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# Party Watch Quarterly Report 1 | 3

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## About this Report

The Party Watch Quarterly Report 1|3 provides a comprehensive overview of important Chinese Communist Party (CCP)-related developments and trends for the period covering May 2018 to August 2018 and offers near-term estimates of their future direction. The report is heavily based on Chinese language publications analyzed during the Party Watch Initiative's daily monitoring of authoritative CCP-regime sources.

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## Executive Summary

- The Central Propaganda Department is directing a balancing act between deterring US trade actions in the US-China trade dispute and preventing further inflammation of bilateral tensions with excessive vitriol or personalized attacks. The danger of a faltering Chinese economy resulting from US trade actions is the greatest near-term risk to CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping's veneer of total political control, evidenced by Party commentary addressing detractors of Xi's strident policies.
- Since Xi Jinping's major speech on the environment in May, the CCP's discipline apparatus has assumed a primary role in fighting China's "War on Pollution" due to its past effectiveness in bolstering the authority of counter-pollution measures. The Party's central role in tackling China's grave environmental situation appears likely to continue for the foreseeable future, confirming the central leadership's determination to address this core issue of popular concern.
- Since Xi Jinping's speech at the first session of the 13<sup>th</sup> Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in March, China's united front apparatus has propagated its long-maintained system of powerless minority political parties under CCP leadership as a model for foreign countries to emulate. It is rebranding this system for external consumption under the rubric of a "new type of party system." Foreign dignitaries that have dialogue with Chinese united front officials can expect to increasingly be lectured on the superior qualities of this system.

## US-China Trade and the Challenge to China's Senior Leadership

*Party-state propaganda exposes the CCP leadership's economic anxieties in the wake of challenges from the Trump administration.*

In the first three months of 2018, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi Jinping oversaw the institutionalization of his personal authority through amendments to the People's Republic of China (PRC) Constitution and the appointment of his allies to positions of power. As expounded on in the Party Watch Initiative Quarterly Report 2,<sup>i</sup> these events make it highly unlikely that Xi's personal authority will be challenged in the foreseeable future short of serious policy failures.

Nonetheless, evidence has emerged that Xi's leadership has experienced an unexpected backlash in the wake of US President Donald Trump's efforts to counter Xi's more aggressive economic policies. Deteriorating trade relations with the US appears not only to have exposed Xi to backlash over his handling of trade and foreign policy, but has also created an opening for critics to voice concern over his rapid concentration of power and cultivation of a cult of personality to cement his authority.<sup>ii</sup> Rumors of pushback against Xi's power by Chinese elites in recent months abound,<sup>iii</sup> with some sources claiming that the repercussions have hit ideology tsar Wang Huning (王沪宁) for his part in mishandling propaganda and crafting

an overly nationalistic image of the country.<sup>iv</sup>

These rumors lend credence to the more visible trends in party-state propaganda during this period. By assessing party-state coverage of the US-China trade relationship, observers can glean the challenge posed by the Trump administration from the Chinese leadership's perspective. In its handling of both the ZTE ban and the US-China trade war, the CCP propaganda apparatus has unwittingly exposed the economic anxieties of China's senior leadership, hinting at challenges that could affect Xi Jinping's seemingly inviolable grip on power.

### ZTE: A Microcosm of the Broader Dysfunctional US-China Economic Relationship

The challenge to Xi from the current US presidential administration moved from rhetoric to reality on 16 April, when Secretary of Commerce Wilbur L. Ross announced a denial of export privileges against Zhongxing Telecommunications Equipment Corporation, of Shenzhen, China ("ZTE Corporation") and ZTE Kangxun Telecommunications Ltd. of Hi-New Shenzhen, China ("ZTE

Kangxun”), collectively referred to hereafter as “ZTE.” The export ban, which prevents US companies from selling technology to the company for seven years, was enacted after the US Commerce Department discovered ZTE’s repeated dishonesty toward the US government following its March 2017 agreement to pay \$1.19 billion in fines and punish employees for exporting telecommunications equipment subject to US trade restrictions to Iran and North Korea.<sup>v</sup>

ZTE remains heavily reliant on US components for its products, and the ban was so devastating to the company that it was forced to cease operations in May 2018. Of note, ZTE enjoys a strong relationship with China’s top leadership as a national technology champion, evident by the Chinese government’s decision to raise the ZTE case during already tense trade negotiations,<sup>vi</sup> and even more so by Xi’s direct appeal to Trump to lessen the company’s punishment.<sup>vii</sup>

At first glance, the troubles of one Chinese company seem less important than the attention the case garnered in Chinese media. However, because companies like ZTE participate in the Xi administration’s economic policies meant to turn China into a preeminent economic and technological power, such as the Made in China 2025 framework—the plan to make China an international leader in critical future industries such as robotics, artificial intelligence,

semiconductors, and electric vehicles—any foreign punishment of these companies can be taken as a rejection of the CCP frameworks under which they operate. This in turn becomes an affront to China’s image-sensitive paramount leader.

