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

12 June 2023

XI JINPING'S LATEST CAMPAIGN : 'THEME EDUCATION'

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Within months of securing a third term at the 20th Party Congress last October and successfully packing the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) with loyalists, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee (CC) General Secretary Xi Jinping launched a new political education campaign – his sixth -- on April 3, 2023. It is the largest, most vigorous and intense ideological campaign since Xi Jinping took office in October 2012 and has penetrated the CCP, People's Liberation Army (PLA) and Government. This new “themed education” programme aims at embedding 'Xi Jinping Thought' into the minds of CCP members and cadres all the way from the central cadres in Beijing down to the country's more than 2,800 county-level areas. It is a long term move intended to ready successive generations of communists to lead China.

2. The campaign was unveiled at a meeting of the CCP CC Politburo in Beijing on March 30. Presided over by Xi Jinping the Politburo decided that starting from April this year, the whole party from top down will be divided into two batches to carry out “education on the theme of learning and implementing Xi Jinping's new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics”. Xi Jinping delivered an "important" speech at the meeting which reviewed the "Regulations on Leading Cadres Reporting Personal Matters". In his speech, Xi Jinping pointed out "that focusing on leading cadres above the county level, the whole party will carry out in-depth study and implementation of Xi Jinping's new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics theme education, and use the party's innovative theory to unify thinking, unify will, act in a unified manner, carry forward the great spirit of party building, keep in mind the "three musts", and promote the united struggle of the whole party to comprehensively build a socialist modern country and comprehensively promote the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation". It emphasised that in-depth study and implementation of the theme education of Xi Jinping's new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the whole party "is a major effort made by the Party Central Committee to fully implement the spirit of the 20th National Congress of the Party and mobilise all comrades in the party to unite and struggle to complete the central task of the party".

3. Describing it as "a major deployment of the new great project of further advancing the party building in the new era", it said the purpose "is to use Xi Jinping's new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics to condense the heart and soul, and promote the whole party to more consciously and deeply understand the decisive significance of the "two establishments", strengthen the "four consciousnesses", strengthen the "four self-confidences", achieve "two safeguards", and maintain a high degree of consistency with the Party Central Committee in terms of ideology, politics and actions". It added that one objective is to promote the “self-revolution” of the party. The meeting instructed party committees (party groups) at all levels

to attach great importance to the campaign and carefully strengthen the mastery and application of the party's innovative theories, do a good job in the transformation of investigation and research results and solve the urgent problems and worries of the masses. Cautioning Party members against duplicity in work it said combining 'theme education' with promotion of the centre's work is to prevent "two skins".

4. The meeting recalled that since the 18th Party Congress, 'the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core' has incorporated the strict implementation of the reporting system for leading cadres on personal matters for strictly governing the party, strictly enforcing the party's discipline rules and strictly managing and supervising cadres. Emphasising the importance of the system, it stressed that leading cadres must "deeply understand the decisive significance of the "two establishments", strengthen the "four consciousnesses", strengthen the "four self-confidence", and achieve the "two safeguards". It mandated Party committees (party groups) at all levels to conscientiously and strictly implement the measures and govern the party. In addition to China's official media, the state-owned China Central Television (CCTV) also publicised the Politburo meeting on March 31.

5. The Politburo meeting's decision, on the new intra-Party thematic education campaign, heralded the start of a rigorous and thorough political education campaign aimed primarily at the senior cadres. It follows other recent articles warning against "double-faced" cadres, "political liars" and Xi Jinping's speech (Qiu Shi; April 30) that cadres with "mediocre abilities" still remain in the Party as do "prominent problems such as impure thinking, impure organization, and impure style of work within the party". To monitor the campaign's progress, the CCP leadership dispatched 58 "guidance" teams across China. This is the sixth education campaign since 2012. The earlier ones were in 2013 (Mass line educational practice activities); 2015 ('Three strict and three honest'); 2016 ('Two learning and one doing'); 2019 ('Do not forget the original intention, keep in mind the mission'); and 2021 (Party history study and education).

