

Optimizing Pathways for County-level Discipline Inspection and Supervision Commissions Office Integration in the New Era from the Perspective of Holistic Governance

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Abstract: The integration of the Discipline Inspection and Supervision Commissions (DISC) in office is a primary component of the reform of the supervisory system, involving the integration and coordination of internal supervisory forces of the Party and the state. It is of significant importance for the modernization of the supervision system and supervisory capabilities. Based on the theory of holistic governance, this paper establishes a "System-Structure-Technology" theoretical analysis framework. It identifies three major challenges faced by the integrated DISC in practice: lagging institutional construction, ambiguous jurisdiction boundaries, and technological constraints. To build a closely linked and efficiently operating disciplinary inspection and supervision system, the paper proposes pathways including improving laws and regulations, promoting the connection between disciplinary and legal measures, strengthening coordination among and within DISCs at all levels, and breaking through technological barriers.

1. Introduction

On October 18, 2017, the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, stated that "after long-term efforts, socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era." The report clearly laid out the nationwide implementation of the supervisory system reform, proposing "the establishment of National, Provincial, Municipal, and County Supervision Commissions, to be integrated with the Party's disciplinary inspection organs." This integration is a continuation and deepening of the first, representing a profound reform of the national DISC system in the new era. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Party once again emphasized the need to "improve a unified, comprehensive, authoritative, and efficient supervision system under the Party's leadership," while further strengthening political supervision, led by intra-Party supervision, to promote the coordination of various types of supervision. The integration of the DISC since the reform of the supervision system is an important manifestation of the integration of Party and government functions, establishing the Party's unified leadership in supervision, integrating various supervisory forces, and realizing the continuity of Party and state supervision. It

is an important manifestation of improving the Party and state supervision system and enhancing supervisory capabilities. The reform of the supervision system is a crucial link in the modernization of the Party and state's supervisory capabilities, and the integration of the DISC is a primary component of this reform. Promoting this integration and building an efficient disciplinary inspection and supervision system is of significant importance for advancing the modernization of the national governance system and capabilities.

Before the reform of the supervision system, academic research on disciplinary inspection and supervision mainly focused on the significance of implementing the joint office of the DISC, policy analysis, and the functional positioning of the DISC after integration. The second integration of the DISC is an institutional arrangement of the state supervision system reform, with current research primarily focusing on two aspects: firstly, through historical tracing^[1] and comparison of the two integrations^[2], demonstrating the importance of the DISC integration under the supervision system reform^[3]. Secondly, by researching institutional construction of the joint office of the Discipline Inspection Commission and the Supervision Commission^[4], establishing the leading role of intra-party supervision^[5], and safeguarding the power exercise of the Supervision Commission^[6], we are exploring specific operational issues at the practical level of the joint office of the Discipline Inspection Commission and the Supervision Commission.

Existing research on the DISC integration is plentiful but tends to be fragmented and lacks systematicity, with a theoretical analysis framework mainly based on law and Party history and construction. The integration of the DISC is a significant measure in the supervision system reform, using the concept of holistic governance to address the issue of dispersed and isolated supervisory forces in the disciplinary inspection and supervision system. It responds to the "nine dragons managing the water" phenomenon in the Party and state supervision system and the overlapping and redundant institutional settings, representing a crucial strategic deployment in the modernization process of the national governance system and capabilities. The theory of holistic governance is strongly coupled with the construction of a disciplinary inspection and supervision system based on the DISC integration. Based on this theory and selecting typical cases as the background, reflecting on and summarizing the practice of the DISC integration to seek optimized pathways for enhancing the efficiency of DISC supervision is of great significance for constructing an efficient disciplinary inspection and supervision system.

2. Characteristics of Discipline Inspection and Supervision Commissions Integration under the Concept of Holistic Governance

The concept of holistic governance was initially proposed to address social issues caused by excessive fragmentation within the government, focusing on the overall operation of internal government institutions and departments. Holistic governance advocates for a shift from decentralized to centralized management, from partial to holistic, and from fragmented to integrated operations. This theoretical perspective has a certain degree of coupling with the logic of the integration of the Discipline Inspection and Supervision Commissions in their joint office operation.