Made in China 2025 in particular has been the subject of increasing foreign criticism in 2018, second only to that received by Xi’s other top economic initiative, the “Belt and Road.” Not only did Xi preside over the creation of these policies, but his administration has also encouraged their propagation through official media as part of the larger push to signal China’s rising prominence on the world stage.

After the ban was announced, the Chinese leadership’s economic anxieties were put on display through party-state propaganda, especially regarding China’s continued reliance on high-technology goods and components from the US and other advanced countries. In a 19 April “Commentator Observation,” *People’s Daily* commentator Li Zheng (李拯) called on readers to respond to China’s technological gaps by mastering core technologies through self-reliance. Citing the *New York Times*, Li asserted that the seven year ban is aimed directly at the Made In China 2025 strategy, and admitted that domestically produced computer chips still lag behind their advanced competitors, noting that in 2016 China imported \$230 billion worth of chips—twice the value of crude oil

imported that same year.<sup>viii</sup> *People's Daily* reiterated ZTE's unrepentant position in a subsequent 24 April commentary stating that the ban was unfair and unreasonable, with the company vowing to fight for ZTE customer interests.<sup>ix</sup>

That same day, Xi pointed to the successful construction of the Three Gorges Dam as an example of Chinese ingenuity. He stated, "this is a superior model of what our country's socialist system is capable of producing, it is a model of the Chinese people's wisdom and creativity, it is a model of the Chinese people's progress toward prosperity...The core technologies, the key technologies, *cannot be panhandled* [emphasis added]; we must rely on our own efforts. 1.3 billion Chinese people must work as one, hone their struggle, and achieve the Chinese dream!"<sup>x</sup>

Soon after, Xi again addressed this perceived deficiency of technological reliance on foreign countries. On the morning of 26 April, Xi visited FiberHome Technologies Group, an information technology and telecommunications company in Wuhan. He pointed to China's long-touted success in developing atomic weapons and satellites (两弹一星) as examples of the superiority of the socialist system, which concentrates resources to accomplish major undertakings. The next step in tackling key scientific and technological problems, Xi said, "is

abandoning delusions and relying on oneself."<sup>xi</sup>

Xi's emphasis on self-reliance continued into the following month, evidenced during his visit to Peking University on 2 May. Xi inspected the university's science departments, where he stated that innovation is the driver of development and the key factor in the country's comprehensive strength and core competitiveness. He reiterated that China must hold scientific innovation in its own hands. The visit was covered in a full front-page article in *People's Daily*.<sup>xii</sup>

The reaction of state media to ZTE's troubles and Xi's well-propagated admonitions that the country should "abandon delusions" and that key technologies "cannot be panhandled" suggest the incident seriously disconcerted China's paramount leader, and perhaps indicated his frustrations that China's socialist system is yet reliant on China's number one capitalist competitor for technological progress. In fact, the challenge to ZTE is likely viewed by the CCP leadership as a microcosm for the troubles of the Chinese economy at large, outwardly strong yet suffering from serious dependencies that risk its overall health.

In the end, Xi's direct appeal to Trump, combined with ZTE's intense lobbying of lawmakers in Washington, appear to have succeeded in reducing the company's punishment to the payment

of \$1.4 billion in fines, the appointment of a new management board, and the opening of a ZTE internal compliance office supervised by US-approved staff.<sup>xiii</sup> Such political solutions have to date, however, been less effective in settling the broader trade dispute between the two countries, which risks blunting Xi's hitherto aggressive foreign policy drive bring China into the economic center of the world and foster a self-serving international trading system conducive to China's rise.

### The US-China Trade War

Official PRC media coverage of the ongoing trade dispute between the US and China suggests a careful balancing act between exuding confidence and not exposing China's top leader to blame and criticism should things not fair well for Beijing.

US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin's early May delegation to Beijing to try to reach a consensus was at first deemed a success story of China's strident position by nationalist outlets. Citing a "source close to the negotiations," a 4 May *Global Times* editorial stated that the US's willingness to negotiate was due to China's strong response to US threats and the country's "moral high ground of safeguarded free trade."<sup>xiv</sup> Likewise, coverage of the Trump-Xi phone call on 8 May focused on Xi's emphasis on economic cooperation, compromise, and the potential for win-win results. Trump was

predictably portrayed as agreeing with Xi that trade issues should be handled "properly."<sup>xv</sup>

Since that time, however, reports surfaced that the propaganda authorities issued orders to avoid mention of Made In China 2025, which has been viewed by China's trading partners, including the US and the European Union, as evidence of Chinese governmental efforts to dominate high technology industries through unfair assistance, including through state subsidies, forced technology transfer and joint-venture requirements, and other such practices. According to a 26 June report by the *South China Morning Post*, this edict coincided with Mnuchin's May delegation to China for trade negotiations, and other mainland media sources confirmed the edict was in effect.<sup>xvi</sup>

Likewise, state media appears to have been instructed not to attack Trump directly with vitriol in order to avoid the war of state policies becoming personal attacks. Foreign observers have duly noted the contrast between Trump's rhetoric attacking North Korean leader Kim Jong-un—calling him a "dotard" and "little rocket man"—to Trump's treatment of Xi, which has been comparatively respectful and positive.<sup>xvii</sup> No doubt Party propagandists worry about how they might respond to similar insults from Trump (what if Trump compared Xi to Winnie the Pooh?)<sup>xviii</sup> without inadvertently escalating the



trade war itself, or letting Xi appear weak.