6. Coinciding with the start of the Theme Education campaign, CCTV (April 3) telecast a report that the first and second volumes of "Selected Readings of Xi Jinping's Works" edited by the CCP Central Committee have been published by the People's Publishing House and will be distributed nationwide on April 3. The publication of the first and second volumes of "Selected Readings of Xi Jinping's Works" has been categorised as "a major event in the political life of the party and the country, with great and far-reaching significance". The report also unambiguously elevated Xi Jinping's status describing "Comrade Xi Jinping as the main representative of the Chinese Communists" since the 18th Party Congress. Crediting major issues of the times with creating 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era', CCTV further announced: "As the core of the Party Central Committee and the core of the whole party, General Secretary Xi Jinping is the main founder of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era". The assertion by the CCP CC that "As the core of the Party Central Committee and the core of the whole party, General Secretary Xi Jinping is the main founder of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" is important. It could possibly be the prelude to formally designating it "Xi Jinping Thought" and placing Xi Jinping on par with Mao!

7. From the next day China's major newspapers began publishing articles explaining and eulogising 'theme education'. Senior Party cadres, commentators and academics have been

writing articles in China's official media almost daily explaining, or expounding, on different facets of the campaign. Senior Party cadres of central organisations and Central Ministries and departments promptly organised 'study' meetings and publicised these. Provincial Party Committees followed and organised special meetings presided over by the Party Secretaries. So did universities and educational institutions. 'Theme education' soon became a nationwide campaign. Qiu Shi (April 30) said that the central government had dispatched a steering group to supervise and guide the development of theme education and that provincial, autonomous, and municipal party committees and party groups (party committees) of the competent departments had dispatched roving steering groups to strengthen the supervision and guidance of their regions, departments and units. City and county levels were directed to emulate this.

8. On April 6, CCTV telecast that the CCP CC had issued a notice on printing and distributing the "Outline for Studying Xi Jinping's Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era (2023 Edition)" as an important auxiliary reading on 'theme education' for the majority of party members, cadres, and the masses. The Notice emphasised that party committees at all levels should make careful arrangements and organize all party members to carefully read the original works. The People's Daily (April 23) disclosed that an official website was set up to help the study of 'theme education' together with an official account for the campaign on the social media platform WeChat.

9. To dispel any doubt about the importance of the first and second volumes of "Selected Readings of Xi Jinping's Works", Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) member, member of the CCP CC Secretariat and Director of the CCP CC General Office Cai Qi addressed a symposium on their publication in Beijing on May 22, 2023. Cai Qi, incidentally, also supervises Propaganda work. According to People's Daily (May 23), Cai Qi stressed the importance of the two books and said they "are an authoritative resource for the whole Party and the entire nation to thoroughly study and implement Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era." He called for genuine efforts to translate the study into concrete actions to build China into a modern socialist country and advance the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts.

10. The Party's leading theoretical fortnightly 'Qiu Shi' (Seeking Truth) published (April 30) a Commentary captioned 'Tightly anchor the target tasks of theme education', which listed the five goals of 'theme education'. It listed these as: (i) build a solid foundation by concentrating on the soul, tempering character and strengthening loyalty; (ii) promoting development through hard work; (iii) practicing the purpose to benefit the people; (iv) establishing a new style of honesty; and (v) public service. It added that achievements in these areas will test the effectiveness of thematic education. Separately, Shuang Chuanxue, Secretary of the Party Committee and President of the Xinhua Daily, published an article on understanding 'theme education' in the Guangming Daily (April 7). He said 'theme education' is an "opportunity to strengthen the party's innovative theoretical arm and continuously improve the level of Marxism in the whole party".

11. China's Supreme People's Court commenced study of 'theme education' on April 12. At its first mobilisation meeting Zhang Jun, Secretary of the Party Leadership Group and President of the Supreme People's Court, emphasised the seriousness of the new campaign when he said, "There will be no gusts of wind, no "two skins", and no formalities". Xu Yousheng, leader of the

22nd Central Steering Group, attended the meeting and said 'theme education' is important for strengthening party building in the new era.

12. On April 17, the Public Security Department of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) held a work conference on studying theme education. Zhang Hongbo, TAR Vice Chairman, Secretary of the Party Committee of the Public Security Department, and Director of the Department, attended the meeting and delivered a speech. He emphasised the maintenance of stability as the top priority along with "severely cracking down on hostile forces and the Dalai clique's separatist and sabotage activities" and fully safeguarding the country's political security and overall social stability in Tibet.

