

# Women Attacked in Tangshan: An Observation on CCP Response

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On June 10, 2022, a violent incident occurred in Tangshan City, Hebei Province, China, where nine men beat four women at a barbecue restaurant after sexually harassing them in a failed pick-up attempt, causing the women to be sent to the hospital with serious injuries. The news shocked China. Video footage recorded by netizens went viral and sparked outrage before prompting the local police to take action and arrest the nine male culprits. The incident not only hit the “top search” of *Weibo* on June 10 and June 11<sup>1</sup> but also prompted official media, including *People’s Daily*, *CCTV*, and *China Women’s Daily* to criticize the

violence and call on the local government to deal with it according to the law as soon as possible.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has adopted strict control over the press, often blocking news immediately whenever needed. As merely a local community case, why has the Tangshan incident unusually attracted criticism from the central-level official media and even become a hot topic on the Internet? Why did the CCP not shut down the news of this incident but instead take the initiative to comment on it and allow it to be widely circulated and discussed? The following are the author’s observations.

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1. Lin Yanchen, “The Last Suspect Involved in the Tangshan ‘Woman Assaulted by Several Men’ Incident Arrested, the News Took 7 Out of 10 ‘Hot Searches’ on Weibo,” *ETtoday News Cloud*, June 11, 2022, <https://www.ettoday.net/news/20220611/2270952.htm>.

2. “Tangshan Women Assaulted Incident / ‘They Need Justice’, Public Rage Unusually Reported by Official Media,” *World News*, June 11, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/d2l8XV>.

### **CCP using incident to reverse its negative image on women's protection**

The “Case of Chained Mother” incident, publicized on the Internet in January 2022, sparked discussions about women trafficking and the protection of women's rights in Chinese society. The CCP's delayed intervention, as well as clear attempts by local authorities to deflect the problem through a series of vague, contradictory reports, led many to believe that the party has little interest in protecting the rights of the disadvantaged. The authorities also blocked comments as netizens tried to identify the chained mother of the eight children in Xuzhou.<sup>3</sup> On April 2, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Youth League (CYL) posted on its *Weibo* account a topic titled, “The Long Marches For Each Generation” with six pictures, aiming to highlight young Chinese who contributed to major historical events

of the CCP. However, netizens pointed out that no women appeared in these pictures. In response to the questions, the CYL Central issued a long *Weibo* post along with the Beijing Evening News on April 12 to criticize “extreme feminism” with strong words such as “it's time to control the fake feminism that swings a big stick.”<sup>4</sup> As a result, this year's events related to women's rights have stirred up netizens' dissatisfaction with the CCP, reinforcing the impression that the CCP has been neglecting the protection of women's rights for years. In the author's view, the CCP's intervention after the Tangshan incident was related to the abovementioned events. The CCP hopes to use pressure exerted on local authorities and criticism in the official media to speak for women and reverse its negative image among netizens as “inactive,” “unreflective,” and “bullying with official authority” when it comes to the protection of women's rights and interests.

3. Christina Chen, “The Logic of CCP's Speech Control from the China Eastern Airlines Disaster and the ‘Xuzhou Eight Children Case’,” *National Defense and Security Instant Review*, No. 344 (April 12, 2022), <https://indsr.org.tw/focus?uid=11=269=22>.

4. Yu Li, “Official Media of Continuous Misstep: Why Did the Chinese National Anthem Lyrics Become Sensitive Words?” *China Digital Times*, No. 95, April 19, 2022, <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/679775.html>.

### **Incident exposes limited effectiveness against gang violence, CCP needs high-profile measures**

Although police arrived at the Tangshan barbecue restaurant, they did not arrest the men who were causing trouble; one of the men was even suspected of being a local police officer.<sup>5</sup> Several Tangshan residents later identified themselves and reported other incidents on the Internet, posting video footage of themselves being assaulted and harassed by local gang members. With the evidence, the Tangshan incident triggered suspicions of long-term collusion between the officials and gangs, leading to rampant crimes in the area.<sup>6</sup>

During his tenure, Xi Jinping has focused on fighting corruption and gangs by launching a three-year “special national campaign to fight organized and gang-related crimes” in 2018, aiming to eliminate crimes and reinforce the authorities at the local level. On March

29, 2021, the CCP held a national convention to conclude the campaign and commend the crime-fighters, declaring the campaign’s successful completion.<sup>7</sup>

From the Tangshan incident and the abovementioned development, it can be seen that the effectiveness of the crime-fighting campaign is actually limited. Local violent crimes obviously have not been completely eliminated, and gangs are still present and rampant in the communities. These incidents have directly shaken the authority of the CCP’s governance; as such, its Central Committee needs to intervene quickly in a high-profile manner to dispel people’s distrust of the regime.

### **CCP tries to win back people’s hearts for stability**

The COVID-19 lockdown of Shanghai in March has caused many problems for people’s livelihoods and hugely impacted the economy, leading

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5. Cheng Jing, “Tangshan Women Assaulted Incident is the Tip of an Iceberg, Foreign Media Demanded Reasons,” *The Epoch Times*, No. 95, 12 June 2022. <https://www.epochtimes.com/b5/22/6/12/n13757467.htm>.
  6. Chen Yan Qiao, “Tangshan Female Singer Locked up in Dog Cage, Police Quickly Arrested Four Suspects after the Public Enraged,” *World News*, June 12, 2022, <https://www.worldjournal.com/wj/story/121474/6383592>.
  7. “Xi Jinping Meets with Representatives from the Conclusion and Commendation Convention of the Special National Campaign to Fight Organized and Gang-related Crimes,” *CCTV Net*, March 29, 2021, <https://reurl.cc/41v81L>.

to many public grievances. During the lockdown, many netizens even circumvented censorship and challenged the CCP's official policy and rhetoric through ironic and satirical expressions.<sup>8</sup> The CCP's response to the Tangshan incident shows that it is aware of its strained relationship with society, and if it does not respond to the needs of the people, there could be more discontent. Even though there has not yet been a large-scale physically assembled protest in China, the CCP's top brass, desperate to get through the year peacefully, must be careful at this crucial moment to avoid the convergence of public opinion on the Internet from turning into actual actions. It is foreseeable that the CCP will make other moves to win back the people's hearts before the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress takes place.

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8. Yu Li, "Official Media of Continuous Misstep: Why Did the Chinese National Anthem Lyrics Become Sensitive Words?" *China Digital Times*, No. 95, April 19, 2022, <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/679775.html>.