

Research on the Reform Path of Sub-district Offices from the Perspective of Holistic Governance—A Case Study of Bijiaoshan Sub-district Office in the Shushan District of Hefei City, Anhui Province

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ABSTRACT

As the key subject of grassroots governance, sub-district offices are imperative to the society's smooth operation and cities' healthy development. In practical grassroots governance, sub-district offices inevitably have some drawbacks, such as jumbled institutions, chaotic personnel, and inefficient function implementation, overlapping other organizations or institutions with unclear rights and responsibilities. From the perspective of holistic governance, this paper takes the reform of the Bijiaoshan Sub-district Office in the Shushan District of Hefei City as a research case, exploring its reform path and summarizing its practical achievements. After the reform of the Bijiaoshan Sub-district Office, the structure of horizontal departments is reorganized, and the functions are optimized. In addition, the responsibilities and relationships of its vertical departments turn clear, with the unimpeded instructions issued by the Party Committee. Besides, the feedback from grassroots governance becomes timely and effective, which constitutes a new pattern characterized by "communication from top to bottom, horizontal linkage, stereo alternation, and collaborative governance". As an epitome of grassroots governance, the reform of the Bijiaoshan Sub-district Office is helpful to improve and develop the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and promote the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity.

QUESTIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1954, in order to strengthen urban governance, China established an administrative street residence system composed of sub-district offices and residents' committees. After the reform and opening up, the urbanization acceleration has stimulated the continuous changes of grassroots organizations in China. The previously formulated Regulations on the Organization of Urban Sub-district Offices were abolished in 2009. Our country has changed from a control-based street residence system to a service-based community system. As a government agency, the sub-district office is the first-level

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public management and service organization, which undertakes government tasks from the agencies above as well as supervises and implements the work of the subordinated ones. Therefore, performing various functions of serving people's livelihoods not only plays a role in connecting the government and the people, but also improves urbanization, social governance capacity, and governance ability. However, many problems still exist in the public service of sub-district offices in China at present. For example, the current unclear division of powers and responsibilities, jumbled institutions, chaotic personnel, strong administrative atmosphere, and inefficient function implementation has hindered the development of sub-district offices.

As the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China pointed out, "A social governance pattern of co-construction, co-governance, and sharing should be created. We should strengthen the construction of the social governance system by improving its Party Committee leadership, government responsibility, social coordination, public participation, and legal guarantee. Moreover, socialization, rule of law, intelligence, and specialization of social governance should be enhanced. In order to strengthen the construction of the community governance system, we need to downgrade the focus of social governance to the grassroots agency, give play to the role of social organization, and realize the benign interaction between governance, social regulation, and residents' autonomy." In response to the call of our country, the existing studies at present mainly put forward two different viewpoints, which are abolishing and retaining sub-district offices from the perspective of national grassroots administrative system reform. On the basis of "reservation", it is divided into three viewpoints, including "maintenance theory", "real sub-district offices theory", and "real sub-district offices in the virtual area". However, due to the high cost and reform resistance, the ideal effect cannot be achieved in a short time without sufficient room for implementing these views. Yang Hongshan and Li Dongquan (2016) who drew lessons from and summarized the reform experience of many regions at home and abroad proposed that before carrying out the reform of sub-district offices, they should take the lead in clarifying their status, roles, functional orientation, and work scope. Li Yuanyuan and Wang Ze (2018) compared the revoking mode of the sub-district office reform between Tongling, Anhui Province and Guiyang, Guizhou Province. They pointed out that only by streamlining government functions, actively cultivating social organizations, stimulating residents' participation, empowering the community, and forming a pluralistic co-governance can we truly realize the stereo community governance and the modernization of governance capacity. Based on the investigation of Beijing, Chengdu, and Nanjing, Lu Jun and Yang Haotian (2019) compared their reform experiences and summed up the general laws of sub-district offices reform mode, namely "spindle type", "dumbbell type", and "saw-bell type", which provided a reference for other cities' reform. Zhao Wenjie (2021) who collected the historical changes of sub-district offices since the founding of the people's Republic of China thought that the key was not the retention or revocation of sub-district offices but to improve urban grassroots social governance by reforming sub-district offices. Revocation and retention of sub-district offices have their own advantages and disadvantages, thus disputes over the reform of sub-district offices still exist. Most scholars pay more attention to tracking and evaluating the effectiveness of sub-district office reform,

ignoring the theoretical innovation based on practice and the fact that the new reform model and research perspective are not comprehensive. Therefore, the most important task at present is to choose a rational research perspective, combine theory with practice, and figure out the relationship between sub-district offices and other aspects, so as to promote the sustainable and good operation of grassroots society.