2.1 Department Integration: Transition of Discipline Inspection and Supervision Forces from Dispersed to Centralized

Before the reform of the supervisory system, there were numerous internal supervision organs, including Party discipline inspection departments, government audit, supervisory departments, procuratorial organs of the judiciary, public security, etc., presenting an overall state of fragmented supervision akin to "nine dragons managing the water" with low efficiency. Since the reform, the establishment of the National, Provincial, Municipal, and County Supervisory Commissions and

their integration with respective DISCs, along with the transfer of two bureaus from the procuratorates, have consolidated internal supervisory departments. Concurrently, "The Rules for the Supervisory Work of the Discipline Inspection Organs of the Communist Party of China" and "The Supervisory Law of the People's Republic of China" as Party disciplinary regulations, have established the Party's leadership over the DISCs, clarifying that local and grassroots Discipline Inspection Commissions (Supervisory Commissions) work under the dual leadership of the corresponding Party committees and higher-level Discipline Inspection Commissions (Supervisory Commissions), centralizing supervisory power and avoiding multiple management heads.

2.2 Functional Coordination: Expansion and Deepening of Supervision Subjects and Content

Before the DISC became the dedicated supervisory organ of the Party and the state, the Party supervised the Party, and the government supervised the government. Fragmented supervision led to overlapping supervision, as over eighty percent of the public servant team were Party members, causing overlapping identities and supervision. On the other hand, supervision gaps occurred, such as public enterprises, public institutions, social organizations, and their staff, relying on public power, were in a supervisory gap^[7]. In the process of deepening the reform of the supervisory system, the scope of supervision was expanded, and the content deepened, from Party officials and public officials to all public officials exercising public power. The content includes not only supervision, discipline enforcement, and accountability for compliance with Party discipline and rules, but also supervision, investigation, and handling of the performance of public functions and exercise of public power, moving from narrow to comprehensive supervision subjects and content.

2.3 Systemic Convergence: From "Separation of Discipline and Law" to "Convergence of Discipline and Law"

Before the reform, various supervisory bureaus carried out administrative supervision functions for state administrative organs and their civil servants, as well as other personnel appointed by administrative organs, according to the "Administrative Supervision Law of the People's Republic of China." At the same time, the People's Procuratorate, public security organs, and others operated according to regulations like the "Procuratorial Supervision Regulations of the People's Procuratorate" and the "Inspection Regulations of Public Security Organs." Meanwhile, "The Standards of Clean Governance of the Communist Party of China" and "The Disciplinary Regulations of the Communist Party of China" proposed "upholding the separation of discipline and law, discipline preceding law, discipline stricter than law." The enactment of the "Supervisory Law of the People's Republic of China" in 2018 was an important exploration in the convergence of discipline and law, with the powers of supervisory commissions at all levels encompassing the handling of suspected disciplinary, legal, and criminal violations in one body, thereby organically connecting disciplines and laws related to corruption control in the "Supervisory Law"^[8].

2.4 Technological Empowerment: Cross-Departmental, Cross-Level Data Sharing

Information technology, as an important tool for modernizing government governance systems and capabilities, plays a significant role in data sharing and the reconstruction of supervision mechanisms in the reform of the supervisory system^[9]. On one hand, relying on the internet and utilizing big data, data resources, and information clues are shared across levels and departments, overcoming geographical and departmental barriers. On the other hand, the effective use of "Internet + Supervision" further integrates forces, using information technology to realize the cross-departmental transfer of clues, receipt of letters and visits clues, and effective screening of clues.

The theory of holistic governance is highly coupled with the top-level design of China's DISC integration. Utilizing the main viewpoints of holistic governance theory to construct a "System-Structure-Technology" analysis framework can reflect on the practice of DISC integration, thereby identifying problems and seeking optimized pathways to achieve an effect greater than the sum of its parts.

3. Real Challenges of the Integration of Discipline Inspection and Supervision Commissions in County X after the Supervision System Reform

3.1 Institutional Lag: Coexistence of Personnel System Absence and Poor Convergence of Discipline and Law

Since the supervision system reform, regulations such as "The Rules for the Supervisory Work of the Discipline Inspection Organs of the Communist Party of China" and "The Supervisory Law of the People's Republic of China" have provided institutional guarantees for the integration of the DISC from a top-level design perspective. However, at the micro-level, there is a lag of institutions behind practice. On one hand, the workload of the DISC has significantly increased due to the expansion of supervision subjects and content, but corresponding personnel allocations have not increased, leading to a mismatch between workload and staffing. On the other hand, there are obstacles in the convergence of discipline and law: first, the applicability issue between Party discipline and state law; second, the problem of case handling procedures. There are systematic distinctions between Party members' disciplinary violations and legal violations. When a Party member's disciplinary violation is severe enough to breach state law, should Party discipline or state law be applied? In cases of both disciplinary and legal violations, if the judicial organ has not prosecuted but the disciplinary inspection organ has discovered the behavior, should it be transferred to the procuratorial organ or the judicial organ for handling? These doubts stem from the unclear relationship and boundaries between Party discipline and state law, leading to unclear bases for case handling due to poor convergence of discipline and law.