The result is that following Liu's second visit of the year to the US in May, which ultimately failed to convince Trump to forsake the imposition of 25% tariffs on \$50 billion in Chinese products,<sup>xix</sup> official outlets avoided excessive inflammatory rhetoric aimed at Trump himself and yet issued strident warnings of Beijing's willingness to counterattack. *People's Daily* coverage of the 2-3 June Beijing visit of an American delegation headed by Wilbur Ross emphasized that progress had been made in talks, but that if US tariffs were enacted the accomplishments of the talks would be lost.<sup>xx</sup>

The tone changed to one of moral justification and regret following the White House's decision to enact tariffs, with the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) declaring that China "will resolutely defend national interests, the interests of the Chinese people, and defend economic globalization and the multilateral trading system."<sup>xxi</sup> On 19 June, MOFCOM responded to new statements from the White House, claiming that the US had further intensified the situation by threatening to draw up a list of \$200 billion in goods subject to tariffs, and that if the "US acts irrationally" (美方失去理性) and issues a list, China will adapt comprehensive qualitative and quantitative countermeasures.<sup>xxii</sup> *People's Daily* and Xinhua predictably responded in kind,

with Xinhua declaring in an 18 June commentary that "a tough counterattack and preventing war through war are the best choices to stop conflict against warlike people" (强硬反击、以战止战是对付好战者的最好选择).<sup>xxiii</sup>

As credible reports emerged in August that the annual secretive Beidaihe conclave was underway, where senior leaders were said to be discussing their approach to the trade war among other sensitive economic issues, *People's Daily* issued a commentary authored by the rarely-used Ren Ping (任平) byline. This byline is likely a homophonous pen name standing for "People's Daily Commentary" (人民日报评论) used sparingly in the past to address similarly sensitive issues. In 2016, for example, Ren Ping was used to discuss the Cultural Revolution on the movement's 50th anniversary, a time when Xi's own blossoming cult of personality faced increasing criticism.<sup>xxiv</sup> The recent August article specifically detracted the "specious viewpoints" of those that would blame China for being excessively confident and brazen and those that believe China should make concessions to the US to prevent further damages.

The use of the Ren Ping pen name likely confirms that the central leadership feels the need to respond to the growing rumbling of its critics, which point to Beijing's staunch position on nearly every aspect of its foreign policy, particularly trade. The commentary's

placement on page five (albeit with a front page note of the article), along with the effort to somewhat obfuscate the true author, suggests that although the Party center feels the need to authoritatively address these critics, the paper dares not do so with a full front page commentary that would garner excessive attention.

## Conclusion

The Central Propaganda Department appears to be directing a balancing act between sending proper deterrence signaling through government statements and official commentary and preventing further inflammation of the trade war by personalizing counterattacks against Trump. That is almost certainly because the Party leadership understands that to antagonize the Trump administration into enacting even stronger economic sanctions risks weakening a Chinese economy that is already experiencing signs of difficulties in 2018.<sup>xxv</sup> Further economic weakening might easily be interpreted as a policy failure of the Xi administration, thereby exposing the leadership to even more direct criticism at home.

<sup>i</sup> Gitter, David, Julia Bowie, and Brock Erdahl. "Quarterly Report 2 | January-April 2018." The Party Watch Initiative. June 01, 2018.

<https://www.ccpwatch.org/single-post/2018/06/01/Quarterly-Report-2-January-April-2018>

<sup>ii</sup> Xu Zhangrun, "Imminent Feats, Immediate Hopes" [我們當下的恐懼與期待]. China Heritage, accessed July 14, 2018. <http://chinaheritage.net/journal/imminent-fears-immediate-hopes-a-beijing-jeremiad/>

<sup>iii</sup> Richard McGregor, "Has China's Leader Xi Jinping Passed his Peak." Lowy Institute, July

27, 2018.

<https://www.loyyinstitute.org/publications/has-china-leader-xi-jinping-now-passed-his-peak>

<sup>iv</sup> Ben Blanchard and Kevin Yao, "Handling of U.S. Trade Dispute Causes Rift in Chinese Leadership: Sources." Reuters, August 9, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trade-china-politics-analysis/handling-of-u-s-trade-dispute-causes-rift-in-chinese-leadership-sources-idUSKBN1KU0TU>

<sup>v</sup> "Secretary Ross Announces Activation of ZTE Denial Order in Response to Repeated False Statements to the U.S. Government," Department of Commerce, April 16, 2018.

