portion of the Party and government apparatus. The danger inherent in running a large scale anti-corruption campaign in the context of a pervasive corrupt political culture, is that the problem needs to be identified and amplified. By increasing the level of “corruption talk,” it runs the risk of creating perceptions of a deteriorating political system fraught with

⁴ Dowler 2003.

⁵ Item 1 uses Baidu index to search for the number of headlines that contain the term corruption (fubai 腐败) between 2011 and 2017. It shows that the latter half of 2014 and the beginning of 2015, was the period when reporting on corruption was the most intense.

corruption, thereby undermining the legitimacy of the regime. Fu has called this a “delicate political battle.”⁶ Indeed, Dickson after conducting a public survey, concluded that a big majority of respondents thought that corruption was more pervasive than they had done prior to the campaign. He says, “in 2010, respondents were evenly divided between those who thought corruption was common among central officials and those who thought it was rare, but in 2014, almost 70 percent thought it was at least somewhat common, and the percentage of those who thought almost all central officials were corrupt more than doubled.”⁷ However, although, most thought that more officials were corrupt in 2014, a sizeable majority of respondents had concluded that the situation of corruption had improved.

This thesis takes the view that corruption is a socially constructed phenomenon and it pays attention to the role of language and discourse that makes sense and gives sense to corruption. It explores how notions of corruption are articulated in state media in China. Furthermore, as the anti-corruption drive is aimed at the Party itself, through denunciation of its members and political culture, the Party are actively denouncing a portion of its members and thus calling attention to government and Party failures. The question, then, is how the Party are legitimating themselves, whilst undertaking a highly publicized anti-corruption drive that actively seek to de-legitimize a significant number of its members and the government apparatus? How does the Party attempt to manage the *meanings* that the anti corruption drive has amongst the public? How do they attempt to frame it in such a way that the citizens derive a meaning that is regime reinforcing, rather than undermining?

The layout of the thesis will be as follows. The following section describes the theoretical background. It articulates a working definition of legitimacy and consider its relevance to stable regime maintenance. It argues that regardless of the specific mode of legitimacy, it needs to be articulated in ways that reinforce positive perceptions of the ruling regime. This provides the basis for a discursive analysis approach to the study of media texts on corruption. The review of the literature on legitimacy and discourse is followed by a

⁶ Fu 2015, 135.

⁷ Dickson 2016, 91.

background to corruption in public opinion and the media environment in China. In the next section, the research methodology and work steps will be summarised. The final sections are the presentation of the analysis and the layout of the legitimisation strategy in the CCP's anti-corruption discourse.

All translations are provided by me, unless stated otherwise.

Theoretical Background

1.1 Concept of Legitimacy

Legitimacy, its' definition, its' function and its' measure has been much debated in political studies, and its' adaptability is further debated in Chinese studies. Max Weber stipulated three separate "legitimacies:" legal authority (derived from rules), traditional authority (derived from heritage) and charismatic authority (derived from popularity of a given leader or religion).⁸ Others have based it on a notion derived from democratic values and based on the beliefs and values of the majority of its citizens, such as Friedrich, " the "question of legitimacy" is the "question of fact whether a given rulership is believed to be based on good title by most men subject to it."⁹ This definition was not the prevalent understanding throughout history, but nonetheless has been adopted by politicians and academics alike.

The definition of legitimacy is also concerned with its function and the associated behaviour of citizens in regards to whether they view their government as legitimate or not. There is an assumption that a government considered illegitimate will result in protest, revolution and even regime collapse. However, such prescriptions assume a definition of legitimacy that is based on Western democracy. However, unlike in a democracy, the Party are not subjected to democratic elections at all levels of the political system, and as such their legitimacy is not directly determined in this manner. Gordon Chang argued that regime

⁸ Weber, 1978.

⁹ Friedrich quoted in Stillman. 1974, 34.

collapse was imminent, based on an assumption that tied the legitimacy of the regime directly with its survival, asserting that “the people are in motion now, and it is just a matter of time before they get what they want.”¹⁰ Yet as Przeworski argues, illegitimacy only matters when there are groups that are politically organized to form an alternative regime. As long as individuals are prevented from joining through repression or co-optation, legitimacy matters little for the survival of a ruling regime.¹¹

Most “pessimist” scholars, to use Shambaugh’s categorisation, have a more nuanced understanding of the extent to which legitimacy is tied to the survival of the regime. A relational understanding of power (Weber), will lead scholars to consider pressures from within the different ranks of the Party. Zheng offers four conceivable pathways to regime change in varying degrees of likelihood; which posits that while revolution from below is possible, gradual political liberalisation is more likely.¹² In Pei’s view, China’s governance crisis is a result of “the erosion of its [the Party’s] authority and appeal among the masses” (legitimacy), which is coupled with the “shrinkage of its organisational capacity” and the “breakdown of its internal discipline.”¹³ Whereas Gilley sees regime change in a revolution from above.¹⁴ In essence, as Przeworski pointed out, legitimacy is part of a set of conditions that make regime collapse a possibility but it does not provide the mechanism for change itself.¹⁵ Furthermore, the Party is equipped with a toolkit which includes both repression and co-optation that can severely hinder the likelihood of a revolution-type regime change.

The third problem is in regards to the measurement of legitimacy in a system of one-Party-rule. This has taken two approaches: the first is to gauge public dissent through the number of protests and social movements and; the second is through public opinion surveys. These two approaches tend to produce two contradictory views, ie that the number of social protests reported throughout the country is rising, while at the same time numerous studies

¹⁰ Chang 2001, 284-285.

¹¹ Przeworski 1986.

¹² Zheng 2003.

¹³ Pei 2002, 101.

¹⁴ Gilley 2004.

¹⁵ Przeworski 1986.

including the Asian barometer and the World Values Survey have shown that overall regime support from its citizens is high.¹⁶ To shed some light on this issue, Dickson has used public opinion surveys to show that the bifurcation between local and central government is key to understanding these results. In what he calls the “local legitimacy deficit,” he finds that “regardless of how it is measured, whether individual or institutional, whether trust, support, or satisfaction, the same pattern is apparent: there is significantly higher support for the center than the localities.¹⁷” When protests occur, protesters often appeal to the state in order to correct the situation, thereby affirming the central government's legitimacy. This shows how confined protests are to localised circumstances. These results can support, albeit arguably, the notion that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been successful in its endeavour to generate support and enhance its legitimacy. There is a debate to whether legitimacy is equivalent to the sum of individuals “belief” in the regime (ie public opinion).

This thesis has opted to adopt a definition of legitimacy based on Friedrich's definition: the "question of legitimacy" is the "question of fact whether a given rulership is believed to be based on good title by most men subject to it.¹⁸" Rulership, for the purposes of this paper, will refer to the central elite, rather than anyone who exercises political power. The reason for that is that in China, local governments have for Dickson has labeled a “local legitimacy deficit.¹⁹” Most men subject to it, means that I am concerned with the opinions of the citizens and subjects of a country, rather than those outside it. This includes those with positions within the Party as well as those outside. Furthermore, this definition accords with the claims of Chinese leaders themselves, who have explicitly tied their right to rule to “the people.” For the purposes of this paper, the function of legitimacy will only be considered to say that the loss of legitimacy does not directly entail a derailing of political rule, but nevertheless, is a desired ingredient for stable domination. Secondly, while the measurement of legitimacy is beyond the scope of this paper, it will suffice to say that the efforts of the CCP to legitimise itself, if measured through

¹⁶ Chen 2004; Shi 2008, 299.

¹⁷ Dickson. 2016, 261.

¹⁸ Friedrich quoted in Stillman 1974.

¹⁹ Dickson. 2016, 261.

the “belief” of its population, has been somewhat successful. The next section will briefly explain how the Party has generated support or at least, maintained the status quo.

1.2 Sources of legitimacy in China

To date, many China scholars have looked at the ways by which legitimacy is generated or maintained by the party-state. The popular viewpoint was that legitimacy rested on economic growth and nationalism. The argument goes, that as a result of economic restructuring, new social realities were incongruent with Communist ideology, which was then subsequently replaced with nationalism. However, in recent years, whilst acknowledging the role that both economic performance and nationalism has had on regime stability and its legitimacy, many scholars have pointed to substantial shortfalls of this formula.²⁰ Scholars are increasingly looking to other sources of legitimacy for an explanation of regime maintenance. They can be distinguished into two types: governance and performance; and ideology, values or culturalism. In many ways, this still resembles the economic performance and nationalism model. There are twin pillars, one pointing to the performance of the regime and the other to the discourse, sentiment or culture associated with that performance. These twin pillars have been conceptualised in many ways from Guos’ differentiation between “utilitarian justification” and “original justification” or Brady’s use of Deng’s “two hands” metaphor.²¹

Those who focus on governance and performance as the source of regime legitimacy in China is a functionalist perspective that looks at what the regime does, rather than what it says it does. Scholars have looked at economic performance²²; provision of public goods and services²³; public participation through local democratic elections²⁴; building a broader ideological discourse for the political system²⁵; and the defence of national interest as sources

²⁰ See Schubert, 2008.; Sandby-Thomas, 2014.; Gilley & Holbig, 2010.

²¹ See Brady, 2009.; Guo Baogang 2006.

²² Wright, 2010.

²³ Tong, 2011.

²⁴ Schubert, 2008.

²⁵ Brady, 2009.

of legitimacy in China.²⁶ This allows us to conceptualise legitimacy as the sum of “partial legitimacies,” albeit separate and weighted differently.

