



CCAS

Centre for China Analysis & Strategy
中国分析及策略中心

14 December 2020

**'XI JINPING LAUNCHES CAMPAIGNS TO ENTRENCH
THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY (CCP) AMONG THE PEOPLE'**

by JAYADEVA RANADE

Chinese President Xi Jinping has been under considerable pressure since he began his second term at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017. The US-China trade war and the Covid-19 pandemic have considerably enhanced the pressure. The Trump Administration's efforts to target the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) so that the ideological commitment of its members would waver will have especially disconcerted Xi Jinping. He has in recent months redoubled efforts to refresh the commitment of Party members to communist ideology and enlarged the scope of the campaigns to include students in an attempt to ensure the CCP's monopoly on power in China over the longer term.

Domestic dissatisfaction has spread in China particularly among students, academics, intellectuals and the privileged group of 'princelings', who have their own networks of influence. The US-China trade war and the Covid-19 pandemic have adversely and severely impacted the economy contributing to the sharp rise in unemployment and uptick in prices and the cost of living. The pandemic has, additionally, aroused an unprecedentedly high level of anti-China sentiment globally, which potentially poses a serious problem for China's economic revival. Chinese economists point out that until the US and Europe come out of the Covid pandemic and their economies recover, China's businesses and industries will not receive orders and the US and EU markets will be closed. Thereafter too, as countries seek to diversify sources of supply, China is unlikely to regain former levels of trade. These pose a serious threat to domestic stability.

The Trump Administration's actions on the trade front aimed mainly at China's hi-technology has hit China's technology industry hard. It has set back by at least 5-10 years China's ambitious 'Made in China-2025' plan for catching up with the world's most advanced technologically developed nations by 2025 and almost crippled China's two technology 'champions', namely Huawei and ZTE. It could similarly impact China's effort to modernise and 'intelligentise' the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The US actions have, additionally, revealed to the Chinese leadership the vulnerabilities in their technology sector. The ambitious strategic geo-economic Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has also been impacted by the turbulence. All three are among the areas where Xi Jinping has focussed personal attention.

Notwithstanding these pressures and his dented personal image, however, Xi Jinping has, in keeping with his character, not yielded ground to either domestic opponents or pressure from the United States. On the contrary he has expanded Party controls and surveillance, imposed more stringent security policies which mandates the growing use of facial recognition technology, and is continuing with the roll out of the Social Credit Management system, all of which have angered Chinese citizens who view it as an intrusive invasion of their privacy. Ignoring foreign protests, he has progressively tightened Beijing's grip on the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and kept Taiwan under sustained pressure.

More importantly, Xi Jinping has doubled down on efforts to further consolidate the CCP's grip on China. Keeping in view the international environment and domestic political imperatives, Xi Jinping has over the past few months initiated a number of new, major ideological education campaigns across China. These have been accompanied by a publicity blitz through the official media. The campaigns are designed to inculcate Marxist theory and "Xi Jinping thoughts on socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era" in the people, and the army with special focus on academia and the youth who are considered more susceptible to "liberal western thought". The campaigns follow through on Xi Jinping's 16-character slogan: "the Government, the Military, Society and Schools, North, South, East and West -- the Party leads them all!" The slogan was incorporated in China's Constitution in October 2017.

In early July 2020, the CCP launched a new ideological campaign requiring Party members and college and school students to study the "Four Histories." These refer to "the history of the CCP, the history of new China, the history of the reform and opening up, and the history of socialist development" -- in other words, the history of the Chinese Communist Party! Cadres were told a "key task" is to promote the contents in classrooms at colleges and universities. Teachers reinforced the campaign with the instruction to students to "firmly keep in mind the contents of the 'Four Histories.'" There will be exams when the new semester begins." Many universities were reported to have incorporated the campaign's study materials in their course work. The East China Normal University in Shanghai, for example, incorporated the campaign material in the school's seminar series so that the students will learn and preach its message to people outside the campus.