13. By April 20, the People's Daily published a special report declaring that central and state agencies, departments and units are all carrying out in-depth study and implementation of the theme education of Xi Jinping's new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics. It listed numerous Party Committees of Ministries as having initiated the study. It mentioned the Party Committee of the Ministry of Public Security, which said it regarded high-standard and high-quality thematic education as a major political task. It said the Ministry had also quickly established a leading group and office for thematic education.

14. Highlighting the progress of the theme education campaign, CCTV (April 22) said a number of 'study' sessions, meetings, training courses and 'theme party days' had been held in central organisations and Ministries. It mentioned the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, the China Writers Association, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Central Taiwan Affairs Office, the General Administration of Sports, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television and other units as having "organised party members and cadres to unremittingly use Xi Jinping's new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics to build their souls". The Guangming Daily (April 30) disclosed that the Ministry of Civil Affairs had begun studying the 'theme education of studying and implementing Xi Jinping's new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics'. It said the Ministry of Civil Affairs had also established a leading group and office for themed education of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, which would be led by the Secretary of the Party Group of the Ministry and Minister Tang Dengjie along with members of the Party Group and Deputy Minister of the Ministry Tang Chengpei.

15. In a telecast on "the theme education of Xi Jinping's socialist ideology with Chinese characteristics in the new era" on May 2, CCTV disclosed that 31 central management colleges and universities, including Sun Yat-sen University, Sichuan University, Central South University and other central management colleges had carried out in-depth study and implementation of the theme education.

16. The Party Committee of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), according to People's Daily (May 23), held a meeting 'immediately to study and understand the spirit of General Secretary Xi Jinping's important speech' and set up a 'reading class for the party committee of the ministry, arranged 14 half-days to concentrate on reading, and sent 5 roving steering groups to supervise and guide the development of themed education in 36 affiliated units within the Ministry and 265 party committees of embassies and consulates stationed abroad'. The Office of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission held 5 rounds of reading classes for all staff in

addition to organising a series of special counselling report meetings and other activities. It said the CCP CC International Liaison Department, had organized reading classes for the leading group of the Ministry and 'three batches of cadres at the bureau level carried out a 7-day reading class, focusing on 28 specific research topics' and 42 special seminars were held. It also reported the activities of the China International Development Cooperation Agency, the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs.

17. CCTV (June 5) reported that the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) has "solidly studied" the theme education. It held 'Party group reading classes and theoretical study centre group studies, conducted in-depth examination of deficiencies, and made solid progress in rectification'. Members of the NDRC Party group had led teams for 28 investigations, and relevant departments and bureaus conducted more than 180 investigations. They went to 19 cities in 9 provinces, held 23 symposiums, and visited 40 companies.

18. CCTV (June 8) publicised that by early summer, the party committees and organs of units above the military level had carried out in-depth study and implementation of Xi Jinping's education on the theme of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. All departments and units had implemented the decisions of the Party Central Committee, the Central Military Commission, and Chairman Xi Jinping. It added that 'The army carries out theme education and ... ultimately it must fall on being able to fight and win battles. From government agencies to troops, from training grounds to mission frontlines, from the western border to the southeast coast, party committees at all levels focus on realizing the goal of the army's centennial struggle as scheduled, and learn from the party's innovative theory the spirit of fighting hard and forging ahead.' It emphasised that theme education would "radiate into a powerful driving force for preparing for wars and overcoming difficulties" and promote the high-quality development of the military.

19. The 'theme education' campaign is the most comprehensive and far-reaching political education campaign initiated by Xi Jinping since he came to power. It further consolidates Xi Jinping's authority. The campaign, which penetrates all levels of the Party apparatus down to the county, is being closely monitored. Apart from raising the ideological level of Party members and cadres, one of its main objectives would be to instil 'Xi Jinping's socialist ideology with Chinese characteristics in the new era' throughout the CCP's rank and file and especially in academia. The campaign will almost certainly identify and eliminate Party cadres of doubtful loyalty to Xi Jinping. At least one CCP cadre has already been accused of "betrayal" of the "Two Establishments". This campaign also credits Xi Jinping as "the main founder of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era". The next step could well be to elevate it to "Xi Jinping Thought" and Xi Jinping to the level of Mao Zedong.

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