

Short Paper

The Causes and Countermeasures of Corruption in China

Di Zhu¹

¹ Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN

Received: April 12, 2021

Accepted: April 20, 2021

Online Published: May 19, 2021

doi:10.22158/jbtp.v9n2p31

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jbtp.v9n2p31>

Based on the Transparency International's rank, China have had serious corruption issue so far (Lawrence & Weber, 2017). Since the reform and opening-up policy has been carried out in 1978, corruption has rapidly worsened in China, although the Chinese economy has been performing well (Wederman, 2004). Some scholars argued that the corruption may distort the allocation of resources, but unlike other countries, China's economic growth was not affected significantly by corruption because of high level of public trust (Li & Wu, 2007). However, corruption may result in a serious regional income inequality and has significant negative consequences of increasing public resentment and social unrest causing more harm to economy (Wu & Zhu, 2011). As a result, the Chinese government often aggressively punishes the corruption actions by law (Lawrence & Weber, 2017).

There are currently few researches to focus on corruption in China because of sensitive nature of corruption and lack of effective methodologies limited to surveys and case studies (Guo, 2008). In this paper, corruption only refers to bribery, a common form and consequence of abuse of public authority for personal gains (Wederman, 2004). By looking at some literatures, this short paper first elaborated on several reasons why corruption in China has been so serious, then come up with a constructive framework coping with corruption.

1. The Cause of the Current Corruption Phenomena

First of all, people's weak morality may be a reason that cannot be ignored in the breeding and spreading of corruption. There is a study that illustrated the reason why weak morality may lead to corruption that "the loosening of the restrains of public morality on people's behavior leads to an increase in self-centered behavior" (He, 2000, p. 263). It further emphasized that "when even public officials no long care about the public goals and interests, and consequently other social strata become indifferent to the future of the nation, society as whole begins to lose its cohesion" (He, 2000, p. 263). At present, in the period of social transformation, due to the loss of moral ideals, the misplacement of moral concepts, and the loss of moral standards, the disorder of moral behavior happened. This disorder reflected in the political life is the corruption of power. Corruption, bribery, and power for personal gain are quite serious. There are many reasons for corruption, but people's low morality standard is one of the reasons that cannot be ignored. Therefore, under the conditions of a socialist market economy, strengthening political ethics construction means to promote honesty, promote people's moral values, and build an ideological and moral defense line that "does not want to be corrupt", thereby suppressing the breeding and spreading of corruption.

Secondly, based on a study, the imperfect supervision mechanism of power and insufficient supervision are the important reasons for the breeding and spreading of corruption (Yu, 2008). Practice has proved that losing the power of supervision will inevitably lead to corruption. Without effective supervision, there will be no real containment of corruption. The essence of power corruption is the abuse of power. The spread of corruption reflects the loss of control over power. Since the reform and opening up of 1978, the reason why corruption has been able to take advantage of the people is that the supervision mechanism is imperfect and the supervision is not strong enough enforced. As a result, some Communist Party members and cadres regard party discipline as “decoration” and regard local government orders as “blank articles”, taking the orders or policies from the central government not seriously.

Third, according to a research, it said that the government failed to form a systematic and effective legal normative mechanism to prevent, suppress and punish corruption (Hao, 1999). In the past, under the highly centralized planned economic system, the actions on political activities or persuasion education intended for maintaining high business ethical standards, through using the internalization of external value standards into people’s own value, have had a major positive impact on people’s behavior. But this effect has a lot of limitations.

In addition, the role of general institutional provisions on anti-corruption is limited. For more than a decade, the documents and notices of anti-corruption issued by the Communist Party and government at all levels including agencies have been numerous, but the wind of corruption has not shown signs of convergence. The main reason is that regardless of persuasion education or moral constraints, there is no guarantee of national coercive power, and the mandatory enforce of institutional provisions is also very limited. Nonetheless, as a special norm, the law not only has the function of persuading education and ethical standards, but it also has the characteristics of internalization, which can punish the behaviors resulting from ego which ignore the legal requirements. However, due to the lack of law enforcement and law-abiding traditions in Chinese political environment, the legal system has been seriously lagging behind, and a systematic and effective legal normative mechanism has not been formed to prevent, suppress and punish corruption. Therefore, on the one hand, people’s thoughts are extremely chaotic, losing the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, sin and non-crime, illegal and legal; on the other hand, the current anti-corruption struggle lacks the necessary legal basis and means.

