

## China's Crackdown on Crime and Corruption with Tibetan Characteristics

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Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, along with the United Front Works Department and the various security apparatus in the country, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection Commission (CCDI) has been deployed to counter and subdue 'separatism' in Tibet. At the second plenary of the 19<sup>th</sup> CCDI meeting held from 11-13 January 2018, Xi, among others, gave a call for 'crackdown on gang crimes to uproot both the gangs and the "protective umbrellas" above them' (CGTN 2018a). The announcement was dubbed as a 'campaign against organized crimes' in a report by the South China Morning Post (Mai 2018a).

In Xinjiang and Tibet, however, the national level announcement was interpreted and adapted to suit the local agendas. Hence, instead of organized gangs or triads, the targets for attack are the so-called 'separatists'. Xinjiang chose to roll out the campaign before a televised media on 29 January as per the SCMP report. The authorities saw the triad in Xinjiang as embodied in the 'three forces' of 'separatism, terrorism and extremism'. The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) followed suit a week later to announce it would target people promoting the following: the 'middle way', "Dalai surrogates" who operated under the

banner of culture and environmental protection, and others who called for the "protection of the mother tongue".

The Radio Free Asia last month had accessed a circular issued by the public security bureau of Nagchu county in TAR, dated 13 March 2018 (RFA 2018), promising cash rewards of up to 100,000 yuan for information on activities such as fundraising, environmental activism, language or culture promotion, and so on. It also warned against contacts with the Dalai Lama and 'foreign hostile forces' including support for the Middle Way Approach. The circular is proof that the 'campaign against organized crime' is being implemented without fail at the ground level in the TAR.

### A Previous Edition of Strike Hard Campaign

Adaptation of a nationwide campaign by local authorities in the TAR is not a new phenomenon. A similar nationwide campaign known as the 'strike hard campaign' was launched in April 1996 (TIN 1996). The announcement then was followed by a public meeting on 9 May in Lhasa. While the campaign at the national level planned to target

‘common crimes, such as murder, rape, and gun-running’ in the rest of the country, in TAR it explicitly targeted political offences. After a day of the public meeting in Lhasa, Lobsang Dondrup, party secretary of Lhasa, is reported to have said:

‘Beginning now, we should use the next three months to carry out the struggle to crack down on separatists’ sabotage activities and on serious criminals throughout the city’.

Later, Gyaltzen Norbu, the TAR Governor at that time joined in to add (on Tibet TV on 14 August):

‘In carrying out our strike-hard struggle, we always insist on giving priority to the anti-splittism struggle and take the task of cracking cases involving explosions committed by separatists as the most important part of the “strike-hard” work’.

## Anti-Corruption Campaign in the TAR

The practice of adapting national campaigns to suit the local situation in Tibet seems to be quite pervasive. Another instance worth referring to is the nationwide anti-corruption campaign that began after Xi Jinping took over major leadership positions in the Party, military and government following the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in November 2012. The campaign involved dispatching of central discipline inspection teams (*xunshizu*, 巡视组) to the provinces as well as central bodies since May 2013. Rough estimates postulate punishment of around 2 million officials including what has been touted as ‘tigers’ (high ranking leaders) as well as ‘flies’ (low level officials) during Xi’s first term. The campaign has also formally targeted officials who have fled abroad through operations titled ‘Sky Net’ and ‘Fox Hunt’ (*Xinhua* 2018a).

Following a central CCDI inspection to the TAR in 2014,<sup>1</sup> several officials were put under investigation and many others punished as per a report in the *Global Times* (2015). Though the news report provides many details with regards the investigation, action taken and the number of people punished, in its entirety, the report barely makes sense. It talks about 1,494 complaints from ‘local residents’ to the Tibetan discipline inspection, out of which, 329 were investigated; there is no clarity about the rest. The report adds that 240 were ‘dealt with for breaches of the “eight-point” anti-bureaucracy and formalism rules issued in 2014’ (*China Daily* 2012)<sup>2</sup> – again it is not clear if this number is drawn out of the 329 investigated or the ones left out of the investigation process.