<https://www.commerce.gov/news/press-releases/2018/04/secretary-ross-announces-activation-zte-denial-order-response-repeated>

<sup>vi</sup> Peter Wells, Yuan Yang, and Xinning Liu, "China's ZTE Halts Operations as US Ban Bites," *Financial Times*, May 10, 2018. <https://www.ft.com/content/4cabb00a-53fb-11e8-b3ee-41e0209208ec>

<sup>vii</sup> Ana Swanson and Kenneth P. Vogel, "Faced With Crippling Sanctions, ZTE Loaded Up on Lobbyists," *The New York Times*, August 01, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/01/us/politics/zte-sanctions-lobbying.html>

<sup>viii</sup> Li Zheng, "People's Daily Commentator Observation: Getting Stronger Cannot be Separated from the 'Core' of Innovation" [人民日报评论员观察：强起来离不开自主创“芯”], *People's Daily*, April 19, 2018. <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0419/c1003-29935400.html>

<sup>ix</sup> Yu Jianbin, "Make a Great Effort to Protect Consumers' Interests" [尽最大努力保护全球用户利益] *People's Daily*, April 24, 2018. [http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2018-04/24/nw.D110000renmrb\\_20180424\\_4-03.htm](http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2018-04/24/nw.D110000renmrb_20180424_4-03.htm)

<sup>x</sup> "Xi Jinping Convenes Conference on Deeply Advancing the Promotion of the Yangtze River Economic Belt and Gives an Important Speech" [习近平主持召开深入推动长江经济带发展座谈会并发表重要讲话], Xinhua, April 26, 2018. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-04/26/c\\_1122749143\\_3.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-04/26/c_1122749143_3.htm)

<sup>xi</sup> "Xi Jinping Inspects Wuhan, Emphasizes the Need to Fully Display Talen Advantage" [习近平考察武汉，强调要充分发挥人才优势] April 26, 2018.

<http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0426/c64094-29953060.html>

<sup>xii</sup> “Grasp the Cultivators and Successors of Socialist Construction, Strive to Build a World Class University with Chinese Characteristics” [抓住培养社会主义建设者和接班人根本任务努力建设中国特色世界一流大学], *People’s Daily*, May 3, 2018.  
[http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2018-05/03/nw.D110000renmrb\\_20180503\\_2-01.htm](http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2018-05/03/nw.D110000renmrb_20180503_2-01.htm)

<sup>xiii</sup> Jodi Xu Klein, “Two US Lawmakers Criticize Watered-Down Senate Bill that Allows ZTE to Survive,” *South China Morning Post*, August 3, 2018.  
<https://www.scmp.com/business/companies/article/2158058/two-us-lawmakers-criticise-watered-down-senate-bill-allows-zte>

<sup>xiv</sup> “Editorial: Curtain Falls on China-US Talks, Trade Conflict Tilts Toward Negotiation” [社评：中美磋商落幕，贸易冲突朝谈判倾斜], *Global Times Online*, May 4, 2018.  
<http://opinion.huanqiu.com/editorial/2018-05/11973605.html>

<sup>xv</sup> “Xi Jinping Accepts Phone Call from US President Donald Trump” [习近平应约同美国总统特朗普通电话] *People’s Daily*, May 9, 2018.  
[http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2018-05/09/nw.D110000renmrb\\_20180509\\_1-01.htm](http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2018-05/09/nw.D110000renmrb_20180509_1-01.htm)

<sup>xvi</sup> Sydney Leng, Zheng Yangping, “Beijing Tries to Play Down ‘Made in China 2025’ as Donald Trump Escalates Trade Hostilities,” *South China Morning Post*, June 26, 2018.  
<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2152422/beijing-tries-play-down-made-china-2025-donald-trump>

<sup>xvii</sup> Sarah Zheng, “Beijing Orders State Media to Soften Criticism of Donald Trump as the US and China Tone Down their Trade War Rhetoric,” *South China Morning Post*, July 9, 2018.  
<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2154173/beijing-orders-state-media-soften-criticism-donald>

<sup>xviii</sup> Beijing has censored references to Winnie the Pooh after the cartoon character was popularized as a reference to Xi Jinping. Benjamin Haas, “China Bans Winnie the Pooh Film After Comparisons to President Xi,” *The Guardian*, August 6, 2018.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/07>

</china-bans-winnie-the-pooh-film-to-stop-comparisons-to-president-xi>

<sup>xix</sup> Donna Borak and Nathaniel Meyersohn, “White House Slaps 25% Tariff on \$50 Billion Worth of Chinese Goods,” *CNN Money*, May 29, 2018.  
<https://money.cnn.com/2018/05/29/news/economy/china-tariffs/index.html>