Nevertheless, each partial legitimacy is not *per se* a source of legitimacy, but it needs to be framed in a way that is conducive to regime stability. For example, good economic performance does not necessarily translate into regime legitimacy. Indeed it has been argued that economic rise would lead to political liberalisation as it would lead citizens to have growing expectations. As Gilly and Holbig argue:

Economic growth and material well-being are highly abstract notions for the individual, notions which are usually experienced by way of intertemporal, interpersonal, interregional, and international comparison. This is to say economic success is not *per se* a source of regime legitimacy; instead, it has to be framed in ways conducive of positive subjective perceptions of the regime, for example, as competent, efficient, fair, committed to the realization of the common interest while avoiding publicly manifest partiality or bias, capable of selectively embracing the benefits of globalization while defending national interests on a complex international terrain, and so on.²⁷

Thus, legitimacy is not only subject to what the Party does, but is also what the Party says it does. This allows us to go beyond the identification of specific modes of legitimacy but rather focus on events that make certain claims at certain times.²⁸ Indeed, this is in line with Schubert, who argues for focusing on the legitimating potential of reforms at the micro-political level.²⁹ The key benefit of this, is it allows for a more dynamic understanding of the concept of legitimacy. Thus in order to understand the process of legitimation in China, this thesis looks

²⁶ Gries, 2016.

²⁷ Holbig and Gilley 2010, 400.

²⁸ Sandby-Thomas 2010, 32.

²⁹ Schubert, 2008.

at areas and events that are potentially threatening to the CPP legitimacy. As it is during these events, that certain issues become more salient.

Corruption is often considered a threat to the legitimacy of the party. The existence of corruption is damaging to the claim that the Party are governing benevolently and humanely, and Party cadres are selflessly and charitably serving the people.³⁰ Furthermore, the show of privilege and pomp, is particularly salient in a country with worsening socioeconomic inequality. As such, it is considered one of the top threats to regime legitimacy in Chinese party intellectual discourse alongside socioeconomic inequality and changing morals and values.³¹ Thus through a highly publicised anti-corruption drive, the Party is able to reinforce these claims to offer evidence of its commitment to moral values and ethics and providing welfare to the public. The anti-corruption drive provides the opportunity to reassert its position in precisely the point, where its legitimacy is considered less secure. Thus it is necessary to focus on how the anti-corruption campaign is discursively constructed.

1.3 Approaches to Discourse

As I am concerned with the process of legitimation, it is necessary to consider the actions of “a given rulership” in order to generate or maintain the belief in the ruling regime. As Lipset argues, “Legitimacy involves the capacity of a political system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate or proper ones for the society.”³² This requires both action and a process to make sense of the action in terms that are favourable to the ruling regime. The nature of discourse, has been the subject of numerous debate. The term discourse has expanded to variably cover any form of verbal or nonverbal language, official and casual; the whole communicative process or the smaller components that make up the language; any form of communicative practices, or the knowledge that is being disseminated through these practices. Discourse Analysis stems from a critical

³⁰ Shue 2004, 13.

³¹ Zeng 2014, 621.

³² Lipset, 1959, 86.

linguistics approach that treats language as a social practice. It seeks to bring to light how events are talked into being, and how meaning is made.

Critical Discourse Analysis is “an approach to language analysis which concerns itself with issues of language, power and ideology.”³³ Thus, it is centrally concerned with elucidating the strategies that establish, maintain and reproduce power relations enacted within discourse. At the core of the discipline is the work of the famous postmodernist Michel Foucault, who changed fundamentally how we understand discourse and power. Power was no longer wielded by specific actors, and seen as a coercive or dominant act, but rather was pervasive in discourse and knowledge: power therefore lies in accepted notions of truth and scientific knowledge. Thus discourse is the system of values, assumptions, beliefs that shape language, and as such is shaped by such considerations, but also actively participates in shaping them. As such it is inherently involved in the process of legitimating certain actors or interests over others. As discourse is laden with ideology, and as such seeks to legitimise the power structures that they are embedded in, CDA attempts to make explicit “the ideology coded implicitly behind overt propositions.”³⁴

1.4 The Construction of Corruption

The literature on corruption is varied in its approach, and has elucidated many of the underlying causes and reasons for corruption. Carl Minzner has focused on organizational behaviour, he discusses the target driven cadre performance evaluation systems as incentivising particular behaviour of cadres with career advancement or salary rewards. He argues that the existence of two separate set of normative rules, legal norms and cadre evaluation systems- means that there is often a conflict between them.³⁵ The evaluation systems that place heavy emphasis on economic growth statistics mean that cadres are incentivised to accommodate those requirements above all else. Thus their behaviour are

³³ Burns and Coffin 2009, 99.

³⁴ Fowler 1996, 3.

³⁵ Minzner 2009.

shaped by these processes. Many scholars see corruption as an unintended by-product of China's evolving reforms, and corruption is explained as opportunistic behaviour based on rational choice in a dysfunctional market.³⁶ Other scholars have argued that there are cultural sources of corruption in China, pointing to the conventions of paying respect, gift giving and expressing gratitude.³⁷ However, few studies have explored how notions of corruption are articulated in China. This paper relies on the constitutive nature of language in order to make sense of corruption in the Party rank. It argues that corruption is not only being objectified or mirrored in these processes that seek to make sense of it, but are creating and augmenting it in the same processes.

The anti-corruption drive in China is particularly interesting case of the construction of corruption as a discursive process, as the Party needs to define certain boundaries for corruption in order to de-legitimize swaths of its own body. Thus differences at the conceptual level can determine the target and fate of the individual offender. Furthermore, how this is communicated to the public, i.e. the effort to label and define corruption in public discussions, needs to be done in such a manner that it does not undermine its authority, but yet makes a credible attempt to tackle the problem. Therefore the conceptualisation of corruption is highly politicised in Chinese discourse.

Corruption has been defined in legalistic terms as "misuse of public office for private gain,³⁸" referring to employees of public office with the party and state apparatus. In China, the responsibility to identify, enforce and punish offenders' lies first with the disciplinary organs. In accordance with the type of corruption, as well as the severity and the level of responsibility, there are several modes of discipline that range from Party discipline, administrative discipline, organisation discipline and finally legal punishment.³⁹ The disciplinary organs deal with a broad range of misdemeanours that cannot be defined as abuse of public power, including hedonism, moral decadence, selfishness, dereliction of duty etc. It is only

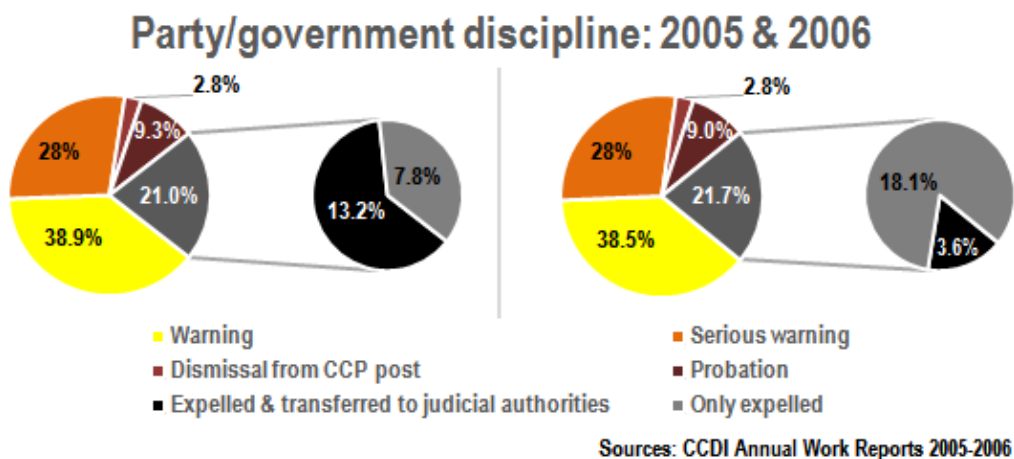
³⁶ Gong 2002; Wedeman 2012; Guo Yong 2008.

³⁷ Zhan 2012.

³⁸ Quinones 2000.

³⁹ Cai 2014, 64.

after the disciplinary organs have reviewed corruption cases, that a minority are transferred to the legal system to be handled.⁴⁰ As such, a definition of corruption in the legal sense is problematic in China.⁴¹ Another difficulty in transitional China, is delineating the boundary between public and private, when many state enterprises are leased to private parties, or urban or rural collectives are neither public nor private.⁴² This makes the definition of corruption as “abuse of public power” rather futile.



Source: *China Economic Review*

How the Party chooses to define the parameters of corruption has practical consequences, not only for the fate of the offender, but in consideration of the broader public. Corruption has long been a public concern, which as Xi implies, the Party must address in order to sustain political authority and legitimacy (Chapter 4). Thus in order to effectively respond to public ire, anti-corruption efforts need to specifically target areas of public concern that do not fall into the bracket of corruption as a legalised term, such as soliciting prostitutes, lavish consumption, excessive housing allocation at the public expense. However, such incorporation of activities into a definition of corruption could overestimate and emphasise the extent of corruption, magnifying government failures and potentially triggering public outrage.

⁴⁰ Lockett 2015.

⁴¹ Sun 2001.

⁴² Ibid.

Thus, if the concepts of “public interest” and “public opinion” are included, drawing a distinct line between corrupt and non-corrupt behaviour from a strictly legal perspective becomes more problematic.

How corruption is defined, whether it is considered as a narrow legalistic definition or a broader moral definition has implications for the scope of offences that can be termed under corruption. As such, it is crucial to focus on the interpretive and hermeneutic processes that construct corruption, as it elucidates on the numerous meanings attributed to corruption. Furthermore, the specific definition of corruption is also at the core of defining the cause, the meaning and to justify the need and the methods of the fight to eradicate corruption. This thesis seeks to demonstrate how misdemeanours and more serious crimes are discursively constructed as instances of corruption, and in turn, how the anti-corruption drive to eradicate such instances are used to legitimise the Communist Party of China.

Chapter 2: Corruption, Public Opinion and the Media

2.1 Corruption in post-Maoist China

In 1978, China adopted a new party policy that prioritized economic growth. The reform slogan is summed up by Deng’s slogan: “Let some people get rich first.” In other words, the new economic policy would emphasise a trickle-down economy (Friedman) over Maoist egalitarianism. Between 1979 and 2010, as reported widely, China’s economy experienced an “economic miracle,” growing at an impressive average rate of 8.75 percent. Concurrently, it has also been experiencing an explosion in the number of corruption cases. Chinese leaders, as early as 1982, had publicly recognised that corruption had reached crisis levels.