*Xi Jinping’s call for ‘crackdown on gang crimes’ at the second plenary of the 19<sup>th</sup> Central Commission for Discipline Inspection Commission (CCDI), has been interpreted and adapted to suit the local agendas in Xinjiang and Tibet to target the so-called ‘separatists’.*

To elaborate, the eight-points called upon leaders to reject extravagance during meetings, cut down on unnecessary formalism, reduce foreign travel, cause least inconvenience to traffic and public in lieu of leadership movements, reduce issuing of documents, paperwork and announcements about achievements and so on, and to be thrifty while using official accommodation and cars. None of the above qualifies as political offences though. The CCDI further issued a list of ‘16 gifts’ on 3 December 2015 (see Koetse 2015).

<sup>1</sup> The inspection team that went to TAR also went to 9 other provinces including Sichuan and Qinghai – while a part of Sichuan comprises of Tibetan autonomous areas, almost the whole of Qinghai province was traditionally a Tibetan inhabited area. This paper is limited to discussing the situation in TAR.

<sup>2</sup> The report incorrectly mentions the year of issuance. The eight-point regulation was adopted on 4 December 2012 at a meeting of the Politburo.

The *Global Times* (2015) report adds that 138 of them were given ‘Party punishment’, which implies that some disciplinary action was taken against them at the level of the party rather than referring or transferring their case to the judicial procuratorate. However, the difference between being ‘dealt with’ and ‘punished’ is not discussed. Either including, or in addition to the above numbers, 45 are reported to have been ‘severely punished’ for abandoning their positions and neglecting their duties and 15 ‘punished... for violating Party and political discipline’. Similar issues arise here too. Apart from the fuzziness with respect to the difference between each of the actions taken – such as some being investigated, others being dealt with and still others being punished – the parameters for assessing a TAR official’s involvement in corruption are vague.

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As per the statements by Ye Dongsong, who was heading the 2014 central discipline inspection team to the TAR and Wang Gang, an official with the TAR discipline inspection commission, the following constituted some of the reasons for the investigation and punishment of the aforementioned numbers of people in 2014:

- participation ‘in the illegal underground “Tibetan Independence” organization’,
- providing ‘intelligence to the Dalai Lama clique’,
- assisting in ‘activities that would harm national security’,
- ‘violation of party and political discipline’,
- ‘abandoned their positions and neglected their duties’,

- failure ‘to take a firm stand on issues related to the Tibet question’, and
- ‘found to be seriously corrupt’

Interestingly, except for one name, there is no publicly available information about the names and details of the above-mentioned party officials indicted in the various corruption related investigations. Losong Tsering, secretary of the Party’s regional Transportation Department was probably one of the only persons whose name was disclosed with respect to ‘serious disciplinary violations’ on 29 January 2015 (Tibetan Review 2015). Prior to assuming position at the transportation department, Losong had served as Party Secretary of Lhoka (Ch: Shannan) prefecture from 2006 to 2011.

Also, the names of two more high profile Tibet party officials (non-Tibetan nationality) were publicized in later months, perhaps owing to the fact that both were indicted in cases of bribery and not political offenses. Initially, it was announced that Huang Xiangtian, party chief of the Lhasa Economic Development Zone was severely punished for ‘violation of law and other illegal cases’ (*Reuters* 2015; also see *China News Network* 2015). Much later, the CCDI in June 2015 announced that he was ‘prosecuted’ for ‘bribery and embezzlement’. Around the same period, in June 2015, Le Dake, deputy director of the TAR People’s Congress, was put under investigation (Zhang 2015). He hailed from Jiangxi province and had earlier served as the chief of the TAR’s national security bureau from 2004-2013. Later, in December 2016, it was announced that he had misused his official position ‘in project contracting and official promotions and reassignment’ (*Xinhua* 2016).

## **Tibet Connections of Zhao Leji and Yang Xiaodu**

Interestingly, in both the instances related to the TAR discussed in this paper – the anti-corruption campaign and the campaign against organized crime – the implementing body is the CCDI. While it is difficult to predict the implications of it, Zhao Leji and Yang Xiaodu,

one heading the CCDI and another deputy head of the CCDI, have strong Tibet connections.