Taking holistic governance as the research perspective, this paper mainly adopts the methods of case study, field study, experience study, and literature study. The data mostly come from the field investigation of the author and the research team in the Bijiaoshan Sub-district Office in the Shushan District of Hefei City, Anhui Province in the summer of 2022. The data mainly includes three parts. Firstly, the interview records between the members of the project team and WWZ, the head of the Party Work Department of the Bijiaoshan Sub-district Office, with the related data provided. Secondly, the data results were obtained by the project team by issuing online and offline questionnaires in the area under the jurisdiction of the Bijiaoshan Sub-district Office. Thirdly, the author obtained relevant laws, policies, and media reports through the network channels such as the WeChat official account and the official website homepage of the Bijiaoshan Sub-district Office. By collecting and studying survey samples, the author combines theoretical content with the practical operation, analyzes its exploration experience, and summarizes its reform practice, which not only provides empirical materials for the holistic governance theory, but also helps the sub-district offices in various regions to discuss and understand.

INTERNAL LOGIC BEHIND THE REFORM OF GRASSROOTS GOVERNANCE SYSTEM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HOLISTIC GOVERNANCE

The “stripe and block” in the theory of government organization is an image statement describing the form and structure of government organization. Generally speaking, the so-called “stripes” refers to the functional departments with the same business nature from the central to local governments. The so-called “blocks” refers to governments at all levels in specific administrative areas. Although they are intertwined and play a common role in grassroots governance, they are easy to cause fragmentation with divided governance, which needs to be comprehensively coordinated. Therefore, the “stripe-block relationship” is an important logic to explore the reform of the grassroots governance system, with holistic governance as an important strategy to guide its reform.

“Stripe-Block Division” Leads to “Fragmentation” of Governance

“Stripe” and “block” are interdependent and inseparable as a contradictory unity. Due to the unreasonable division of the “stripe-block” structure in practice, the centralization and decentralization of central and local powers are different, resulting in unclear powers and responsibilities, overlapping functions, idle resources, communication barriers, low efficiency, and other problems among government or sub-district offices,

which leads to the division of “stripe-block relationship” and makes grassroots governance fall into the development dilemma of “fragmentation”. In this case, when the sub-district offices face the governance as a “block” in the administrative organization, the relevant functional departments do not have enough power to request the government docking department as a “stripe” to deal with it under the dual pressure of administration and service. Due to practical reasons such as poor information and inconvenient communication, it is more likely to have conflicts between the departments of “stripes” and “blocks”, appearing the phenomenon of shifting off responsibilities, which makes it impossible to fulfill the duty of serving the people. The imbalance of the “stripe-block relationship” is a vital obstacle to grassroots governance at present. Therefore, the prerequisite for the reform of the grassroots governance system is to straighten out the “stripe-block relationship”, clarify the boundaries of powers and responsibilities, and form an overall linkage effect.

“Holistic Governance”: From Fragmentation to Aggregation

With people’s needs and public interests as its governance concept, holistic governance takes integration functions, cooperation, and coordination as its governance strategy by governance means of the intelligent platform and information technology. In an operation mechanism characterized by a one-stop service supply, holistic governance aims to coordinate and unify. This is a new governance paradigm. In recent years, through continuous research by scholars, the applicable scope and connotation of holistic governance theory have been further expanded. For example, Li Rongjuan and Tian Shibing explained the rationality of the holistic governance theory in the reform of sub-district offices, which puts forward general governance countermeasures from four aspects, that is, vertical, horizontal, internal, and external dimensions, providing a new analytical idea for sub-district reform from a holistic perspective and explaining the way of constructing social governance community, so as to make a contribution to the application of this theory in grassroots governance.