3.2 Structural Constraints: Ambiguous Jurisdiction Boundaries and Poor Coordination

First, the jurisdictional positioning of the DISCs at various levels is unclear, leading to a weakened supervisory function of county-level DISCs. Hicks pointed out two significant characteristics of "fragmentation": problem shifting and conflicting projects and goals. In the practice of the disciplinary inspection and supervision system, this is manifested as the transfer of work from higher-level to lower-level DISCs, with different jurisdictions leading to the occupation of resources. After the integration of the disciplinary inspection and supervision system, hierarchical management was implemented. The leadership positions of higher-level DISCs and party committees over lower-level DISCs were determined, and the "Regulations for the Implementation of the National Supervision Law" granted higher-level supervisory commissions the right to designate their supervisory matters to lower-level supervisory commissions. The disciplinary inspection and supervision system is the dedicated supervisory organ of the Party and the state. The common goal of DISCs at all levels is to focus on the supervision of Party and state power and anti-corruption efforts. However, the realization of big goals requires the decomposition and implementation of smaller goals, with each level of the DISC having its jurisdiction. In the context of insufficient depth in promoting the supervision system reform and lack of overall thinking, departments at all levels make biased behavioral choices for their departmental goals and interests. Situations such as joint case handling and personnel mobilization have led to the transfer of some work from higher-level DISCs to lower-level ones, resulting in an excess of tasks assigned

by higher levels, few tasks at their level, excessive personnel mobilization, and severe mismatch of staffing, weakening the disciplinary inspection and supervision force at the county level.

Second, unclear division of labor within the county-level DISC. "The Rules for the Supervisory Work of the Discipline Inspection Organs of the Communist Party of China" propose that "disciplinary inspection and supervision organs should establish a working mechanism where supervision and inspection, review and investigation, case supervision and management, and case adjudication are coordinated and mutually restraining. Supervisory commissions above the municipal level implement separate departments for supervision and inspection and review and investigation." As the "Rules" only mention separate departments for supervision and inspection and review and investigation at the municipal level and above, without requirements for the county level, most county-level DISCs have not separated supervision and inspection rooms from review and investigation rooms. However, in practice, the merged disciplinary inspection and supervision rooms are responsible for both daily supervision work in connecting with localities and units and conducting review and investigation work. Amid high-intensity and cumbersome tasks, unclear departmental division of labor leads to weakened active supervision function and difficulties in conducting review and investigation work.

3.3 Technological Bottleneck: Weakened Technological Empowerment

The main sources of disciplinary inspection and supervision clues include transfer from higher levels, transfer from the same level, discovery through supervision and disciplinary work, and letters and complaints. All channels involve information sharing and exchange between different supervisory subjects, with information technology being a crucial support for seamless connections among various entities in the supervisory system. The "Internet + Supervision" model, with its advantage in opening up channels for democratic supervision participation, allows citizens to submit clues online, integrating supervisory forces and expanding the scope of supervision. However, due to certain limitations in technology levels, "Internet + Supervision" also faces the dilemma of a large volume of letters and complaints with low effectiveness.

4. Optimization Pathways

4.1 Accelerating Institutional Construction and Promoting the Convergence of Discipline and Law

Improving laws, regulations, and institutional systems serves two main purposes: on the one hand, it promotes the implementation and enforcement of "The Supervisory Law" and "The Working Regulations of the Communist Party of China Discipline Inspection Commission," ensuring the orderly operation of the disciplinary inspection and supervision system. On the other hand, it necessitates the swift perfection of micro-level institutions in tandem with reforms, such as refining personnel systems and team building policies. Beyond addressing the increased workload of disciplinary inspection and supervision departments through institutional support in terms of staffing, it also involves offering systemic support for team development. For instance, the enactment of a "Supervisory Officers Law" could define clear career paths for disciplinary inspection and supervision personnel, enhance their sense of achievement, and improve their remuneration, thereby managing staff turnover in these departments.