Zhao Leji was born in Xining, the capital of China's northwest Qinghai province, where his parents had moved during the Maoist period as a part of China's frontier aid programme. Hence, he spent a considerable amount of his youth in Qinghai, which is territorially more or less co-terminus with the traditional Tibetan region of Amdo. The current 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama hails from Kumbum, which is located in Huangzhong county and part of Xining district. Qinghai, along with the other Tibetan areas in Gansu and Sichuan has been a hot bed of the 2008 protests and the 150 plus self-immolations since 2009.

*Zhao Leji and Yang Xiaodu, one heading the CCDI and another deputy head of the CCDI, have strong Tibet connections and its impact on Tibet policy have been interpreted in multiple ways - with one view seeing it as favourable and another seeing it as being irrelevant or rather serving a utilitarian purpose of bolstering the particular leader's chances of promotion.*

After graduating from Peking University and returning to serve in many positions within the province since the 1980s, Zhao became the Party Secretary of Xining in 1997 to later take up the position of governor of Qinghai in 1999 and party secretary from 2003. He left Qinghai to serve as the party secretary of Shaanxi, Xi's home province, as well as his ancestral place, in 2007 and hence, did not experience the 2008 Tibet protests. He was promoted to the Politburo during the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2012 along with being appointed as the head of the party's powerful Central Organisation Department that oversees appointments across the party, government, military and state owned enterprises (SOEs). Zhao was appointed as head of the CCDI after his anointment as a Party Politburo Standing Committee member following the 19<sup>th</sup> party congress in 2017.

Yang Xiaodu was born in Shanghai and spent his prime years serving in various positions in the TAR after his graduation in 1976. His early experiences were in TAR's Nagchu (Naqu) and Chamdo (Ch: Changdu) prefectures before moving up to become the Vice-Chairman of the regional TAR government.

After having been in the TAR for more than two decades, Yang shifted back to his home city, Shanghai where he served in various positions since 2001. It was during his stint here that his paths crossed with Xi who was Shanghai Party head in 2007. Yang was able to gradually rise in the party hierarchy to finally assume the position of Deputy Secretary of the CCDI after the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. Yang, who was promoted to the 25 member Politburo in October last year, had been appointed as Deputy Secretary of CCDI in 2014 and as Minister of Supervision and Director of National Bureau of Corruption Prevention (NBCP) in 2016. The latter two offices stand dissolved as of March 2018. Following the National People's Congress in March 2018, Yang was appointed as head of the newly inaugurated National Supervision Commission (NSC).

The impact of Tibet connection of leaders on Tibet policy have been interpreted in multiple ways – with one view seeing it as favourable and another seeing it as being irrelevant or rather serving a utilitarian purpose of bolstering the particular leader's chances of promotion. Supplementing the legend about Tibet connection as being a stepping stone to attaining high positions in the party is Richard Baum's description of postings to “troubled areas and constituencies” as the “Aegean stables” (Baum 2007: 121).

Baum discussed this in the context of Hu Jintao who worked in Tibet, Gansu and Guizhou before he was posted to Beijing. Hu served in the TAR during the height of protests in the late 1980s and oversaw the implementation of martial law in Lhasa in 1989, few months before its imposition in Beijing. Protests in that sense are also useful indicators to gauge a leadership's disposition – a hardline response to a given protest would suggest his/her intention to signal resolve and interest in moving up the party hierarchy. Zhao and Yang



however, moved out of their Tibetan postings before the Tibet protests broke out in 2008. It is hence not possible to draw a definite conclusion about the disposition of the two leaders and how their placement in the CCDI and NSC would bear upon Tibet work just because they had some association with Tibet in the past.

## CCDI – National Supervision Commission Interface

Another interesting aspect to look out for would be the CCDI-NSC interface, owing to the overlap in many respects – not just mandate, but also office space and personnel, among others. Briefly, the National Supervision Commission (NSC) was formally inaugurated on 23 March 2018 following the conclusion of the National People’s Congress. It is an umbrella body under the National People’s Congress (NPC) that has subsumed pre-existing government bodies such as the Ministry of Supervision (MoS) and the National Bureau of Corruption Prevention (NBCP). The decision to establish the NSC was made by the Party in 2016, which was followed by the establishment of pilot SCs in three experimental locations – Beijing, Shanxi and Zhejiang.