RATIONALITY OF HOLISTIC GOVERNANCE TO SUB-DISTRICT REFORM

“Fragmentation” corresponds to “integration”. In order to effectively solve the “fragmentation” of sub-district office governance, it is necessary to reorganize the structure and optimize the functions of all levels by means of integrated governance, so as to improve the governance capacity of various departments at the grassroots level. At present, the problems encountered by sub-district offices, such as compartmentalization, broken governance, and different powers and responsibilities, need to be analyzed in depth from vertical and horizontal stripe-block relationships. Through the overall reform of sub-district offices, we should unite the “stripe-block relationship” so that the governance will be promoted from “fragmentation” to “integration” finally.

FEASIBILITY OF HOLISTIC GOVERNANCE IN SUB-DISTRICT REFORM

From the perspective of “stripe” based on the vertical management of departments, “there are thousands of subordinated agencies with a central guidance.” The continuous concentration of political power leads to the sub-strict offices without their own operating space and clear division between powers and responsibilities. On the other hand, from the “block” with territorial management as its content, the academia usually emphasizes the interaction between communities, social organizations, higher-level governments, and sub-strict offices, aiming to establish a good governance pattern through the active interaction of multiple subjects under the leadership of the government. Holistic governance is oriented towards integrity, with the help of modern information technology, so as to establish a grassroots social governance community of co-construction, co-governance, co-discussion, and sharing. As a result, it not only overcomes the disadvantages of decentralization, prevarication, and fragmentation in the sub-strict offices, but also promotes the coordination and cooperation among multiple social subjects, which realizes orderly governance and makes grassroots governance featuring decentralization, partiality, and fragmentation to a concentrated, holistic, and integrated one.

According to the holistic governance theory, facing the phenomenon of “fragmentation” caused by “stripe-block division” and the confusion of governance structure, the characteristics of sub-district offices functions should be combined with the nationality of power and the social governance, guided by practical problems and aiming at serving the people, so as to clarify the orientation of sub-district functions, optimize internal institutions, promote the resources sinking, integrate power upward, and coordinate governance downward, realizing the dynamic balance between state power and social governance.

REFORM PATH OF BIJIASHAN SUB-DISTRICT OFFICE IN SHUSHAN DISTRICT OF HEFEI CITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HOLISTIC GOVERNANCE

Basic Situation

Bijiashan Sub-district Office, established in April 2004, is located in the southeast of Dashu Mountain, the core area of the Hefei Municipal Party Committee and Municipal Government, adjoining the bank of Swan Lake. Its jurisdiction extends east to Qianshan Road, along Qimen Road to the junction of Huaining Road and the Heyedi sub-district office. It is adjacent to National Highway 312 in the south and borders the National Economic and Technological Development Zone and Feixi County. With its west to Hefei West Railway Station of Hejiu Railway, it also borders the National High-tech Development Zone. With its north to the special railway line, it has a boundary with Jinggang Town and Nanqi Sub-district Office. Its jurisdiction covers a total area of 7.11

square kilometers with a population of about 108,000. There are six departments in the sub-district office, including Party and Government Office, Financial Development Section, Social Affairs Section, Population and Family Planning Section, Comprehensive Law Enforcement Section, and Judicial Office. Besides, it's also attached to five community workstations, namely Huilin Pavilion, Cuiting Garden, Swan Lake, Wenbo Park, and Xuelin House.

Reform and Exploration

The reform of the Bijiaoshan Sub-district Office is the unified action of Hefei. In February 2019, in order to streamline institutions and departments, improve service capabilities, and implement the "Three Emphases and One Enhancement" project in depth, Hefei Municipal Committee held a meeting of deputies to the National People's Congress of Hefei City concerning the 2018 Shanghai Municipal Party Building Conference and implemented the "Several Measures for Urban Grassroots Party Building to Lead Urban Grassroots Governance" as well as the requirements of eight supporting documents to uniformly deploy the reform work.