Corruption is a highly volatile issue in China. According a study by He Anbang, quoted by Manion, “60 percent of ordinary Chinese surveyed by People’s University Social Survey Centre in the mid-1990s believed that “hardly any” or “not many” of those with wealth had

obtained it by legitimate means.”⁴³ As the economy took off, it also faced a growing problem, a widening income gap, and the emergence of inflation and unemployment, which added to the sense of crisis. Thus as corruption worsened, public anger increased. Corruption was said to be at the centre of the grievances behind the student protesters at Tiananmen Square in 1989. Hsu states that “although the Western press focused on the pro-democracy demands of the movement, in China it was the students’ stance against corruption which was their most popular and effective platform in attracting the support of urban residents.”⁴⁴ Hsu tracks a rhetorical shift in the corruption narrative in official discourse, and argues that it was during the course of the protests, that the Party were able to resurrect their position, from “immoral” political elites reining over a “dying dynasty” that suffered from a irredeemably “pervasive and systemic” corruption problem, to “hero” tirelessly fighting corruption “in the name of the people.,” to ensure the continuation of economic growth.⁴⁵

2.2 The Media’s role in China

The media play a key role in channelling official discourse to the public. The decentralisation, privatisation and commercialisation of media outlets from the end of the 70s in China has led to a more diversified and vibrant media environment.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, “a system of interlocking government and CCP departments,” ensure that the Party maintain a strong control over traditional media⁴⁷. This is done through measures such as control over publication permits, and the power to punish transgressive outlets and journalists.⁴⁸ While traditional media is characterised by its one-to-many function, the emergence and proliferation of internet communication technologies (ICTs) was a new challenge to the Party, due to the function of ICTs to facilitate many-to-many communication. Scholars such as Yochai Benkler, promoted the emancipatory potential of information technology, which would allow previously

⁴³ Manion 2004, 86.

⁴⁴ Hsu 2001.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Zhao 1998, 53.

⁴⁷ Hassid, 2015.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

marginalised actors and opinions to become visible, and therefore reactivate an egalitarian public sphere.⁴⁹ It was in such an atmosphere of optimism regarding the internet that Bill Clinton famously claimed that China's attempts to control the internet was the same as trying to "nail Jell-O to the wall."⁵⁰

As Guo Binyang has demonstrated, the social media and internet platforms opens up a space to resist state discourse, to challenge social injustices and allow for dissent and protest.⁵¹ Corruption was increasingly being exposed through internet forums and information spread rapidly through social media sites such as Sina Weibo. Yang Dacai, whose fate was determined by a untimely smile at the scene of an accident, led to a netizen-led investigation, in which photographs of Yang wearing expensive watches were uploaded and netizens relied on each other to identify the brand and price of the watch. By exposing corrupt officials, these online vigilante groups, dubbed "Human Flesh Search Engine," placed pressure on the government to punish the accused swiftly. Lei Zhengfu, former Party Secretary of Beibei District, Chongqing, was dismissed after a sex video went viral on the internet, after being uploaded by Zhu Ruifeng. As it transpired, the 18 year old girl named Zhao Hongxia, had been hired and trained by a construction company to seduce and film Lei in order to bribe him. In a blogpost with a circulation of over 67,000, Zhao was sarcastically commended for having "completed the arduous mission of seducing, bedding and videotaping." It continues, "she preferred to sacrifice her individual rights to uncover a corrupt official wholeheartedly for the people, to benefit the people, and can be rated as a Goddess."⁵² The phrase "wholeheartedly for the people" is evocative of Party rhetoric, and can be seen as a satirical attack on the corruption narrative. Hassid has argued that "when such cases are uncovered and appear before the public eye, authorities generally act very quickly to punish those targeted by popular

⁴⁹ Benkler 2006.

⁵⁰ The Economist 2013.

⁵¹ Yang 2011.

⁵² "完成了勾引、上床、录影的艰巨任务，宁可牺牲个人利益揪出贪官，一心为民，造福一方，堪称神女!" in Guoren Qianguang 2016.

pressure.⁵³ Online exposure of corruption cases abound in the internet “public sphere,” and create significant pressures on the state to respond to corruption cases, in order to reassert their authority and legitimacy.

On the other side, Morozov pointed out, that “the early theorists of the Internet’s influence on politics failed to make any space for the state, let alone for a brutal authoritarian state with no tolerance for the rule of law or dissenting opinions.”⁵⁴ There have been a wealth of studies that are concerned with how the state can use internet technologies for surveillance and monitoring, as well as for guidance of public opinion. The Party have a varied toolbox when it comes to the controlling the narrative on corruption in the new media environment. One of these strategies is direct intervention in the form of censorship, through an internet monitoring system, labelled “The Great Firewall.”⁵⁵ It “relies on filtering keywords, blocking IP addresses and blacklisting websites, a system backed by thousands of internet police who monitor domestic sites and discussion boards.”⁵⁶ An example of this, is the strict censorship on reports in Western press about the family wealth of Xi Jinping in 2012. The author responsible, Forsyth was suspended from his position at Bloomberg, and was eventually hired by NYT.⁵⁷ Implicating Xi’s family in corruption allegations, would presumably have enormous implications for the legitimacy of the anti-corruption campaign. Nevertheless, the story was suppressed.

Another example of direct intervention in storytelling, is the case of Guo Wengui, a fugitive billionaire business man. He gained prominence on Western social media sites, such as Twitter and YouTube, by hurling (mostly unverifiable) corruption allegations at the upper echelons of the Chinese Communist Party, most notably implicating the (former) head of the powerful anti-corruption agency, Wang Qishan. Nevertheless, prior to his rise to fame in Western journalism, he was already engaged in an online publicity war with Beijing University

⁵³ Hassid 2015.

⁵⁴ Morozov 2012, 15.

⁵⁵ King, Pan and Roberts 2014.

⁵⁶ Hassid 2015, 42.

⁵⁷ Haughney 2014.

Founders Group. Caixin ran a lengthy story on him⁵⁸, which accused him of colluding with Ma Jian, a security official, which led to further legal spats between Guo Wengui and the well-known and respected journalist, Hu Shili.⁵⁹ For the purposes of this thesis, the more important story is the media coverage in China on the Guo Wengui case, which SCMP have labelled as an “unprecedented publicity war.”⁶⁰ This has included publicising televised confessions and interviews with Guo’s associates and rivals, as well as an open trial to the prosecution of three executives at Guo’s Beijing Pangu Investment.⁶¹ This demonstrates the varied strategies that can be used in media coverage, to persuade the people on a narrative that is more favourable to the Party.

Furthermore, under Xi Jinping, there have been efforts to strengthen control of the internet “public sphere” and control over the big V’s (verified Weibo users with a large number of followers). In 2013, a discourse emerged on state media, arguing that social media was propagating rumours and fake news, and thus harming social order⁶². Under the criminal offence of “picking quarrels,” which targets “whoever undermines public order with anyone of the following provocative and disturbing behavior”⁶³ was extended to encompass online behaviour in late 2013 (Wong, 2015). This meant that anyone who was the owner of a post deemed to be unlawful and retweeted 500 times or viewed 5,00 times could face up to three years imprisonment.⁶⁴ At the same time as cracking down on online public opinion, the Party have been encouraging citizens to report official corruption through Central Discipline and Inspection Committee (CDIC) websites created for online corruption reporting.

⁵⁸ Caixin 2015a.

⁵⁹ Caixin 2015b.

⁶⁰ SCMP 2017.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ fmprc.gov.cn

⁶⁴ Creemers 2017, 93.

3.1 Setting up a research agenda

As I have shown, the Chinese Party-state, use a number of strategies in responding to challenges to the state narrative on corruption. Nevertheless, what is less clear is how the anti-corruption campaign is represented and framed in Chinese state media. In regards to what Fu Hualing as termed the “delicate political battle,⁶⁵” this thesis examines the way in which state media report on corruption which actively de-legitimizes a proportion of Party cadres, whilst simultaneously reasserting its own position. In this chapter, I describe my research methodology, the selection of sources and the work steps I followed.

3.1 Selection of the Articles

Text material on corruption was gathered from the online Xinhua News Portal, using the Baidu insite-search-function. Xinhua News is a state owned news agencies, however the online news portal contains articles originating from a variety of news organisations. As this thesis is concerned with legitimation, I tried to include articles that can be labelled state media, but also have a reasonable likelihood of being read by the wider public. Xinhua News Portal is ranked twenty-fourth by Alexa for website traffic ranking in China.⁶⁶ The search resulted in tens of thousands of texts. To make the number of articles more manageable, whilst ensuring a varied number of texts, the top 50 articles from each year were selected. Texts with no direct relevance, videos and pages that had been moved, were removed. This resulted in a sample of 143 news reports, which were coded into four broad categories: anti-corruption effort, corruption cases, corruption analysis and other corruption. Table 3 presents an overview of the empirical material.

Article Type/Year	2013	2014	2015	2016
Corruption Analysis	16	4	11	9
Corruption Cases	10	8	10	10

⁶⁵ Fu 2015, 135.

⁶⁶ <https://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/CN> (last accessed 10 December 2017).