Finally, there is a lack of economic conditions for increasing the public official incomes to reduce the number of corruption cases. The distribution of high salaries for the sake of a corruption-free society is a topic of dissent. A study also commented why this strategy is controversial that “there has been some speculation in the theoretical economic literature that high wages may reduce the number of corrupt acts, while they may lead to demands for higher bribes on the part of those who continue to be corrupt” (Tanzi, 1998, p. 573). It further stated that “the reason is that high wages raise the opportunity cost of losing one’s job, while they do not eliminate the greed on the part of some officials” (Tanzi, 1998, p. 573). One of the important root causes of serious government corruption in many Asian, African, and Latin American developing countries is that public officials in government departments have to use their jobs for personal gain because their incomes are too low to maintain their normal living standards. On the surface, the low-wage policy seems to shorten the distance between government officials and the people, and achieve the goal of opposing privileges and realizing justice. In fact, on the contrary, it promotes privileged thinking and various injustices. In most developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the abuse of privilege, malpractice, corruption and bribery by government officials is

just a reasonable and unlawful supplement to low wages. Some countries with more successful anti-corruption, such as the Singaporean government, have resolutely abandoned many low-wage policies from developing countries that seem to oppose privilege, but actually generate more privileges. They have implemented preferential wage policies for public officials to offer them a slightly higher income from government than private sector, as a literature introduced (Quah, 1999).

2. The Countermeasures of Corruption

(1) Constructing an ethical line of defense that promotes honesty with integrity to make public officials do not want to be corrupt

In strengthening the construction of political ethics, it must carry forward the fine tradition of ethics and values in politics, and foster a political atmosphere of honesty and self-discipline. It is necessary to carry forward the Confucian ideologies of “people-oriented” and “the people are the state-based”, inherit the concepts of justice, integrity, self-discipline of the nation and the Communist Party, become modest and prudent, guard against arrogance, keep arduousness and simplicity, serve the people wholeheartedly as “public servant”, thus diluting the desire for power and sincerely serving the people. Strengthening the construction of political ethics, the purpose is to promote honesty and integrity as well as diligence of public officials, guide public officials to take power and use rights for the people, eradicate the soil of corruption, and shape a group of honest and diligent moral model who can have influence and radiation over others. Through the establishment of a clean and honest moral image of public officials, it can form a clean atmosphere of the whole society, thus improving the moral level of the entire society.

(2) Establishing a power operation mechanism that supervises the protection of integrity making them cannot corrupt

In recent years, there have been a lot of work done around strengthening the supervision mechanism. However, from a global perspective, there is still a lack of a sound and effective power restriction mechanism compatible with the development of a socialist market economy, and a lack of a set of effective supervision systems and measures.

Therefore, in order to ensure the smooth progress of reform and opening up policy, and continual development of the market economy, the Chinese government must strengthen the construction of supervision mechanisms to supervise the protection of integrity, thereby establishing a power operation mechanism compatible with the development of the market economy, and shaping a diligent, honest, and efficient people’s government image. At present, it must improve the supervision mechanism, especially strengthening the overall coordination of the supervision mechanism, strengthening the institutional supervision mechanism with the main content of power restriction, and establishing a relatively independent and authoritative supervision agency.

It is necessary to strengthen the overall coordination of the monitoring mechanism. Thus, the government must earnestly strengthen the supervision of National People’s Congress (NPC) and National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) on the party and government organs; it must attach importance to and rely on the democratic supervision of the broad masses of the people, so that the supervision measures such as “reporting boxes”, “reporting calls”, and “leader reception systems” can really play a role; it needs to strengthen the supervision of the functional departments, make the supervision and inspection by the party committees and their members work at the same level executive branch, effectively solves the problem of weak and scattered party organizations, and prevents individuals from making decisions and personal arbitrariness; it is

necessary to comprehensively promote and implement the “two disclosures and one supervision” system and put the power of supervision from the people combined with the exposure of media supervision. In short, in the process of establishing and developing a market economic system, the Chinese government must effectively strengthen the supervision of party members and cadres at all levels of party organizations and disciplinary inspection organs, strengthen the supervision of the people, the democratic parties and non-party members on the Communist Party, establish and improve a system of supervision within and outside the party, from top to bottom and from bottom to top. Only with these mechanisms, the government can have a strong monitoring network formed and the overall effectiveness of supervision can be exerted.

It is necessary to strengthen the internal supervision mechanism with the main content of power mutual restraint. To strengthen internal supervision and control, the core is to strengthen supervision and control over power. The key is that cadres’ power should not be too large and too concentrated. The responsibility and power of mutual restraint cannot be concentrated in one department or one person. Power should be appropriately decomposed and effectively restricted, and the power structure that one has the final say should be changed. For important posts controlling for HR, budget, and planning and so on that easier lead to corruption, to control corruption, while regularly conducting post rotations, it must also strengthen the internal control mechanism of posts, strengthen the constraints of business and division of labor, and design the necessary power to run the program that without the control procedures related to the operation of power, the power cannot take effect, forming a mutually restrictive power structure. That is to say, it is necessary to rationally allocate power among individuals, groups and different institutions, to achieve mutual activation and moderate dispersion and balance of power.

It is necessary to establish a relatively independent and highly authoritative supervisory institution. A study pointed out that “the major defect is the overconcentration of power into the hands of FICs (First-in-Command). This was corroborated by the statements of quite a few fallen FICs” (Jianming & Zhizhou, 2008, p. 48). As a result, this institution should have relative independence and full autonomy, and exercise its unique supervisory mission in accordance with laws and regulations to effectively prevent and contain the breeding and spread of corruption. Comrade Deng Xiaoping suggested that to strengthen supervision, the most important thing is to have a special agency to conduct superior supervision and inspection over the political power. Deng Xiaoping once said, for example, “the Party is at risk of failure for sure unless we punish corruption, especially corruption at the high levels of the Party” (Jianming & Zhizhou, 2008, p. 47).