MAIN MODE: "ONE OFFICE, SEVEN DEPARTMENTS, AND TWO CENTERS"

Most of the reform contents of the Hefei Sub-district Office draw lessons from the reform framework of Shanghai without too many differences among sub-district offices except details. According to the results of the public opinion survey collected by the project team, most residents before the reform didn't know much about the functional orientation of the sub-district office and thought that the sub-district office "makes less difference despite its large jurisdiction" with cumbersome external processes, internal prevarication, low efficiency, poor service attitude, and impersonal touch. After the reform, the focus of sub-district functions changed from economic to social services. According to the comprehensive and flat scientific governance direction, Bijiaoshan Sub-district Office integrates the original six departments and their subordinate institutions into "one office, seven departments, and two centers", namely, Party and Government Office, Party Work Department, Urban Management Department, Social Affairs Department, Community Construction Department, Safety Construction Department, Business Environment Department, and Government Affairs District Service Department. In addition, there is also a Party Service Center and a Grid Service Center in the sub-district, which serve as a community center and a comprehensive management center to directly serve grassroots party members and masses.

MAIN CONTENT

Eleven departments have equal status and clear responsibilities. In an interview with WWZ, simply speaking, "one office" is the Party and Government Office, mainly responsible for docking the instructions and tasks issued by superiors such as district

committees, district governments, district People's Congresses, and district People's Political and Consultative Conference.

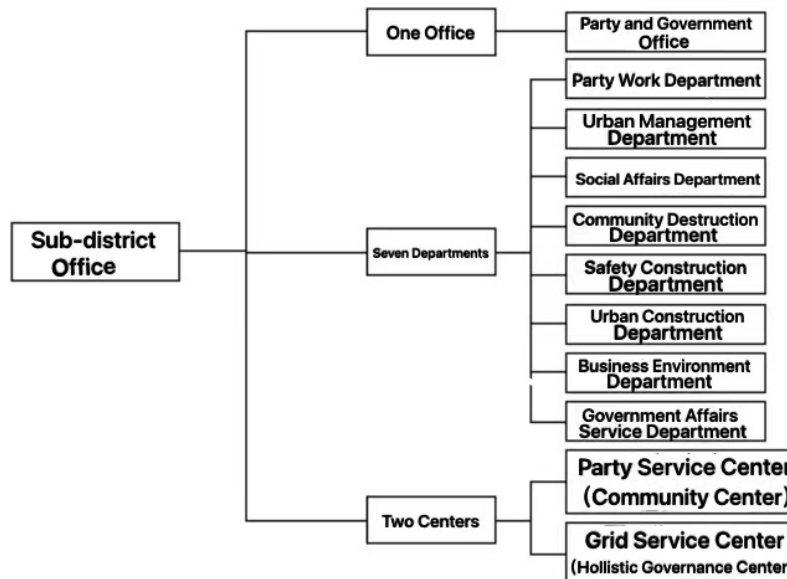


Figure 1. Overview of Hierarchical Structure of Bijiashan Sub-district Department after Reform.

The first “seven departments” is the Party Work Department. Before its reform, the Party Work Department worked together with the Party and Government Office with the same duties and powers, so its capability of Party building work was not strong. After its reform, the Party Work Department was separated, which strengthened its Party-building capability. The Party Work Department is mainly in charge of organizational work and publicity, managing the corresponding publicity organizations (Communist Youth League, Women’s Federation, Trade Unions, etc.). The second is the Urban Management Department, “a team responsible for law enforcement.” Because it covers the function of law enforcement, the Urban Management Department doesn’t take charge of the city management, maintaining the order of street facades and stalls in the city as well as merging the labor security work that originally belonged to the Social Affairs Section and the Population and Family Planning Section. The third is the Department of Social Affairs, which is mainly responsible for all projects related to people’s livelihood, such as subsistence allowances, civil affairs, disabled persons’ federations, health, and family planning. Then the Department of Community Construction was established. Its main duties are to strengthen the construction of neighborhood committees, strengthen residents’ autonomy, integrate social organizations, and promote pluralistic community governance. Later, the Department of Peace and Construction was established, which controls comprehensive social management, political affairs, and legal work. The Department of Business and Environment is set up by each sub-district according to its actual situation, which is a window to convey information with a certain mobility.