Anti-Corruption Effort	12	9	12	9
Other Corruption	5	12	3	3
NA	7	17	14	19
Total	43/50	33/50	36/50	31/50

Table 3. Corruption reporting overview of material

3.2 Process

The analysis progressed in two main stages. In the first stage, I conducted a content analysis of specific themes and argumentation patterns within the Anti-Corruption Effort category. This category consists of leaders' speeches (Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang and Wang Qishan), an analysis of Xi Jinping thought and speeches, Inspection Work Team reports and other texts that show support of the anti-corruption efforts, without providing any further information or analysis of corruption. The number of these articles remain consistently high throughout the years, as they are a constant reminder that the Party is active in combating corruption. As speeches and statements are the most direct form of communication from the Party leadership to the world, they play a crucial role in framing issues and expressing party viewpoints and therefore set the tone for official discourse on corruption. I found that throughout these the Party provide the official interpretation of corruption: the consequences, causes, the forms and patterns of corruption as well as the solutions and remedies to eradicate it. I took notes on the wording and metaphor choices from official statements, which can be found throughout all the other articles in my sample. I analysed how corruption facts and statistics are produced and interlaced in other media reports. Thus showing how the media are involved in the process of legitimating and naturalising the shifting power relationships of the CDIC over every level of the Party and the Government.

In the second stage, I conducted a content analysis of themes and argumentation patterns within the Corruption Cases and Corruption Analysis category that are related to legitimacy of the political system. The first step was to divide the articles by type. The first

category was the sector that they were related to: real estate, university, State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and construction. The second type were divided by the type of corruption: EPC behaviour, collective corruption, grassroots corruption, family corruption. Categorising corruption in this method allowed me to see which type of issues were being identified as more prevalent in official discourse. Furthermore, it allowed me to see how the texts relate to each other through cross referencing and argumentation. Within these, I found argumentation patterns that were focused on the targets of legitimacy (morality, economy, public participation (online reporting)). Although there were a number of arguments, the most prominent were articles that focused on morality and economy. Thus in the final section, I conducted a qualitative analysis of the articles that used moralising or economic argumentation patterns. I find that the Party use moralising language to delegitimize a certain portion of officials. At the same time, it is involved in the process of bifurcation between “the corrupt officials” and the Party, in order to reassert the Party’s position and its moral authority.

In the final stage, an analysis of the articles coded other corruption cases, shows how through a comparison with corruption in other political systems in the world, the media is involved in the re-legitimation of its political system and its chosen method in the anti-corruption drive.

4. Results of Analysis

Available scripts for media reports

These frameworks have been collected from the articles coded “anti-corruption effort.” They are instrumental in conveying the official position on the anti-corruption campaign, and seek to offer a comprehensive analysis of corruption: the causes, the consequences as well as the remedies and solutions. It is argued that through these, the Party are able to provide the key frameworks and interpretation of the anti-corruption drive efforts. The first step in the process of legitimation is analysed in this section: that is legitimating Xi Jinping as the moral compass

of the Party, through the use of his speeches; justifying the need for an anti-corruption drive; and legitimating the CDIC to act as the enforcer of appropriate behaviour.

4.1 The consequences of corruption

4.1.1 Corruption can lead to the extinction of the Party and the State

Corruption is framed explicitly as crucial to the survival of the Party, and thus the ultimate consequence of corruption is the extinction of the Party and the State. The phrases the loss of the Party and the nation (*wangdang wangguo* 亡党亡国) and the life or death of the Party and the nation (*Dang he Guojia shensi cunwang* 党和国家生死存亡) deliberately blur the lines between the Party and the nation. In this way, it allows for the co-optation of love of the nation to include love of the Party.

China has a long history of corruption. The collapse of dynasties has often been characterised as a cycle of rise and fall (*lishi zhouqilü*, 历史周期律): At the founding of the dynasty, officials worked hard to survive, however after rising to power, officials become complacent and corruption becomes widespread, until its succession and removal by another power. In 1945, Mao Zedong was posed the question of how to break free of the rise-and-fall cycle, by Huang Yanpei. He was said to have answered, “We have found the new path way. We can escape the cycle. The new way is to establish democracy. Only under people’s constant surveillance will the government not dare to become lax. Only when everybody takes the responsibility will the scenario of “the policy ending when the governor has passed away” never be repeated.⁶⁷

Successive Chinese leaders have also explicitly framed the problem of corruption this way. Xi likewise states that “in Chinese history, there are numerous examples of the “the policy ending when the governor has passed away” because of serious corruption in governing

⁶⁷ Feng 2002, 114.

cliques. In the world today, there are too many examples to enumerate, of the loss of power because of corruption in the ruling power.”⁶⁸ Not only is the framework borrowed, but the language and phrases are a direct quote from Mao Zedong. As George Orwell noted, “white papers and the speeches of undersecretaries do, of course, vary from party to party, but they are all alike in that one almost never finds in them a fresh, vivid, homemade turn of speech⁶⁹.”

The carefully cultivated and scripted political speech of Xi, allow him to inherit Party thought and to simultaneously take ownership of the ideas in them. The phrase has also been used by both Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin, Xi is thus able to lean on the authority of previous Party leaders, which emphasises a sense of reassuring continuity and stability. This is not to say that the Party do not advocate change, however it is always constructed as for the purposes of serving the overall strategy and the historic mission of “national rejuvenation.” This reinforces the idea that Chinese leaders have inherited a duty to govern, to shed the 100 years of national humiliation (*bainian guochi 百年国耻*) and bring the nation pride in its civilisation and culture, whilst simultaneously lending personal authority and legitimacy to Xi Jinping. Xi’s own authority is further bolstered by the publication of his speeches, and the commentary and analyses that accompany his speeches. In my sample of media reports, speeches by Chinese leaders and the analysis of their ideas made up a significant percentage of the articles coded Anti-Corruption Effort. While these included a small portion of speeches by Li Keqiang (5) and Wang Qishan (1), their speeches always made reference to Xi. The vast majority were articles relating to Xi’s speeches and thought.

	2013	2014	2015	2016
Speeches/Keyword Analysis	2	8	4	3
Anti-Corruption Effort	12	9	12	9
Percentage	16%	89%	33%	33%

⁶⁸ 中国历史上因为统治集团严重腐败导致人亡政息的例子比比皆是，当今世界上由于执政党腐化堕落、严重脱离群众导致失去政权的例子也不胜枚举啊！In News Xinhuanet 2015a.

⁶⁹ Orwell 1946.

The consequence of continuing corruption is the death of the Party. This framework is highlighted in various media articles in my sample, pertaining to the fall of dynasties in Chinese history, as well as articles on corruption scandals in Eastern Europe.⁷⁰ Less explicit but existent in almost all the media reports, are the use of medical metaphors. The expression of *duliu* “poisonous tumour” in 腐败是社会毒瘤 *fubai shi shehui duli* “corruption is a poisonous tumour in society, conceptualises the institution as a human body, and corruption as a malfunction of that body.⁷¹ These are interspersed with phrases about the timely treatment of disease, such as eliminate disease with aggressive medicine (*menyaoquke* 猛药去疴), shave the bones and cure the poison (*guaguliaodu* 刮骨疗毒) and prescribe the right remedy for an illness (*duizhengxiayao* 对症下药). Such a conceptualisation is not necessarily peculiar to China, Nonetheless, it is a device that seeks to simplify and reinforce the abstract and complex notion of corruption being a matter of life and death, and thus providing a justification for undertaking an anti-corruption drive.

4.1.2 Lethal to the flesh-blood ties between the people and the Party

“Serve the people,” is the Party’s official slogan. Central to the Party rhetoric, it is emblazoned in Mao’s calligraphy at the entrance to Zhongnanhai, the Party compound in Beijing. It is also the name of the popular 2015 TV corruption series “In the Name of the People.” As Xi articulates, “The phenomenon that the masses hate the most, is the various types of negative

⁷⁰ Zhao 2013.; SG Xinhuanet 2013.

⁷¹ Jing-Schmidt and Peng 2017, 2010.

corruption and privilege, these phenomenon's are the most lethal to the flesh-blood ties between the Party and the masses.⁷²

Privilege, which is granted and protected by the ruling class is what distinguishes ordinary people from the officials. It is the construction of the binary between privileged and ordinary that gives meaning to the discourse on corruption in China. Chinese society's view on privilege is highlighted in the "My father is Li Gang" incident, in which Li Qingming, the son of a local deputy police chief was questioned for intoxicated driving after hitting two college students, shouted out "Sue me if you dare, my father is Li Gang." The anger directed at privilege and arrogance is such that it can occasionally lead to wrongful assumptions of privilege, as in the case of Zhang Miao.⁷³ It is instances such as these that highlight the lethal nature of corruption for the flesh-blood ties between the Party and the masses.

The media coverage on corruption is littered with references to the people. The leaders link the responses to corruption as tied to the duties of the state to listen to the people's needs, and thus present themselves as benevolent and competent rulers. Through concretising statements of corruption harming the masses, (see Chapter 4) it provides an explanation for social inequality. Thus creating a moral imperative to privilege Party-people relations, which flouts the political cultural obligations of patron-clientism in the Party ranks.

4.2 The Causes of Corruption: The Four Winds (sifeng 四风)

In official discourse, the target of the anti-corruption drive is to address the problems of the four winds (*sifeng*): formalism, bureaucratism, hedonism and extravagance. The Four Winds, are intimately linked with corruption, but corrupt officials who exhibit the four winds, or undesirable working styles, are not necessarily corrupt, and those who are corrupt do not

⁷² "人民群众最痛恨各种消极腐败现象，最痛恨各种特权现象，这些现象对党同人民群众的血肉联系最具杀伤力" in News.Xinhuanet.com 2015a.

⁷³ Belkin 2017, 214.

necessarily exhibit the four winds.⁷⁴ The Four winds are the four working styles within the Party that lead officials to become corrupt. According to Jing Schmidt and Peng, *feng* “wind” is “lexicalized in many Chinese terms referring to various medical conditions,” and considered “the top trigger of a hundred diseases.⁷⁵” Thus the Four Winds represents the exposure to the disease of corruption, and those who are left untreated may become infected, thus becoming more prone to corruption. It is through this discourse, that Party discipline becomes a necessary countermeasure to prevent officials committing “corruption,” in the legal sense.