<sup>xx</sup> “Chinese Side Issues Statement About China-US Trade Consultations” [中方就中美经贸磋商发表声明] *People’s Daily*, June 4, 2018.  
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<sup>xxi</sup> “Ministry of Commerce Spokesperson Issues Statement on US June 15 Announcement of Trade Measures Toward China” [商务部新闻发言人就 6 月 15 日美方公布对华贸易措施发表谈话], Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China, June 15, 2018.  
<http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/ae/ag/201806/20180602756351.shtml>

<sup>xxii</sup> “Ministry of Commerce Issues Statement on US White House June 18 Declaration” [商务部新闻发言人对美白宫 6 月 18 日声明发表谈话], Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China, June 19, 2018.  
<http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/ae/ag/201806/20180602756563.shtml>

<sup>xxiii</sup> David Gitter, et al, “Party Watch Weekly Report 1|35,” Party Watch Initiative, June 22, 2018. <https://www.ccpwatch.org/single-post/2018/06/22/Weekly-Report-135-6162018-2222018>

<sup>xxiv</sup> <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0517/c1003-28355143.html>

<sup>xxv</sup> Ann Listerud, “Why China’s 2017 GDP Numbers are a Reason To Worry,” Party Watch Initiative, February 21, 2018.  
<https://www.ccpwatch.org/single-post/2018/02/21/Why-China%E2%80%99s-2017-GDP-Numbers-are-a-Reason-to-Worry>; Li Yuan, “Latest Sign of China’s Slowdown: A Technology Cash Crunch,” *New York Times*, July 16, 2018.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/16/technology/china-startups-technology-economy.html>

## China's "War on Pollution" Gets Political

*The CCP is relying on its discipline enforcers to clean up the environment by tying environmental problems to the anti-corruption campaign.*

At last year's 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, Xi Jinping vowed to confront the "principle contradiction" facing Chinese society: "the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life."<sup>xxvi</sup> While the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) once rested in its ability to deliver prosperity to the developing nation, Xi Jinping's statement bluntly acknowledged the Party's responsibility to deliver more than just material gains. China's pollution crisis is, of course, the quintessence of this contradiction. The CCP cannot continue to pursue economic growth at the expense of its environment without running a major risk to its legitimacy.

While conceding the challenges it must confront in its mission to maintain power, the CCP projected an image of a confident and unified leadership. As Vice President Wang Qishan (王岐山) wrote in a *People's Daily* article promoting the message of the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, "[in the] Party, government, military, society or academy; north, south, east, west or center—the Party leads everything."<sup>xxvii</sup>

To handle these challenges while maintaining its comprehensive power, the National People's Congress (NPC) voted in March to establish new

superagencies intended to strengthen the CCP's hand in tackling key political threats. The new Ministry of Ecology and the Environment (MEE) has absorbed all of the previous responsibilities of the now-defunct Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) and the environmental work of six other government agencies, confirming the Party's commitment to environmental protection and pollution control.<sup>xxviii</sup> Meanwhile, a new anti-corruption superagency, the National Supervisory Commission (NSC), with sweeping authority ranked higher than the judiciary, will extend the reach of Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign.<sup>xxix</sup>

While the two ministries cover different portfolios, their work is becoming increasingly interrelated as Xi's "War on Pollution" moves toward rooting out corruption related to ineffective environmental oversight and increasingly emphasizes the role of "political responsibility" in tackling pollution. With such priorities, the War on Pollution will strengthen the power of the CCP not only by tackling a key threat to Party rule, but also by leveraging the power of the newly-enhanced anti-graft drive to emphasize the absolute primacy of the CCP over all matters.

## China's War on Pollution and the Anti-Corruption Campaign

The role of anti-corruption in cleaning up the environment has grown steadily since Li Keqiang declared a War on Pollution in 2014 to signal the government's firm commitment to resolving China's intensifying air pollution crisis.<sup>xxx</sup> The following year, the amended Environmental Law gave authorities enhanced tools to target environmental violations, changing the focus of environmental authorities from environmental impact assessments and construction approvals to compliance and responsibility oversight, indicating a role for China's anti-corruption organs in environmental work.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Soon after, China's anti-corruption organs began speaking and writing publicly on the role of corruption in China's environmental problems.<sup>xxxii</sup> Their work began at the very top: following reports that officials at the MEP had been bribed into allowing highly-polluting facilities to continue operating,<sup>xxxiii</sup> the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), the Party's own discipline organ that oversees Xi Jinping's extensive anti-corruption campaign, announced an investigation into the retired Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) vice minister, Zhang Lijun (张力军).<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Months later, China's State Council sent an inspection team to Hebei Province to conduct a month-long review of the

province's implementation of environmental regulations which included a contingent from the CCDI. As environmental inspection teams had previously only been deployed by the MEP, the move broke with tradition and demonstrated that the War on Pollution required the weight of a stronger authority than the MEP.<sup>xxxv</sup> Indeed, the success of some anti-pollution measures in recent years has been credited to the fact that the campaign had the explicit backing of the CCDI.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

## The War on Pollution in the Age of the National Supervisory Commission

Since Spring 2018, Xi Jinping has doubled down on the emphasis on anti-corruption work in the fight against pollution with calls to strengthen the role of the Party in cleaning up the environment and by emphasizing the role of "political responsibility" in the campaign.