The establishment of the NSC is not expected to impinge on the CCDI as such. The CCDI work report prepared by Zhao that was passed at the CCDI’s second plenary meeting<sup>3</sup> in January 2018 unequivocally states ‘The supervisory network will be under unified leadership of the Party’ (*Xinhua* 2018c). Further, many analysts see the appointment of Zhao’s junior to head the NSC as underscoring the inferior position of the NSC to the CCDI. The NSC system is also seen as an attempt by Xi to ‘institutionalise his signature anticorruption crusade as a permanent feature of the state’ (Gan 2018). Rightly so, the CCDI has expanded its jurisdiction to now include the right to investigate not just party, but also government and public officials.

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<sup>3</sup> The first plenary of the CCDI was held on 29 October 2017.

Jinting Deng has a somewhat nuanced analysis of the dynamics emerging out of the new system (Deng 2017). He discusses the topic at length based on field interviews in Beijing, Shanxi and Zhejiang, the three locations that were selected for carrying out the initial experiment in 2016. He sees the setting up of the system of NSC as a way for the party center to assert its primacy and control in the process, with the intent to restrict local party leaders’ powers. The latter, he feels, has its merits as local level ‘arbitrariness of the DICs<sup>4</sup> will be decreased’ as they will no longer have control over recruitment, promotion, funds allocation, influence and so on.<sup>5</sup>

*The implications of setting up the system of NSC as a way for the party to assert its primacy and control in the process, with the intent to restrict local party leaders’ powers, though not immediately discernible, would be immense for principles of regional autonomy for minority nationalities as enshrined in the Chinese constitution.*

The implications of the above for principles of regional autonomy for minority nationalities as enshrined in the Chinese constitution, though not immediately discernible, would be immense. Notwithstanding, attempts at centralization of authority or rather, consolidation of the party’s authority around the core of Xi’s leadership seems to be in full swing. In the words of Zhao Leji himself, the key objective of the CCDI is ‘to safeguard Xi’s position as the core of the CPC Central Committee and the whole Party’. He has also not minced words in clarifying that ‘the

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<sup>4</sup> DICs or Discipline Inspection Committees.

<sup>5</sup> A Stratfor study, while agreeing about attempts made by the CCDI to strengthen control over lower ‘CDIs’ (Deng calls it DICs) since 2015 owing to the need to pool in resources in terms of personnel from lower levels, among others, remains skeptical. In its view, the CDIs continue to remain ‘vulnerable’ to ‘local interests because of their ties and different incentive structure’ (Stratfor 2015).

fundamental goal’ of putting in place the new NSC system ‘is to strengthen the CPC’s unified leadership in the anti-graft work’ (*Xinhua* 2018c). In another instance of consolidation of party’s authority over minority related affairs, the government body, State Administration for Religious Affairs was subsumed under the party body, the United Front Works Department (UFWD).

## National Supervision Law (Draft)

Notwithstanding the uncertainties, it is worth looking also at the new (draft) national supervision law<sup>6</sup> that was issued by the NPC on 6 November 2017. Obviously the draft law does not mention any of the alleged offences for which the officials in the TAR were implicated for in 2014. Some of the offences that are repeatedly mentioned in the draft law are suspected corruption, bribery, dereliction of duty, or other illegal or criminal abuses of public office. The draft law makes no mention of criminalizing political offences or ‘separatist’ activities; though it does mention ‘national interests’ in Article 32 under which political offences may be covered.

Article 32: Where the investigation’s subject voluntarily admits guilt and ... actively cooperates with the investigation ... or makes a major meritorious service, or where the case involved major national interests; then after collective research and reporting to the Supervision Organ at the next higher level for approval, the Supervision Organ may issue a recommendation that punishment be lenient or mitigated when it is transferred to the procuratorate.

The clause basically promises ‘recommendation’ of leniency in punishment if a ‘subject’, – the detainee – cooperates with the authorities or confesses one’s involvement in acts undermining China’s national security.

<sup>6</sup> Unofficial translation of the National Supervision Law by China Law Translate, available at China Law Translate (2017).

The procedure of extracting televised confessions of guilt as a precondition for release or minimization of their sentences has been a common practice in China. Of course, not necessarily concerning the CCDI cases, it has been prevalent in the case of arrested Chinese lawyers and activists. However, while commonplace also in the case of Tibetan detainees, they are neither televised nor publicized. Much of it takes place in secret detention<sup>7</sup> unlike mainland detainees whose confessions are made before the court of law, as well as, in full public view on television. Even in case of those implicated by the CCDI, confessions have been a common feature, so has the practice of *shuanggui*, or secret interrogation.