Thus the first step in the anti-corruption drive is the reshaping of behaviour standards and practices that could legitimise the Party by resetting the “ethical subjectivity of the Party.⁷⁶” In 2012, Xi Jinping laid out guidelines for the correct and appropriate behaviour of Communist Party officials in the Eight Point Code (EPC). The eight points stipulated restrictions on ostentatious displays of importance and privilege at official events - large banquets, red carpets, floral arrangement, manipulating traffic signals or closing roads, and official speeches were to be kept short and to the point. Alongside this initiative, the Party launched a Mass Line Education Programme, to guide the cadres on how to govern the self, and is concerned with practicing self-criticism and interacting with the masses.⁷⁷ The anti-corruption drive is therefore not only targeting “corruption” in the legal sense, but the culture of political norms that exacerbate the corruption problem in China. Thus it rests on the argument that it is the necessity to combat the root causes of corruption that means the behaviour cannot be evaluated based on judicial measures alone. This provides the justification for the CDIC to address misdemeanours that are considered to be violations of moral or social ethics, as opposed to violations of laws, through disciplinary measures.

Furthermore, as Jing-Schmidt and Peng argue, “by providing a simplifying and selective cognitive routine of understanding the etymology of corruption based on a cultural model of health and ill-health, the evocation of “four winds” conveniently circumvents the need

⁷⁴ Zhang and McGhee, 2017, 138.

⁷⁵ Jing-Schmidt and Peng 2017, 11.

⁷⁶ Zhang and McGhee 2017, 2.

⁷⁷ Shanon 2013.

to bother with the complex political, economic, and institutional circumstances conducive to corruption.⁷⁸

4.3 The Patterns and Forms of Corruption

The situation of corruption is grim and severe

This phrase seeks to define the extent of the problem of corruption in China by describing the patterns and forms of corruption. The phrase, the situation of corruption is grim and severe, is inherited Party rhetoric since at least 1992.⁷⁹ The description of the situation as grim and complex, firstly admits to the seriousness of the corruption among party cadres and secondly, calls for the adoption of more anti-corruption measures. This has proved to be an effective tactic that the Party also adopted during the Tiananmen protests in 1989.⁸⁰

Through inspection work reports and statements from the CDIC, the Party designate certain patterns and forms of corruptions. These are named “hard hit areas,” “hotbeds,” “collapsing corruption” or “corruption that happens around the masses.” Hard hit areas, can refer to a certain sphere of corruption, such as real estate, university, construction or State Owned Enterprises. “Hotbeds” refer to places which corruption can grow from such as luxury or extravagance. “Collapsing corruption” is a designation for a number of corruption cases that result in the exposure of “collective corruption,” usually regional corruption cases. These designated corruption spheres are not only helpful to organise information and render them manageable, but they also frame corruption as an issue that is serious and urgent but still containable. It is through such processes of designation and codification that the Party are actively producing knowledge and simultaneously constraining the structures of it. Within the media reports that deal with “hard hit areas,” the media specify the forms and patterns of corruption. For example, in the articles referring to corruption in the construction field, there is an examination of where corruption occurs in the process, such as inspection and ratification,

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Xinhuanet 2015b

⁸⁰ Lu 2000, Kindle Location 83.

the bidding process, procurement of equipment, the quality assessment and evaluation etc.⁸¹ Thus the CDIC who are involved in the production of such knowledge, are legitimated to act on such knowledge through the inspection, supervision and audit of all departments, bureaus and enterprises that are involved in the corruption cases. As such the media coverage of the anti-corruption drive is a signal of the Party's strength in maintaining political order and social control and capacity to punish offenders.

Furthermore the level of corruption within the Party and the Government, necessitates and justifies a response that is both resolute and immediate, as well as protracted and considered. The discourse creates a distance between the Party, its members and the people, as those who can produce knowledge, those who are constrained by such knowledge and those, who are the central justification for this process being done. As such it is both constituting a social hierarchy, as well as being constituted by them. The grim and complex situation is reinforced in oft used medical analogies, where the Party plays the role of the surgeon who has a full grasp on the situation and is able to carefully and skilfully remove the problem. The image of the surgeon is vivid in Xi's statement: "There is a problem but do not fear, we should only fear when there is apathy, but we will study the symptoms to find the right cure, it is better late than never."⁸²

4.4 The Solutions and remedies

4.4.1 The process of eradication: Do not dare, cannot, do not want

The process of eradicating corruption is a three step solution: officials will not dare to commit corruption, will not be able to commit corruption, and will not want to commit corruption. These three steps have their equivalent measures. For officials, to not want to commit corruption, there must be re-education of their faith and ideals; for officials to not be able to commit corruption, supervision management and the system must be strengthened; and finally, for

⁸¹ Liaowang 2015.

⁸² "有问题并不可怕，怕的是对问题麻木不仁，要对症下药，亡羊补牢，未为晚矣" in News Xinhuanet 2015a.

officials not to dare to commit corruption, there must be timely punishment.⁸³ The latter two, point to a regulatory function of the institution that constrain the behaviour of officials, while the former, points to influencing how officials act by informing them of their duties.

This three step solution is crucial to preventing the narrative of corruption from spiralling out of control. The fulfilment of the requirements of each step remain ambiguous and open ended, and as such, the Party are able to ensure that they can guide how the campaign through certain phases. For example, in January 2016, Xi stated that the first phase was set to be complete and that the anti-corruption drive had reached a point where the anti-corruption efforts were acting as a significant deterrent.⁸⁴ He said “this year there has been a significant change in the judgement of the anti-corruption situation, this is because our anti-corruption strength has become even stronger, and we have enough strength to overwhelm corruption.⁸⁵” Although the exact threshold of “achieved crushing momentum” is not defined, through certain phrases, the leaders are able to signals to the public, the Party and the media for the anti-corruption drive to slow down. From 2016, the amount of money involved in the cases reduce, there is a reorientation for the vast majority of articles to focus on rank and file cadres over senior officials.

4.4.2 The means of eradicating corruption

4.4.2.1 Punishment, Supervision and Education

As previously argued, the Party justifies the necessity for an anti-corruption drive through the exposure of corruption at every level of the Party and government and across many departments and bureaus that are involved in a diverse range of industries and spheres. Particularly, the media reports on “collective” corruption cases show how anti-corruption efforts are thwarted by vertical and horizontal “social relation” (guanxi) networks, which act as a

⁸³ News Xinhuanet 2013a

⁸⁴ People’s Daily 2016.

⁸⁵ “今年对反腐形势的判断出现明显变化，是因为我们的反腐力量更强大了，足够压倒腐败的力量” in *ibid*.

shelter to protect each other. By doing so, it advocates for the construction of a panopticon surveillance mechanism through which corruption cannot occur. This mechanism is the CDIC. Although, it was formed in 1949, a lack of autonomy, ineffective structural design resulting in an “ambiguous chain of command” meant that it was largely ineffective.⁸⁶ By demonstrating that corruption is “severe and complex,” it justifies the necessity for an autonomous CDIC, who have the authority to inspect and monitor even high levels of the Party, such as provincial Party committees. The CDIC, do not only have the power to inspect, but also to interrogate and administer discipline. Punishment is not administered to be cruel or for retribution, but to serve as educational examples to others, and thus to act as a deterrent.

Furthermore, the Party constructs corruption as an ethical problem of individual cadres, and point to a change in worldviews, and their values and systems of belief as the cause of corruption. This is represented in the four anti-working styles (*sifeng* 四风), whereby the former takes officials as individual subjects (hedonism and extravagance) and the latter as agencies of the state (formalism and bureaucratism).⁸⁷ This process is a resocialization of corrupt officials, not simply by constraining the behaviour of the cadres through coercive measures such as discipline and supervision, but by imposing traditional Confucian ethics of an upright noble official. By focusing on the values and beliefs of officials, they become the target of education.

4.4.2.2 Zero Tolerance

Zero tolerance is a key component, and is repeatedly emphasised in the anti-corruption campaign. It refers to the idea that regardless of the time, place and prohibited areas (i.e. retired officials), regardless of the individual and the seniority rank, the anti-corruption drive will target anyone who violates Party discipline or the nation’s laws. Thus, examples of corrupt officials being investigated during important events or throughout the holidays, or being

⁸⁶ Keliher and Wu 2016.

⁸⁷ Zhang and McGhee 2017, 134.

arrested in their homes, at work or at a meeting are used to emphasise the “zero tolerance” of the Party’s anti-corruption drive. In this process, the media are instrumental in creating a sense of fear amongst Party officials as well as demonstrating the Party’s political will to punish offenders.

Conclusion

This section has laid out the main framework for the official discourse on the anti-corruption campaign. It has sought to show how the discourse legitimates the position of Xi Jinping, justifies the reason for undertaking an anti-corruption drive and legitimates the authority of the Anti-Corruption disciplinary organs to do so. Xi borrows rhetoric from previous Party leaders to provide a sense of change through continuity to achieve national rejuvenation. His authority as moral leader or the Party is elevated by the media reports through the publication and analysis of his speeches and thought. Corruption is a problem that needs to be resolved in order to achieve this overall goal of national rejuvenation, as desired by the people. By showing that corruption directly harms the people’s interests and thus eroding the ties between the Party and the people, corruption prevents the Party from doing their duty and mission, to serve the People. The ultimate consequence of continuing corruption is the loss of the Party, thus serving as a justification for the anti-corruption campaign.

The cause of corruption is the values, beliefs and norms that are embedded in the political culture in China as represented by the Four Winds. Through this discourse, the Party are able to justify the need to address misdemeanours as well as instances of actual corruption. The Inspection Work Teams (*xunshizu* 巡视组) are responsible for inspecting corruption and producing reports on specific regions and work units (*danwei* 单位). Thus they are involved in the production of corruption knowledge, and as such are legitimised through the power of knowledge. The CDIC, who are responsible for the Inspection Work Teams, act on the knowledge to not only inspect and investigate cases of corruption, but to administer

discipline or if the cases are thought to demand a prison sentence, to turn cases over to the judiciary. The notion of Zero Tolerance shows how the CDIC derive their authority from the highest levels of the Party, as they are sanctioned to inspect and investigate officials at all levels of the Party and Government (except the Standing Committee). By reporting on the activities of the CDIC, the media are actively involved in reinforcing and reproducing the power structure that they are themselves constrained by.