Party discipline and state law should not be confused. Although "anti-corruption" is a common goal of disciplinary enforcement and legal enforcement, each should have distinct boundaries in different contexts. The convergence of discipline and law is crucial for ensuring that the DISC operates with clear disciplinary and legal standards during enforcement. In January 2018, Zhao Leji,

the Secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, emphasized at the Second Plenary Session of the 19th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection the need to "adhere to discipline being stricter than the law and precede the law, to ensure a smooth transition from disciplinary review to legal investigation." Practices of discipline-law convergence vary across regions, generally falling into two categories: "discipline first, then law," as exemplified by the treatment of the first case of detention in Shanxi, and "parallel discipline and law, mutual recognition of evidence". Despite various explorations in different regions, a lack of unified norms and standards for application has been a persistent issue. Therefore, accelerating the development of institutions to further clarify the distinction and integration of functions after the DISC integration is essential. This will help define the boundaries between Party discipline and state law, thereby better addressing the issue of discipline-law convergence.

4.2 Strengthening Internal Coordination to Enhance Supervisory Capability

Since the reform of the supervisory system, the emphasis has been on achieving full coverage of supervision, significantly increasing the subjects and content of disciplinary inspection and supervision, which is the embodiment of extending supervision "horizontally to the edges." Disciplinary inspection and supervision organs are responsible for both supervising discipline enforcement and conducting review and investigation, making their work cumbersome and voluminous, especially at the grassroots level where staffing is more limited. Therefore, a rational division of labor is particularly important. "The Rules for the Supervisory Work of the Discipline Inspection Organs of the Communist Party of China" have clearly defined the organizational structure of DISCs at the municipal level and above, separating supervision and inspection from review and investigation departments, and providing guidance for internal division of labor, optimizing the process of discipline enforcement and law enforcement while strengthening internal self-supervision. DISCs below the municipal level can refer to these "Rules" for guidance, adjusting their division of labor based on their circumstances. Those county-level DISCs that have the basis for departmental separation can separate supervision and inspection rooms from review and investigation rooms. Those without the conditions for separation can divide and allocate personnel reasonably from an organizational and institutional perspective.

The establishment of DISCs at various levels is actually an extension of supervisory forces from the central to the local level, constructing a "vertically to the roots" disciplinary inspection and supervision system. Under the principles of hierarchical management and local management, DISCs at all levels decompose the unified supervisory goals, effectively fulfilling their special supervisory duties within their respective jurisdictions, thereby ensuring the realization of the Party and the state's overarching supervision goals. Simultaneously, parts are also components of the whole; the DISCs at various levels are parts of the Party and state disciplinary inspection and supervision system. Due to the systemic and complex nature of disciplinary inspection and supervision work, coordination and linkage with other parts, i.e., DISCs at various levels, are necessary. Therefore, it is essential to clarify the jurisdictional positioning of DISCs at each level and leverage the advantages of stationed supervision and inspection tours. Effectively fulfilling special supervisory duties within their respective jurisdictions is crucial. Maintaining close contact with higher-level DISCs and corresponding Party committees, as well as reporting regularly and promptly, is necessary. Additionally, actively cooperating and coordinating with DISCs at all levels, disciplinary inspection and supervision forces, and relevant departments is important. These efforts will help to explore mechanisms like 'room-group-locality' joint case handling and special governance activities.

4.3 Breaking Through Technological Barriers to Enhance Supervisory Efficiency

Overcoming technological barriers is crucial for enabling the cross-level, cross-departmental, and cross-field flow of information using modern technology. First, adopting the "Internet + Supervision" approach to build a supervision platform can expand participation in supervision through information systems, apps, and mini-programs, thus achieving the integration of various types of supervision. Second, by constructing databases, real-time information sharing can be achieved. Fourth, leveraging intelligent algorithms and artificial intelligence can automate simple tasks like repetitive petition screening. Simultaneously, intelligent algorithms can also break down professional barriers. On the basis of clear departmental division of labor, problem clues can be intelligently categorized and transferred using programming and intelligent algorithms, not only reducing the workload of disciplinary inspection and supervision personnel but also enhancing supervisory efficiency. The instrumental rationality of these tools further contributes to the objectivity and fairness of case handling. Information technology not only enables close connections, cooperation, and coordination within the disciplinary inspection and supervision system, achieving holistic governance, but also provides technical support for the collaboration of disciplinary inspection and supervision forces with other forces in the Party and state supervision system, offering technical feasibility for the holistic governance of the Party and state supervision system.

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