

*Fighting Corruption in China: Trajectory, Dynamics, and Impact**

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of the decades-long fight against corruption in China, focusing on its trajectory, dynamics, and impact. Corruption has long been a threat to China's social stability, its economic development, and even the legitimacy of the regime. Equally notable are the numerous efforts made by successive generations of the Chinese leadership to control and prevent corruption. While goals may have remained the same across different periods, anti-corruption strategies and methods have changed considerably, moving from sporadic campaigns to more institutionalized methods and from power-driven rectification to rule-based integrity management. The current anti-corruption drive, launched after Xi Jinping took power at the 18th National Party Congress in 2012, not only has demonstrated novel features, suggesting a multi-pronged approach, but also is unprecedented in its breadth, depth, and severity. What are the dynamics of China's fight against corruption? Has the increasingly intense crack-down been able to contain corruption? How can we understand the

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impact and effectiveness of anti-corruption enforcement in China? The six articles, including this one, in this special issue provide answers to these questions.

The largest and most publicized anti-corruption campaign in the history of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was initiated by the Xi Jinping government following the 18th National Party Congress in 2012 and is still underway at full scale. This campaign has attracted worldwide attention and stands out for its sheer scope and intensity.¹ However, it is by no means the first battle the CCP has ever waged against corruption. In its history of over one hundred years, the Party has made numerous attempts to curb corruption and develop clean government, especially after it established a new political regime in 1949.

Scholars have developed different explanations for the dynamics and impacts of China's continuous battle against corruption. Some believe that the successive CCP leaders since Mao Zedong have been aware of the fact that endemic corruption has plagued the country and that systemic corruption could cause the Party's downfall and the failure of the state. As a result, the fight against corruption is not only to preserve the CCP's capacity to govern but also to defend the regime's legitimacy.² Others argue that the logic of China's anti-corruption enforcement can be seen in the country's economic needs,³ or in the fact that corruption has seriously aggravated social problems such as polarization between the rich and poor.⁴ Still others attempt to understand the dynamics of fighting corruption in the context of China's corruption-growth paradox.⁵

While these scholarly views about the motivations behind China's war on corruption all make sense to some extent, we argue that a historical perspective of how the CCP has responded to the corruption problem and why it has responded in those ways is necessary. Contexts affect dynamics of action.⁶ China's response to corruption is thus contextualized, with different factors shaping the Party's responses to corruption in different periods of time.

From the historical perspective, fighting corruption is imperative not only due to the pervasiveness of corruption but also because of its changing forms and characteristics in different contexts. For the same reason, fighting corruption is inevitably an arduous task. The question is not so much whether corruption should be curbed but rather how it can be contained. Indeed, since the founding of the People's Republic of