At a two-day meeting on environmental protection in Beijing this May, also attended by Premier Li Keqiang, and Politburo Standing Committee Members Wang Yang (汪洋), Wang Huning (王沪宁), Zhao Leji (赵乐际), and Han Zheng (韩正), Xi gave a widely publicized speech in which he declared that in order to win the "big, hard, and bitter battle" against pollution, the "leadership of the Party must be strengthened." He specifically named the leaders of local party committees and governments at all



levels as the “primary persons responsible for the ecological environment of that locality.” Leading cadres guilty of damaging the environment were to be held responsible “honestly, daringly, and strictly, for their entire lives.”<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Since the speech, discipline organs have taken a keen interest in environmental issues, publishing articles on the importance of anti-corruption efforts in environmental protection and reprinting commentaries from important Party outlets, presumably for the purpose of demonstrating the resolve to carry out central demands and rallying discipline inspection bureaucrats to join in the war against pollution.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

The day after Xi’s speech, the CCDI responded with its own strongly-worded article declaring, “discipline inspection and supervisory organs are duty-bound to help fight the battle against pollution,” and promising to “resolutely rectify the outstanding environmental problems that harm the interests of the masses, and, with the spirit of hammering nails, grasp implementation point by point and grasp reform piece-by-piece in order to strive for real results by all means.”<sup>xxxix</sup>

Shortly thereafter, the CCDI published a report exposing those responsible for six “typical cases of environmental damage,” in which officials had failed to properly investigate environmental issues from the improper storage of hazardous material to the dumping of

contaminated sewage in their districts, demonstrating the organ’s efficacy in dealing with environmental violations. The CCDI reported that the officials involved had been disciplined, publicly admonished, or removed from office.<sup>xl</sup>

In June, the CCDI and NSC reprinted on their website the Central Committee and State Council’s “Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening Environmental Protection and Resolutely Fighting the Battle Against Pollution,” which emphasized “comprehensively strengthening the Party’s leadership in environmental protection” by “improving environmental protection inspection mechanisms,” and “strengthening assessment accountability.” The “Opinions” stipulated that any official that “fails to implement environmental protection responsibilities, shirks responsibilities, or fails to complete tasks, must strictly be held accountable in accordance with the law, and face lifelong liability.”<sup>xli</sup>

### Tackling Pollution at the Grassroots

Local discipline inspection and supervision units, presumably at the behest of the central CCDI and NSC, have begun issuing reports on how they have successfully dealt with cases of environmental damage related to corruption, published on the CCDI-NSC website. The reports appear to demonstrate the local discipline inspection units’ dedication to

environmental protection and serve as examples of good practice for other inspection units.

Selected examples of cases are as follows:

- The Chengdu Municipal Discipline Inspection Commission reported, among other cases, that eight to ten rainwater pipelines in Jianyang City had long been draining domestic sewage into the Tuojiang River. For not dealing with the problem, two members of the municipal water affairs bureau deputy Party group were admonished, another member received an administrative warning, and the person in charge of rainwater pipelines was removed from their position.<sup>xlii</sup>
- The Yunnan Provincial Discipline Inspection Commission reported on a number of pollution and environmental damage cases in which poor supervision was at the root of the problem. For example, after the discovery of illegal cage culture fish farming in the Niulanjiang River Basin, a Huize County Agricultural Bureau Party committee member was held accountable, and the chief of the Fisheries Law Enforcement Brigade was warned.<sup>xliii</sup>
- The Guangdong Provincial Discipline Inspection Commission reported that in Qingyuan City, 23 officials were investigated and five were held accountable for failing to

perform their duties in a water pollution case. Seventeen officials were investigated and two were held accountable for failing to implement pollution control measures in the city of Foshan.<sup>xliv</sup>

On 12 July, an environmental inspection group deployed to Yunnan by the MEP to carry out the “Look Back” (回头看) campaign—a sweeping nationwide campaign aimed at reviewing cases of environmental damage that had been mishandled—reported that it had transferred several corruption cases uncovered by the campaign to the Yunnan Provincial Commission for Discipline Inspection (YPCDI) to handle. In its report, the YPCDI emphasized that “every locality and every department must improve its political standing (政治站位), and taking Xi Jinping’s Ecological Civilization Thought (生态文明思想) as a guide, profoundly understand the significance of ecological civilization construction and ecological environment protection” and promised to “resolutely fight the battle against pollution.”<sup>xlv</sup>