The focus of the 'Four Histories' campaign was elaborated by Lu Yanqin, Deputy Secretary of the Party Committee of Zhejiang Jiaxing University. Writing in the China Education Daily (August 13) he emphasised that it is necessary to "inherit the red gene, cultivate new generations, unite, educate, and lead the young pioneers to be the successors of the cause of communism." He described the "red gene" as the "life code of the Chinese Communists". He said "It contains the nature and purpose of a Marxist party. It is embedded with the ideals and beliefs of the Communists to fight for. It gathers the great revolutionary spirit of the Communist Party of China. The original intention and mission of the Communist Party of China". He stressed that "To strengthen ideological and political education for young people, it is necessary to carry on the red gene well, and strive to cultivate socialist builders and successors who develop comprehensively in the new era of morality, intelligence, sports, and art". The "Four History" education, he said, will "help young people understand why the leadership of the Communist Party of China is the people's choice and history's Choice". He urged that it be "integrated into the teaching of ideological and political courses and related professional courses, so that young people have a deep understanding of the hard-won New China's red regime and the hard-won socialism with Chinese characteristics. Recognize the great significance of the Chinese nation to get rich and strong, and deeply understand the major contribution of socialism with Chinese characteristics to the world socialist movement, and let the red gene flow in the blood of young people". He pointed out that "To inherit the red gene, we must guide young people to understand the party's purpose. ... the party has always put the interests of the people first". Lu Yanqin quoted Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping -- significantly omitting mention of any other Chinese leader! Xi Jinping was quoted as saying "Our ideological and political courses should allow young people to fully understand the purpose of the party from the centuries-old history of the Communist Party of China, and guide young people to establish a firm belief in listening to and following the party". The article concluded that the "red gene" was important for "realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation".

In a related message, the CCP's leading theoretical fortnightly journal, Qiu Shi ('Seeking Truth' -August 31) reprinted Chinese President Xi Jinping's speech (of March 18, 2019) at a symposium for teachers of ideological and political theory classes in schools. Xi Jinping regretted that some schools still did not understand the importance of ideological and political

courses and there were shortcomings in the selection and training of teachers and the ideological and political courses. He emphasised "as China increasingly opens up and moves closer to the centre of the world stage, influences from other countries have deepened, and the struggles facing the ideological field have become more complex. ... the destiny of the nation and Party are closely connected. Schools are therefore at the forefront of ideological work, and can't be thought of as ivory towers or 'peach blossom gardens'". He said teachers must have knowledge beyond Marxist theory, must have strict self-discipline, and must have positive personalities. He exhorted Party committees to take the lead and stressed that the Party's leadership over ideology and political education courses is key to their success.

Xi Jinping listed eight "unifications" to promote the reform of ideology and political theory courses:

- i) Unification of politics and academic rationality: While political guidance is the purpose of these courses, they should not come across as political propaganda. They must "guide students with the power of the truth" and "stand up to students' questions of 'why?'"
- ii) Unification of values and knowledge: The courses cannot simply preach values without the support of "scientific knowledge."
- iii) Unification of "constructiveness" and "criticalness": While the task of these courses is to transmit ideology, they must also inspire a critical spirit, an essential characteristic of Marxism.
- iv) Unification of theory and practice: Political theory should have practical applications.
- v) Unification of universality and diversity: While ideology and political theory courses have universal teaching objectives and materials, they should still adapt to local conditions.
- vi) Unification and guidance and subjectivity: Courses should maintain a balance between the teacher's guiding role and empowering students through class discussion and debate.
- vii) Unification of indoctrination and inspiration: While indoctrination is essential to Marxist political education, students should also be inspired by the story of the Chinese nation, the Chinese Communist Party, socialism with Chinese characteristics, Reform and Opening Up, and the New Era.
- viii) Unification of explicit and implicit education: While some people advocate hiding ideology and political theory courses within other courses, it is important to be confident in teaching these courses in the open. At the same time, there are ideology and political theory resources in other courses that should be tapped".

Meanwhile, there are signs that some Party cadres want to further expand the scope of the campaigns. An article in China Education Daily (September 17) by Jia Hongxia, Associate Professor at the Beijing Open University, stressed that preschool education is the foundation stage of basic education and lifelong education. Stating that "Ideological and political elements are the shaping of the personal and national value system", he proposed that children's thinking needs to be guided from the preschool stage to help them gradually form values that adapt to their own and social development.

Xi Jinping's emphasis on frequent ideological campaigns in the Party to increase indoctrination of CCP members in the last two years is partly a response to US efforts to target CCP members. Inclusion of the youth and school children in these campaigns is intended to ensure that the CCP retains its monopoly on power in China in the decades to come. The incessant ideological indoctrination campaigns also hint that the commitment of CCP members to ideology is weak.

(The author is former Additional Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India and is presently President of the Centre for China Analysis and Strategy)