5. Targets of Legitimation

This section is an analysis of the media reports coded corruption cases, corruption analysis and other corruption. It shows the final steps of the Party's media legitimation strategy in the anti-corruption drive. The second step is the process of condemning and delegitimizing a minority of its Party members. As it is also the Party who are in a position of authority to condemn, it is both able to reprimand its official, and reassert its position. For example, by condemning public officials for immoral behaviour, the Party are simultaneously asserting their moral position based on the immoral behaviour they condemn. Table 1 provides a crude summary of the argumentation patterns found in the articles.

Target of (il)legitimacy		2013	2014	2015	2016
Morals & Values	Behaviour	23%	50%	5%	10%
Morals & Values	Individual	19%	33%	10%	16%
Social Inequality	Welfare	8%	17%	33%	52%
Economic Performance		7%	9%	11%	3%

5.1 Morality

5.1.1 Redefining corruption: behavioural problems

Much of the anti-corruption drive coverage in the media is involved in a process to construct the parameters of acceptable behaviour amongst the cadres. Although there are corruption cases that are transferred to the judiciary, the vast majority are not seen as economic crimes, but as social or ethical violations that are handled solely by the disciplinary institutions. Thus the Party carefully delineate “unhealthy tendencies” from “corruption,” and as a result, not all corrupt activities are constructed in legal terms, but are often justified in terms of moral or immoral behaviour. Through regulations such as the EPC, the Party re-establish the normative categorisation of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Thus the media are a crucial outlet for processing and constructing these new parameters.

Noticeable in the 2013 media coverage on Xinhua, was a number of articles involved in the interpretation and “operationalising” of the abstract “four winds.”⁸⁸ The media gives the vague language of the central policies meaning, by using them to carve out clear distinctions of inappropriate behaviour. In my coding, I have only included articles that target “specific” behaviours, for example the use of public cars⁸⁹; or gift giving during the holidays⁹⁰ or cheating on expense reports.⁹¹ Aside from the regulatory evaluation of such behaviour, it is justified in terms of ethics and morals. One report addressing the banning of use of public funds to buy or send New Year’s Greeting cards, states “it is scarcely imaginable, that such a small New Year’s Greeting card, which seems like a gift of goose feathers, actually contains the harm of “the four winds⁹².” Much like the Christmas card in Christian traditions, vast numbers of elaborately designed New Year's greeting cards are sent to relatives, friends and colleagues annually only to be discarded. The report thus questions whether this perfunctory greeting is what is meant by formalism, and not feeling sorry when spending public money is what is

⁸⁸ Minzner 2009.

⁸⁹ News Xinhuanet 2013c

⁹⁰ News Xinhuanet 2013d.

⁹¹ News Xinhuanet 2016

⁹² “殊不知，小小贺卡，看似“鹅毛之礼”暗藏“四风”之弊” in Xinhua Economic Information 2013a.

meant by extravagant waste. Thus the use of public funds to send greeting cards is constructed as a waste by emphasizing the perfunctory function of the card. This is then reinforced as a value laden moral issue by elucidating the potential harm to the wider public, by stating that the money wasted on New Year's greeting cards could be spent on funding a primary school.⁹³ By doing so it gives concrete meaning to waste and is effective in advocating for social responsibility and a care for others. It then goes on to incorporate a number of other “seemingly trivial” behaviours under the “four winds,” which allows for the transfer of the argument based on morality, onto a number of other behaviours.

The difficulty of reshaping the behaviour of corrupt officials is that some actions, such as gift giving, use of public cars or entertainment fees, are considered normal by many of the state functionaries. The process of identifying corrupt behaviour and making examples of it, is an important means of problematizing the status quo on acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and thus calling for change. For example in 2013, Xinhua reported that China Railway Construction Corp. Ltd., the country's second-largest infrastructure contractor, spent over 800 million yuan in banquets and entertainment for guests. The article argues that SOEs as enterprises, have legitimate and necessary costs for entertaining clients associated with normal business operations that include gifts, dinners and sightseeing activities, but should not be seen as an excuse for reckless spending.⁹⁴ The offence here, is not hospitality itself, but what can be considered appropriate or inappropriate. The article stops short of connecting the exchange of business courtesy with clear cut examples of bribery, and does little to articulate any clear cut definition of “legitimate and necessary costs.” Nevertheless, such coercive punishments and uncertainty can instil a sense of fear among other corrupt officials, which is assumed can act as a deterrent.

⁹³ “据媒体报道，中部地区某县每年定制贺卡花费在 30 万元左右，”相当于花掉了一所希望小学的资金”
in Ibid

⁹⁴ News.Xinhuanet 2013b

5.1.2 Morality of individual cadres

It is not only the “corrupt” action or the “unhealthy tendency” that is taken as the object of such disciplinary measures, but also the corrupt officials themselves. Through a process of identifying corrupt individuals and imbuing them with negative identity traits, the object of discourse is the personal characteristics of the officials. Much of this is done by the revival of the notion of an upright official (*junzi*) in Confucian ideology, thus generating a discourse that can influence the standards by which official behaviour can be measured in public discourse.

A relatively small percentage of articles take an individual corrupt official as the referent object of the news report. They often refer to the Confession letters that are written by officials after arrest, which “is a special style of redemption and education.”⁹⁵ The confession letters are used as evidence to factualise the fallen official’s wrong-doings, and specify key junctures in the officials’ life, when the system of norms, values and beliefs began to shift. It is also the only opportunity that reprimanded officials are given a “voice” to re-legitimize their specific actions. However, given the conditions that confession letters are written under, and the shared characteristics of these letters, it can most accurately be considered the Party’s voice.⁹⁶ In most instances, officials are corrupted by the lure of money, jealousy, family members or corrupt businessmen rather than being considered intrinsically bad. The object of analysis in these instances turn to the private lives of the officials, and aim to reshape their morals and values. While the EPC is concerned with limiting the freedom of officials, the articles are articulated in terms of re-imposing traditional morals for a transformation of the ethical self.⁹⁷

The crime of the unrepentant official is a lack of modesty which is used as evidence of his immorality. Humility and modesty are key aspects of a noble official (*junzi*) in Confucian traditions. The unrepentant official brags about his accomplishments and lists his titles and

⁹⁵ 是自我救赎和教育后人的特殊“文体” in CDIC Website 2016; Legal Daily, 2015.

⁹⁶ Wang 2017.

⁹⁷ McGhee and Zhang 2017.

honours as proof of his competency. These officials are not only guilty of embezzlement and accepting bribes, but more importantly of a lack of humility. By boasting about their accomplishments, the official is charged with a self-serving attitude, rather than working wholeheartedly for the state and the people. An example of this is Chen Mingxian, whose confession letter is quoted to denounce and delegitimize his character.⁹⁸

In my sample, family corruption became one of the narratives of the anti-corruption drive from June 2015. Templates for the characters in family corruption case involve an unethical wife, characterised by smoking, drinking, playing mahjong, and a bossy and domineering temperament and an arrogant son, characterised by an obsession with material wealth and privilege. Corruption in these cases, is the result of the weakness on the part of the male official (always male) who is unable to hold resolutely to his values and beliefs, unable to separate public from private, and gives into the urges of his family. The official is responsible for ensuring the correct working style of the family and thus becomes the target of discipline. These officials are less immoral than the unrepentant official, as it is their misguided understanding of their duties rather than an irredeemable character flaw. One article states, “The original intention behind the corruption of many of the ‘fallen’ corrupt officials is to provide their families with an even better livelihood.”⁹⁹ Such statements exemplify the inherent contradiction in imposing traditional Confucian ethics to regulate behaviour within the family. The Confucian preference on filial piety above the universal way¹⁰⁰ or the emphasis on mutual non-disclosure among family members¹⁰¹ do not sit comfortably with Party ideals. Nonetheless, the Party imposes a code of elite masculinity by incorporating both Confucian values and Communist notions of self-sacrifice and placing one’s interests second to those of the Party and the people. One article quotes traditional texts, “after you cultivate yourself, you can manage your family, after your family is managed, you can govern your states and bring justice and virtue to the World” (The Book of Rites: Big Learning) as well as providing examples

⁹⁸ Hebei News Net 2015

⁹⁹ Jiancha ribao 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Liu 2007.

¹⁰¹ Wang 2014.

of Party officials such as Mao Zedong, Luo Ronghuan and Chen Yun with good family working styles.¹⁰² The Party are thus politicising the family, and attempting to govern the Party indirectly through institutions such as the family or the self.

The media play a central role in communicating both to the public and to Party members. It clarifies the parameters of acceptable behaviour which is justified in moral terms. This is an effort to change the behaviour of cadres first, through coercive restrictions on their behaviour such as the EPC, and second, to publicise the details of corrupt officials who have been caught which is hoped will be both pedagogical material and a deterrent. The Party distances itself from its corrupt members by denouncing them publicly. Through such denunciations, the Party is able to reassert its position as the vanguard of upholding traditional Confucian values and morals. It is also able to save some officials from total condemnation by declaring that while some are indeed misguided, they are nonetheless only trying to provide a better livelihood for their family. In this endeavour, these officials fail to uphold their filial duties by involving their families in corrupt activities, who are often prosecuted. The unrepentant official is both un-Confucian and un-Communist thus has no redeemable qualities.

5.2 Social Inequality and the provision of public goods and services

Part of the moral dimension of its legitimation strategy is the effort to emphasise the ability of the government to take responsibility for the welfare of the people. Although, mentioned in early articles (2013 & 2014), those addressing this type of corruption appear random as they are not interwoven through an overarching narrative, cross references or case types. However by the later phase of the anti-corruption struggle, as the Party shift their t from Tigers to Flies, the narrative of harming public welfare is clearly stated and the articles use different case studies to factualise and concretise this claim.