## Conclusion

The call for “enhancing the leadership of the CCP Central Committee with Xi Jinping as the core” in all state affairs has become a mandatory remark of any official writing on any subject in the Xi Jinping era. However, it should not always be dismissed as hackneyed propaganda speak. To the contrary,

demands to enhance the “guiding role” of the Party in environmental issues reflect the CCP’s strategy for winning the battle against pollution—one of the “three tough battles” that must be won in order to overcome China’s principle contradiction.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Due the past success of the CCDI’s involvement in efforts handling perpetrators of environmental violations, the CCP is doubling down on the central role of anti-corruption organs in the War on Pollution. Given the high degree of public attention given to pollution-related corruption issues by the CCDI and NSC since Xi Jinping’s major speech in May, observers can expect that cracking down on violators of environmental regulations will become an increasingly important focus of the anti-corruption campaign.

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<sup>xxvii</sup> Wei Zhangning, “Three Keywords in Wang Qishan’s Recent Article” [王岐山最新文章里的三个关键词], Beijing Daily Online, November 7, 2017.

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<sup>xxxi</sup> Peter Corne and Johnny Browaeys, “China Cleans Up Its Act on Environmental Enforcement,” *The Diplomat*, December 9, 2017. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/china-cleans-up-its-act-on-environmental-enforcement/>

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<sup>xxxiii</sup> Liu Qin, “China’s Environment Ministry Launches Anti-Graft Reforms,” chinadialogue, November 3, 2015. <https://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/7771-China-s-environment-ministry-launches-anti-graft-reforms>

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<sup>xxxvii</sup> “Resolutely Fight the War on Pollution, Push the Construction of an Ecological Civilization into a New Phase,” *People’s Daily*, May 20, 2018.

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<sup>xli</sup> “Central Committee and State Council Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening Environmental Protection and Firmly Fighting the War Against Pollution” [中共中央 国务院关于全面加强生态环境保护 坚决打好污染防治攻坚战的意见], Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and National Supervisory Commission Website, June 24, 2018.

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<sup>xliiv</sup> “Guangdong Report Examples of Problems in Environmental Accountability” [东通报 2 起生态环保领域问责典型问题], Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and National Supervisory Commission Website, July 3, 2018.

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<sup>xlv</sup> “Yunnan Reports the Situation of Four Cases Transferred by the Central Environmental Inspection “Look Back” [Team]” [云南通报 4 起中央环保督察“回头看”移交有关问题核查问责情况], Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and National Supervisory Commission Website, July 12, 2017.

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## China's "New Type of Party System": A "Multiparty" System for Foreign Consumption?

*The CCP rebrands China's "multiparty" system for external propaganda.*

At a 4 March panel discussion at the first session of the 13<sup>th</sup> Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Xi Jinping officially rebranded China's system of "multiparty cooperation" as China's "new type of party system" (新型政党制度).<sup>xlvii</sup> Xi highlights an often overlooked aspect of China's political system: while the CCP dominates all political decision-making in China, eight other minority parties are officially recognized as participants in the process. While the minority parties nominally represent non-communist elements of Chinese society in the CPPCC, they are primarily used as united front tools to align non-communist groups with the will of the central authorities.

The rebranding mirrors the series of new labels, such as the "new type of great power relations" and "new type of international relations," that Xi has applied to China's style of diplomacy and international relations, intended to improve China's global image and foster the idea that China's rise will positively reshape the world order.

Applying the "new type" paradigm to a hallmark of China's domestic politics comes at a time when Beijing is increasingly marketing its willingness to

share its "governance experience" with other developing countries as an attractive feature of strategic and economic cooperation with China. The relabeling thus indicates that China's minority political parties, some of which define overseas Chinese, Taiwanese, or former KMT members as their "main constituents,"<sup>xlviii</sup> will increasingly be deployed as a tool of China's external propaganda on behalf of the CCP.

Following Xi's remarks on the "new type of party system," CCP propagandists and United Front Work Department (UFWD) officials have worked to flesh out the concept and define how it can be applied to united front goals. UFWD Head You Quan (尤权) held a session for minority party leadership a few weeks later to discuss "persevering with, developing, and perfecting China's new type of party system."<sup>xlix</sup> Notably, he considered the utility the concept has for external propaganda, instructing minority party leaders to "talk about the 'China story' of multiparty cooperation."<sup>1</sup>

Further highlighting the intention to market the "new type of party system" label internationally, the *People's Daily's* Zhong Sheng (钟声) column, used to authoritatively transmit the

views of the paper on international affairs, released an English language article in March on how the “new type of party system enlightens the world.” The article pits China’s party system against “the chaos in the [sic] Western society,” providing countries with “a China solution on how to seek a better political system.”<sup>li</sup>

A concerted effort has since emerged among minority political party chairpersons to propagate the new label. On 10 July it was reported that the Zhi Gong Party Central Committee convened a meeting on “telling a good China story, propagating well our nation’s new type of party system.” At the conference, Zhi Gong Central Committee Executive Vice Chairman Jiang Zuojun (蒋作君) demanded that party members “propagate well China’s new type of party system when meeting with important foreign political leaders.”<sup>lii</sup>

The chairmen of the eight minority parties have made a variety of comments in recent months on China’s political party system at official meetings and as part of a coordinated commentary series on the subject in the official newspaper of the eight minority parties, *Tuanjie Bao*. Their commentary indicates that the concept of China’s “new type of party system” is being honed for external dissemination: they have stated that the Chinese political party system is rooted in the failure of the Republican Chinese government and their attempt at Western

democracy; that the Chinese system is a development beyond the “chaotic” systems for which Western states advocate; and that the Chinese political model is an option for other nations seeking alternative governance schemes.