*The procedure of extracting televised confessions of guilt as a precondition for release or minimization of the sentences under the National Supervision Law Draft has been a common practice in China. But in the case of Tibetan detainees, much of it takes place in secret detention unlike mainland detainees.*

## Conclusion

This paper was an attempt to highlight anomalies in the local implementation of China’s national level campaigns, taking the case of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). It is not possible to comment on whether such an anomaly is purely an outcome of the discretion exercised by the local authorities of the TAR. If the latter were true, it would to some extent absolve the role of the central authorities and leadership in the discrepancies discussed in this paper. Hence, if the adaptation were purely an outcome of local level decision-making, then it could be argued that the TAR

<sup>7</sup> As confirmed to the author by Tsering Tsomo, Director, Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, 5 March 2018.

may face some respite following the introduction of the new supervision commission system, which as Jinting Deng (2017) argues, seeks to wrest control away from local party authorities.

The second plenary of the 19<sup>th</sup> CCDI has already made ‘detailed plans for discipline inspections this year’, that is 2018 (CGTN 2018b), seen as an important year marking the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of reform and opening up policy (CGTN 2018c). It has already dispatched ‘15 discipline inspection teams to 30 provincial-level regions, ministry-level agencies and state-owned enterprises’ (Xinhua 2018b). How the inspections are carried out this time and how the CCDI-NSC system fares, particularly in TAR, would be an important indicator of the central Chinese leadership’s general outlook towards the Tibet question. So far, many have reserved their judgment of Xi’s Tibet policy under the expectation that he would herald an emancipated approach during his second innings.

*How the inspections are carried out in coming times and how the CCDI-NSC system fares, particularly in TAR, would be an important indicator of the central Chinese leadership’s general outlook towards the Tibet question*

Xi is now at the helm of affairs at all levels within the party and the state following the 19<sup>th</sup> party congress decisions. The CCDI has repeatedly stressed the position of Xi as the core of the party leadership. If he were unable to fructify the many expectations laid upon him in the next few years, then it would be logical to dismiss the proposition of central-local discrepancy in Tibet policy. In the context of this paper, local level adaptation of national campaigns may no longer be considered the handiwork of purely local authorities.

The avowed campaign against ‘Dalai surrogates’ that has already been launched by the TAR authorities as a part of the CCDI’s national campaign against gang crimes and the

cash reward circulars in Nagchu county of TAR – both targeting not just the ‘middle way’ approach, but also civil activism – does not yet reflect the optimism being exuded by Xi bettors. Categorizing of people working for language, culture and environment as ‘separatists’ and ‘Dalai surrogates’ demonstrates what Guowa Jiamaoji shared with her colleagues during a panel discussion of the national Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in early March 2018 – and reported by the SCMP (Mai 2018b).

Guowa Jiamaoji is of Tibetan nationality and serving in the Chinese military since more than 20 years, and also a member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).<sup>8</sup> She lamented that measures to ‘deter separatists’ were being imposed on the ‘whole Tibetan race’ by concerned authorities (2018b). If Xi would take note of her plea, she called for the cessation of the practice of treating all Tibetans as ‘separatists’, which as she opined, is not only discriminatory but also ‘detrimental to national unity’. Further, the answer to the problems in Tibet may not necessarily be to centralize governance, but to put local Tibetans officials in positions of authority. For, in her view, ‘Native cadres will stay here forever’ and as a result, ‘local herders and farmers’ would be able to ‘relate to them better’ and hence, listen to them more. This way, the principles of autonomy envisioned by China’s founding fathers would also be redeemed.■

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<sup>8</sup> A search on her name revealed that she is ‘deputy head of Zhanqi Art Troupe in Chengdu Military Region’ (People’s Daily Online 2010).

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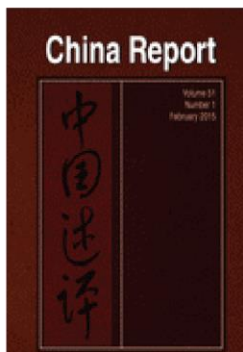


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