In a speech given by Wang Qishan at the fifth plenary session of the eighteenth Central Commission for the Discipline of the CCP in January 2015, the need to focus on corruption at

¹⁰² Jiancha ribao 2015.

the grassroots level was emphasised. According to one article, “corruption that happens around the masses” was mentioned once a month from January to May 2015 by the CDIC website.¹⁰³ The CDIC held meetings on April 23rd and May 26th to specify details of work deployment in order to tackle corruption at the grassroots level. The Party thus, recalibrate the discourse on corruption through public statements, meetings and speeches. In conjunction with the various statements by the CDIC, the first article that is framed as “corruption that occurs by the side of the masses” is published in April. It calls for the anti-corruption struggle to address the corruption at grassroots level. It is argued that the anti-corruption drive needs to be based on the “needs of the masses,” it needs to effect “change from where the masses are the most dissatisfied, where there are the most complaints and even from the places where they are forced to petition.”¹⁰⁴

From July 2015, the CDIC began to issue monthly reports on the “typical cases” of corruption and the Four Winds problems that happens around the masses. By December 2015, there were altogether 860 cases reported in these monthly reports. In my sample of media reports, the content of these reports became a major focus. The reports actively encourage the cases to be used as pedagogical material in order to produce a deterrent effect: “The CDIC have emphasised many times that the exposure of the reports should be intensified, they shouldn’t hide the ugly, or shield [the facts]. Send out a strong signal, put pressure at each level by reporting on the investigation of the typical problems.”¹⁰⁵ The articles differentiate in how they organise the information and which CDIC report they use, but the articles all emphasise the scope of the investigation by stating all the provinces and official positions that have been investigated. Furthermore, the articles touch on a number of different corruption cases that involve: embezzlement, encroachment and fraud of various subsidies and compensation fees, that are provided by the state for the welfare of the public;

¹⁰³ Changjiang Ribao 2015.

¹⁰⁴ News Xinhuanet 2015c.

¹⁰⁵ 在通报上述问题时，中央纪委多次强调，要强化通报曝光，不遮丑、不护短，通过通报典型问题查处情况和责任追究情况，发出强烈信号，层层传导压力，督促各地始终保持查处发生在群众身边的“四风”和腐败问题工作力度” In News.Xinhuanet 2015c

misappropriation of collective funds (挪用公款); and receiving the reward for being the go-between or middleman (好处费). In 2016, CDIC reports also single out corruption in the poverty alleviation field, following the special emphasis it was given in the Sixth Plenary Session of the Eighteenth CDIC meeting in January.¹⁰⁶ In addition, the same approach is used at the provincial level, whereby the Provincial Discipline and Inspection Committee (PDIC) report typical cases of the same nature. In my sample, the focus of the Hainan PDIC were lesser offences in terms of the amount of money that was involved, and that none of the cases were transferred to the judiciary. One of typical cases involved the use of collective funds for the unauthorised purchase of scenic spot entrance tickets, amounting to 660 RMB.¹⁰⁷

The media reports on grassroots corruption in the second phase of the anti-corruption struggle is interact with each other through a main framework that emphasises that grassroots corruption harms public welfare. The “flies” are eating the funds from the collective bowl of soup, it is through such efforts that the Party can show that there are various welfare allowances, subsidies and poverty alleviation programs in place. However, at each level of the lower stratum of government, they are being siphoned off and never reach the public, who they are intended for. Corruption occurs at these levels precisely because there are so many programs and welfare made available in recent times, and the supervision mechanism has not had time to catch up.¹⁰⁸ Thus, an important point for the legitimization of the central leadership is the bifurcation process between local and central. Statements make it clear that “there exists in the anti-corruption drive at present, a pattern from high to low, high is hot and low is cold, high is busy and low is at leisure.”¹⁰⁹ The legitimacy of the local government is sacrificed for the legitimacy at the centre. It is through the process of condemnation of these officials, that the Party are able to reassert itself as a benevolent government who takes responsibility for the welfare of the people, by emphasising the varied and numerous efforts

¹⁰⁶ Disciplinary and Inspection Paper 2016.

¹⁰⁷ Hainan Daily 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Xinhua Economic Information 2016.

¹⁰⁹ 反腐不能像深深的海洋，上面九级风浪，下面却纹丝不动 in News Xinhuanet 2015c

to provide benefits to the people. This is a notion that is particularly poignant in China, where there is a widening wealth gap. By linking social inequality, which is an increasing worry in legitimization discourse in China, with notions of corruption, the Party are also able to provide explanations for it and reassert its political will to solve these issues.

5.3 Economic Performance

While economic performance has been considered a pillar of legitimacy, my sample shows that comparatively few articles use economic arguments to justify the need for an anti-corruption drive. Hsu found that it became central to the narrative during the Tiananmen Square demonstrations. The articles in my sample support the consensus that corruption harms economic growth, offering various explanations for how: They argue that corruption deforms certain markets to exaggerate a products market value; or that corruption disrupts fair competition in markets. In addition, around a third of the articles that incorporate economic argumentation, use a summary of Double Paradox by Andrew Wedeman to discredit the argument that corruption is the lubricant to economic growth. They quote Wedeman to argue that because serious corruption emerged only after reforms had already created dynamic economic growth, it did not provide a significant barrier to economic growth, thus providing an explanation for the coexistence of corruption and economic growth in China. One article takes the argument further to argue that corruption will “eventually lead to the collapse of the system and social unrest.¹¹⁰” Furthermore, following Wedeman, they attribute a portion of the success of economic growth to the anti-corruption efforts already made by the CPP. This highlights the ongoing struggle to delegitimize corruption in the face of economic growth.

Another argument that presents a significant challenge for the anti-corruption drive, is the notion that the anti-corruption drive is in itself, a cause for slowing GDP rates. Shanxi was designated as a “hard hit area” and was one of the most heavily targeted provinces in Xi’s anti-corruption drive. Reuters reported that the anti-corruption drive had left 300 job posts

¹¹⁰ Xinhua Economic Information 2014

open, including senior official posts. In 2015, it was reported that Shanxi had the lowest growth rates of any province, at 4.9%. Vice Premier of the State Council, Ma Kai, at a meeting of Shanxi delegates, addressed the issue of Shanxi's GDP in a speech. The cause of slowing GDP rates are not linked directly to the anti-corruption efforts. Rather he argues that the whole country faced an economic challenge in 2015, and that it's only with great effort, that the officials in Shanxi were able to ensure that the damage to economic growth was not worse. He argued, "If corruption is not eradicated, it will inevitably cause a backward and mistaken selection of officials and cause great harm, if this malignant tumour is not eradicated, it is impossible that good economic work will be done." Thus legitimating the anti-corruption drive that installed good and dedicated officials who work tirelessly to prevent any damage to economic growth. This is an interesting example of the re-legitimation effort.

5.4. National Pride

The notion of nationalism as a core pillar of the CPP's political legitimacy gained a foothold in Western scholarship.¹¹¹ With the waning practicality of a Communist ideology and the loss of people's faith in Maoism, the CCP turned to nationalism as an alternative to strengthen its' political legitimacy.¹¹² The government has promoted official nationalism through the media, patriotic education in textbooks and other types of propaganda. The "anti-China" theories and the "collapse theories" that became prevalent in the West, following the student demonstrations at Tiananmen Square produced strong nationalistic reactions in China. China's economic growth and rise to the position of competing superpower, particularly in the face of the fall of the Soviet Union, the anti-China international environment and an intensely patriotic education, has led to a complex stream of emotional threads running through nationalistic sentiments in China. The "Pessoptimistic" Nation, as coined by William Callahan,

¹¹¹ Ibid

¹¹² Zheng 1999, 87.

conceptualises a nation that is marked by both its nationalistic pride in the country’s achievements, but which is linked to its fear of the “national humiliation” of the 19th Century.¹¹³

How Chinese media conceptualises its anti-corruption campaign relative to corruption in other countries in the world, cuts across the discourse associated with “China’s rise.” The status of “China’s rise” in Chinese discourse, is characterised as “big but not strong” (da’er buqiang 大而不强), “rising but has not yet risen” (jiangqi weiqi 将起未起) and “more powerful but not powerful enough” (jiangqiang weiqiang, 将强未强).¹¹⁴ It is recognised that it still needs to cross certain thresholds to claim that it has truly risen. A Red Flag article argues that corruption is directly related to a country’s stage of socio economic development.¹¹⁵ Thereby naturalising the corruption problem in China and justifying its ranking in relation to other countries.

The media reports in my sample, demonstrate that corruption is a worldwide phenomenon. In my sample, a consistently high number of media reports are allocated to corruption in other countries. My sample may be biased, given that I was searching from an IP address located in the Netherlands, but the sudden increase in 2014 is suggestive, though not conclusive, that more reports in 2014 were based on international cases of corruption. This may be an attempt to allay concerns about the extent of corruption in China that was being exposed due to the anti-corruption drive.

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016
International Outlook	4/43	11/33	3/36	3/34
Percentage	9%	33%	8%	9%

Table 2: Number of articles with an international outlook

¹¹³ Callahan 2012.

¹¹⁴ Wang Jianhua 2017.

¹¹⁵ Red Flag Manuscript 2015.

Looking more carefully at the media reports in my sample, there are 3 reports that deal with international cooperation and China's search for corrupt fugitives (foxes). All the other remaining articles deal with political corruption, rather than in the field of corporate or sports (Fifa corruption scandal 2015). 6 were related to the US, 3 to the EU, 2 to Japan and 2 to Singapore, and did not touch on corruption scandals in other Asian countries (Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, Malaysia). Again, this could be related to search results biases. Nevertheless, in the majority of these cases, the reports point out that even in countries which are usually associated with clean government and a strong anti-corruption mechanism, corruption exists. It demonstrates that where there is public power, there is corruption, regardless of the political and judiciary system that it is embedded in.