- On 8 March, China Democratic League Central Committee Chairman Ding Zhongli (丁仲礼) said at a press conference that “the multiparty cooperation system explained by the General Secretary is China’s creation and is one type of political party system innovation. This system first of all is different from the one-party system, and is also different from western competitive multiparty system, our (system) is the multiparty cooperative system led by the CCP.”<sup>liii</sup>
- On 28 March, China Association for Promoting Democracy Central Committee Chairman Cai Dafeng (蔡达峰) stated that China’s current system is “a historical decision... in the not-so-distant past China witnessed a Western-style parliamentary system and all the efforts of the multiparty system, but in the end both failed..”<sup>liv</sup>
- On 10 May Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang Central Committee Chairman Wan Exiang (万鄂湘) wrote an article on “Studying the Spirit of General Secretary Xi Jinping’s Important March 4th Speech”, which stated that: “Ever

since a long time ago, some Western countries have attacked and defamed our form of government and political system through every mean and method; they are obsessed with misrepresenting [our] multiparty cooperation, distort consultative democracy, and enthusiastically promote Western ‘two-party systems’ and ‘multiparty systems.’ They make some rumbling noises and nobody is able to put up with it any longer.”<sup>lv</sup>

Minority party chairpersons’ comments also recognize that China’s current political system has grown from the “soil” of the failure of Republican Chinese rule. While in other contexts this “soil” is presented as exceptional, chairpersons suggest that the tragedy of the Republic of China between assassinations and war is hardly unique in the world and other countries could adopt China’s system:

- On 6 March China National Democratic Construction Association Central Committee Chairman Hao Mingjin (郝明金) responded to questions from a *Xinhua* journalist at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, where he stated: “The innovation and development of our country’s multiparty cooperation system has also caused some countries in the world to see the new model and new pattern of our country’s political party system and party relations, for

the political development of the world’s political parties offer China’s plan and China’s wisdom.”<sup>lvi</sup>

- On 4 June Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League Central Committee Chairman Su Hui (苏辉) wrote an essay posted to her party’s website and the CPPCC website that “...In the distinct contrast of Western ‘chaos’ to China’s ‘governance,’ China’s plan and China’s wisdom are offered and contributed for the exploration of even better political systems for humanity.”<sup>lvii</sup>

## Conclusion

“The new type of party system” is neither new nor an institutionalized system of multiparty democracy. Nevertheless, China’s “new type of party system” has been clearly presented as a rejection of the Republican Chinese system and the Western democratic model; an extension of the socialist system; and as a model for developing nations to adopt and developed nations to understand.

On 19 July, while visiting Bijie, Guizhou, Xi again told united front officials “to unceasingly demonstrate well the advantages of the CCP-led multiparty cooperation system.”<sup>lviii</sup> Minority party chairpersons have done just that in their public statements since March. Their statements do not exist in a vacuum: as demonstrated by the 10 July Zhi Gong Party conference, these directives have already been

communicated down to the members of the minority parties, who will use them as a guide in their interactions with united front, targets and foreign dignitaries. Despite denials,<sup>lix</sup> a Chinese political model is being offered to the world.

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<sup>li</sup> Zhong Sheng, "Op-ed: China's New Type of Party System Enlightens World." People's Daily Online, March 12, 2018.

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<sup>liii</sup> "Cai Dafeng's Speech at the China Association for Promoting Democracy's Conference on Studying and Implementing the Spirit of the Two Meetings [蔡达峰在民进学习贯彻两会精神座谈会上的讲话]." China Association for Promoting Democracy Website, March 28, 2018.

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<sup>liii</sup> "Mo Exiang: Manifest Great Nation Self-Confidence, Guide the Direction of Work [万鄂湘：彰显大国自信 指引工作方向]." Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang Central Committee Website, May 10, 2018.

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<sup>liii</sup> "Hao Mingjin."

<sup>liii</sup> "China CPPCC Journal Publishes Essay 'Pass on the Spirit of the 'May 1st Slogan,' Do Not Forget the Original Intention of Multiparty Cooperation' Signed by Chairwoman Su Hui [《中国政协》刊发苏辉主席署名文章《传承“五一口号”精神 不忘多党合作初心》]." China CPPCC, June 04, 2018.

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