(3) Creating a legal environment that protects the law with integrity and make them do not dare to corrupt

Punishing corruption and building a clean government are the systematic projects of comprehensive governance. It requires the use of educational, administrative, and legal means to achieve results. Among these means, the law is undoubtedly the most effective means.

The Chinese government must vigorously strengthen and improve the legislation for corruption-free government. In other words, it is necessary to clearly define the right and wrong in legal form, use objective criteria to confirm the connotation of clean government and corruption, and use the law to measure whether state public officials violate the will of the people, whether there are corrupt acts such as illegal discipline and malpractice. The purpose of the legislation for corruption-free government is to regulate the behavior of state organs and their public servants. This is the prerequisite and important link for the integration of clean government construction into the legalization track.

Also, the law needs to be strictly enforced. The purpose of enacting laws is to use it to regulate people's behavior, adjust social relations, and maintain and develop normal social relations and social order. Therefore, even the best laws, if not realized in real life, will lose the value of existence. In the general sense, the implementation of the law requires that all state organs and their public servants must abide by the law. On the other hand, they require the state administrative organs, the judiciary, and their public servants to strictly enforce the law and adapt to the law, thus ensuring the realization of the law. This requires them to break the traditional understanding of "strict education, deal with lenience", adhere to the punishment and education, and severely punish corrupt officials as an important measure to strictly govern the Communist Party and strictly manage the government for the long run.

(4) Realizing economic conditions for high Salary that leads to reluctance to corrupt

Providing higher wages and other benefits for national public officials, on the one hand, can encourage outstanding talents to flow into government agencies; on the other hand, it enables ordinary civil servants to maintain a middle-class level of decent life with their legitimate incomes so that they have less sense of oppression and crisis in life. Therefore, they can be loyal to their duties and be able to resist some material temptations.

Under the conditions of market economy, it is in line with the principle of fair distribution of market economy to provide higher salaries for national public officials. The consistency between the higher social role status of national public officials and higher salary income helps to form a "social justice" judgment in this class.

Therefore, in a market economy with differentiated sectors, it is difficult to maintain a clean government without a high salary. However, only a high salary combined with a strict and perfect legal system may have a truly effective impact on the integrity of state public officials. This is because the combination of high salaries and a strict and perfect legal system actually increases the cost and risk of national public officials. Dong and Torgler (2013) argued that "higher wages imply higher opportunity costs when officials are ousted due to corruption" (p. 8). In today's society where the risk of life is increasing, the state gives public officials a more stable and better life and welfare and a higher social status. On the other hand, the state monitors their behaviors and property incomes through effective laws; once it discovered if there is a deviant behavior like corruption, not only will they lose everything they have, but they will also be severely punished by the law. Only in this way, the state may truly realize the economic conditions of "reluctance to corrupt" by providing high salary and benefits.

In summary, through establishing a set of ideological and moral defense lines to prevent power corruption, the establishment of a set of mutually restrictive power operation mechanism, using the law to deter and punish corruption to create a good legal environment, and providing public officials with high salary to prevent corruption, this framework would make public officials and those in power do not want to be corrupt, can't corrupt, do not dare to corrupt, and have reluctance to corrupt. Thus, it prevents the abuse of power, and curbs the growth and spread of corruption.

References

- Dong, B., & Torgler, B. (2013). Causes of corruption: Evidence from China. *China Economic Review*, 26, 152-169. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chieco.2012.09.005>
- Guo, Y. (2008). Corruption in transitional China: An empirical analysis. *China Q.*, 349. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741008000416>
- Hao, Y. (1999). From rule of man to rule of law: An unintended consequence of corruption in China in the 1990s. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 8(22), 405-423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670569908724355>
- He, Z. (2000). Corruption and anti-corruption in reform China. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 33(2), 243-270. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0967-067X\(00\)00006-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0967-067X(00)00006-4)
- Jianming, R., & Zhizhou, D. (2008). Institutionalized corruption: Power overconcentration of the First-in-Command in China. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 49(1), 45-59. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-007-9090-4>
- Lawrence, A. T., & Weber, J. (2017). *Business and society: Stakeholders, ethics, public policy*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Li, S., & Wu, J. J. (2007). Why China thrives despite corruption. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 170(3), 24.
- Quah, J. S. (1999). Corruption in Asian countries: Can it be minimized? *Public Administration Review*, 483-494. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3110297>
- Tanzi, V. (1998). Corruption around the world: Causes, consequences, scope, and cures. *Staff Papers*, 45(4), 559-594. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3867585>
- Wu, Y., & Zhu, J. (2011). Corruption, anti-corruption, and inter-county income disparity in China. *The Social Science Journal*, 48(3), 435-448. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2011.05.001>
- Yu, O. (2008). Corruption in China's economic reform: A review of recent observations and explanations. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 50(3), 161. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-008-9133-5>