The articles relating to political corruption scandals in the US, Japan, and Australia, are focused on corruption in political donations and the electoral process. By doing so, it is able to establish a clear link between democratic elections, policy and corruption. In the articles concerned with US corruption, there are three articles that are "informative," in that they provide information on a case (one) and a corruption research report (two). However, all of the articles provide an additional analysis of the general corruption situation in the US, with a particular focus on political donations (five/six) and construction projects (two/six). Election campaigns are seen as "inseparable from money."¹¹⁶ Many of the articles argue that as political donations can affect the political future of presidential campaigners, it then also affects the policy trend of the winner. Such statements are "factualised" through media techniques that serve to blur the lines between opinion and fact. One article "provides evidence" through examples, such as the National Rifle Association.¹¹⁷ Another article draws on expert opinion and public opinion to indirectly call into question the legitimacy of the election process, by suggesting that American politicians are beholden to political donations from special interest groups, who are thus able to manipulate policies in their favour. "Public opinion questioned whether this would mean that money completely manipulated American politics... As Martin,

¹¹⁶ News Xinhuanet 2014

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

one of the prize winning authors of “Betrayal of America” when discussing American domestic political corruption problem warned, once the two parties are controlled by the political donations of domestic and foreign enterprises and special interest groups, the Democratic and Republican two parties no longer represent the interests of the American people.¹¹⁸ A key point in the media coverage is that political donations is a *legalised* form of corruption. A number of the articles highlights that the US has a relatively perfected (*wanshan* 完善) anti-corruption mechanism and legal system, but yet political corruption is an unavoidable characteristic of electoral democracy.

A particularly interesting comparison, is how anti-corruption efforts and the “clean government” of Western style democratic political systems compare with that of Singapore’s authoritarian democracy model. There are two articles in my sample, one on the trial of Ng Boon Gay, and the other that reports the results of the Transparency International Corruption index. The media report on Ng Boon Gay is a relatively straightforward news articles that focuses on the facts of the trial. It states facts regarding the case, the suspected crime, the trial and the verdict. The quotes from the judge and the prosecutor, in order to provide the reader with additional details for why Ng Boon Gay was acquitted and whether or not there was likely to be an appeal. In stark contrast, the media report on Naoki Inose (Japan) and the Eight by Five corruption case (Australia), use this opportunity to designate “hard hit areas” and “hotbeds” of corruption in these countries (both of which are political funds in the election process). By doing so, it identifies the case as one part of a larger corruption problem in these countries, rather than a stand-alone case. In the case of Japan, it highlights the system as relatively clean and effective, but only to highlight that the system is unable to safeguard against certain types of corruption. For Australia, the use of the term Pure Land (*jingtu* “净土”)

¹¹⁸ 公众舆论质疑此举将导致美国政治彻底被金钱操纵... 诚如美国获奖图书《背叛美国》的作者马丁在谈及美国国内政治腐败问题时警告说，一旦两党被国内外企业和特别利益集团用政治献金控制后，民主、共和两党就不再代表美国民众的利益了 In People’s Daily Net 2014. (I haven’t been able to verify that the book used in this quote exists.)

makes a mockery of the claims that Australia is called a “clean country.”¹¹⁹ The Ng Boon Gay trial case, however does not stand as an exception to the claims of a strict anti-corruption system, but rather as an example of it. “Singapore is famous for its strict anti-corruption and clean government, civil servants are required to avoid anything that might invite suspicious, the “presumption of guilt” is also the principle in cases of corruption, and the defendant has the responsibility to prove his innocence.”¹²⁰

This is backed by the other article that gives a glowing review of Singapore’s anti-corruption system. The article qualifies Singapore as exceptional by noting that it is the only Asian economy to make it into the top 10 of the Corruption Perceptions index. The reason for this is due to its “zero tolerance” position towards corruption, which (as shown) is a phrase often touted in Xi’s own anti-corruption campaign. The association helps to legitimate China’s political system by demonstrating that a non-Western democratic political system can also be successful in combating corruption and building a clean government. The Red Flag piece cited earlier, directly makes the point that “In Singapore and Hong Kong, countries that do not completely implement Western democratic systems, the level of “cleanness” far surpasses Korea and Taiwan, countries that transplanted Western systems of governance.”¹²¹

Conclusion

This section addresses how the anti-corruption discourse seeks to de-legitimise corrupt officials through moral argumentation, in order to reassert its stance on corruption and commitment to public welfare. Morality is a key justification of political power in China. As such, the exposure of corrupt officials in social media, “give the lie to the officially cultivated mystique

¹¹⁹ Pure land refers to the celestial realm or pure abode of a buddha or bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism.

¹²⁰ 新加坡以严厉反贪腐和廉政闻名，公务人员被要求避免瓜田李下的嫌疑，对腐败案也以“有罪推定”原则，相反被告有责任举证证明自己无罪。in Sg Xinhuanet 2013b.

¹²¹ 没有完全实行西方民主制度的新加坡和香港，廉洁程度却远远超过移植西方民主制度的韩国和台湾 in Red Flag Manuscript 2015.

of benevolent governance.¹²² The public image of an official as magnanimously carrying out the work of the state in the name of the people is easy to refute when videos emerge the state's virtuous officials soliciting prostitutes or when officials are caught faking a Tiger discovery.¹²³ Although difficult to quantify in their scale, these instances of creative acts of subversion are statements that challenge the moral and benevolent image of the state. When politics is moralised as in China, "any political criticism inevitably becomes moral criticism. Personal morality of the politicians becomes a public matter. Politics is filled of charges and counter charges of corruption—a typical characteristic of immorality."¹²⁴ In undertaking an anti-corruption drive, the Party is recognising some of the criticisms directed at its members. The Party are thus delegitimizing a portion of its members, but by doing so the Party are simultaneously able to reassert their moral authority and claims of benevolent governance.

In contrast to the traditional role attributed to economic performance as a pillar of the CCP's legitimacy, my sample show that comparatively few articles argue that corruption harms economic growth. However, this is not to say that the argument that the CCP rely on economic performance for maintaining political legitimacy is altogether incorrect. My analysis shows that when economic growth slowed, and is articulated as a threat to legitimacy, arguments of the CCP as the protector of economic growth were mobilised to relegitimate the Shanxi provincial government. In the final stage of the legitimation strategy, my analysis has shown how the Party legitimise the political system through a comparison with corruption in other countries.

6. Conclusion

This thesis is concerned with the legitimation strategy of the CCP. It starts by considering the dilemma posed by Fu Hualing and Bruce Dickings in regards to how the CCP can conduct a widespread anti-corruption drive in terms that are favourable to regime support, whilst simultaneously delegitimising a significant number of its own members. A credible anti-

¹²² Shue 2004, 71.

¹²³ Gao and Stanyer 2014.

¹²⁴ Tong 2011, 146.

corruption drive, needs to show that it is making serious efforts to discipline the bureaucracy and tackle corruption. However, an increase in “corruption talk,” and the exposure of high level corrupt officials runs the risk of creating a perception of a deteriorating political system fraught with corruption.

The thesis finds that the legitimisation strategy is done through four stages. The first is legitimisation of Xi Jinping through the publication and commentary on his speeches and thought. It propagates the notion of Xi Jinping Thought, which functions to exalt his status as moral leader of the Party and elevate his ideas to an ideological status that cannot be challenged. The second stage is the legitimisation of the CCP as the enforcer of anti-corruption efforts over all levels of Party and Government departments. The CDIC are to lead the fight on corruption. Administrative reforms have given greater autonomy to the CDIC to investigate, interrogate, audit and administer punishment. The media reports use the information that is published by the CDIC, thereby naturalising its authority to produce knowledge and justify the need for the CDIC to act on that same knowledge. The CDIC thus have the power to shape corruption narratives as they are the sole authority in the production of corruption statistics and facts. The third stage is the delegitimation of swaths of its own members. Through redefining corruption to cover a range of misdemeanours, the CDIC are justified to discipline a broad range of norms and behaviours that fall outside the parameters of the legal mechanism. The media help to disseminate the new moral guidelines and disciplinary regulations by problematising certain behaviours in moralising language and publicising examples of wrongdoing. In doing so, they are able to focus precisely on the areas which are deemed threatening to the legitimacy of the Party (the loss of moral values, corruption and social inequality). By doing so, the Party are able to reaffirm their commitment to reshape the values and norms of the Party, to eradicate corruption and to ensure the welfare of the people, thereby reaffirming themselves as moral and benevolent leader. The final stage is the legitimisation of the political system of China. This is done through emphasising that corruption is a worldwide phenomenon and thus corruption is not endemic to the political system of China itself. A focus on corruption problems in political donations in comparison the Singaporean system provides

evidence that good corruption rankings do not depend on installing a Western democratic system. Thus it is through such steps that the Party legitimises itself as a Party, the anti-corruption drive and the political system that it is embedded in.

These stages are discursively constructed for the purposes of examining how the CCP legitimises itself through the discourse on anti-corruption in state-media, and as such the stages work simultaneously together. Legitimation is a dynamic process that plays between the spaces of everyday interaction, multimedia, cultural products, personal experiences and a whole host of variable possibilities. The legitimacy of the regime does not rest on static concepts of economic growth, nationalism or moral and benevolent governance, but rather as a hybrid mixture that operate at certain times for certain purposes. Certain modes of legitimacy become more salient in certain events and they are independent of each other. Further studies that focus on specific events, such as the Shanxi political corruption scandal could elucidate what kind of discursive dynamics take place in the processes of de-legitimation and re-legitimation in corruption scandals. Furthermore, this thesis treated "state-media" as a monolithic whole, thus further studies could expand the sources to cover privatised media as well as blogs and social media to determine whether these argumentation patterns are replicated across different types of media. These studies could show whether meaning over corruption is contested and negotiated and thus demonstrate how state media interacts with popular conceptions of corruption.

This paper can be seen as a preliminary study to the legitimation strategy of the CCP through the anti-corruption discourse in the media in China. Nonetheless, the success of the legitimation strategy rests on the long run with the success of the CCP's efforts to eradicate corruption.

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