Stripping away the central tasks assigned by the government to the grassroots governments, it mainly serves the main enterprises within its jurisdiction, implements and fulfills some emergency policies, and helps enterprises solve difficulties and optimize the business environment. Bijiaoshan Sub-district is located at the seat of the Hefei Municipal Party Committee and Municipal Government with many resident organs in its jurisdiction. Therefore, the sub-district has set up a District Service Department dealing with government affairs to connect and serve the central, provincial, and municipal resident units, which is a characteristic working organization in its jurisdiction. In addition, a Development and Construction Department is set up in the departmental sub-district, which is mainly responsible for housing security, project services, land acquisition, demolition and resettlement, community reconstruction, civil air defense, and civil defense, etc., which is the same as the Department of Business and Environment with mobility.

One of the “two centers” is the Party Service Center (Community Center), which takes a one-stop service supply as its operating mechanism equivalent to a government service hall directly handling certificates for residents. The Party Service Center was set up before the reform, and its governance function was enhanced after the reform. Not only is it geographically located in residential areas, which has achieved the effect of benefiting the people, but it also abides by the principle of serving the people, integrating some frequently used service windows together. “Dealing with multiple affairs in one window” and “sparing people from surplus visits” improves work efficiency and people’s satisfaction. Another center is Grid Management Center (Comprehensive Management Center). The Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee put forward the “innovation of the social governance system and promotion of the social governance methods.” In order to improve fine governance, sub-district offices are divided into grids. Apart from taking charge of the situation integration and work of each small grid, the network management center issues orders from superiors and implements the public sentiment and public opinion recovered by grid workers, which plays a connective role.

VITAL EXPERIENCE OF THE REFORM OF BIJIASHAN SUB-DISTRICT OFFICE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HOLISTIC GOVERNANCE

Horizontal Structure: Led by Party Building, From Division and Fragmentation to Unification and Integration

Before the reform, the various departments of the sub-district offices with relative independence went their own way and had limited strength, so it was difficult to form an effective joint force when encountering urgent and dangerous tasks or comprehensive work. After defining the functional orientation, the sub-district office focuses on strengthening grassroots party building, adjusting and optimizing its own internal party and government organizations, with most of the team members in charge of one block and responsibilities, so as to realize “one principle followed by all, and one team managed to

the utmost”. The overall coordination function of the Party Working Committee has been significantly enhanced, and the role of grassroots party organizations as fighting bastions has been under the design of the national top system. The sub-district offices guide multiple subjects to participate in grassroots governance with the help of political advantages, organizational advantages, and mass advantages of the Party Committee, which gives play to the core and central role of party building and realizes the integration of “stripe-block” power and governance resources. Secondly, the sub-district office sets up a one-stop service window in the service hall to implement the reform of “one window for all management” and aggregate the handling matters scattered in various departments in one window. Adhering to the people-centered work concept, it strengthens the sense of responsibility and work orientation, giving full play to the governance advantages of sub-district offices in grassroots governance. In order to ensure the orderly connection of various tasks and clarify the workflow after the institutional reform, the Party Working Committee of Sub-district Offices can formulate a function list, task list, and responsibility list based on reality, requiring all departments to welcome and implement orders according to their requests. At the same time, we should implement the principle of open government affairs and publicize it to enterprises and residents in the jurisdiction through WeChat official account, publicity column, and other platforms. Therefore, under the leading role of Party building, the sub-district office realizes the horizontal structure from division and fragmentation to unification and integration.

Vertical Structure: Sinking Resources, Decentralized Power, and Downward Emphasis

In streamlining and integrating horizontal institutions of sub-district offices, the management and working procedures are correspondingly reduced. Some staff and social resources even gradually sink into the community. First of all, the Sub-district Party Working Committee needs to scientifically formulate the personnel allocation plan, assign the administrative quota, and effectively use human resources, so as to ensure “the united team and the vigorous energy” when improving administrative efficiency. Furthermore, the Decision of the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee on Several Major Issues of Comprehensively Deepening Reform proposes to improve social governance methods and innovate social governance systems, in addition to taking grid management and socialized services as the direction and improving the grassroots comprehensive service management platform. Therefore, apart from using modern information means and establishing a good and timely public opinion feedback mechanism, sub-district offices need to timely reflect and coordinate people’s interests and demands at all levels, put people first, and focus more on service functions. Furthermore, grassroots people’s awareness of democratic autonomy and satisfaction should be improved to well finish the “last mile” of the community. From the vertical governance dimension, the governance resources sinking, and the decentralization of governance power have promoted profound changes in the grassroots social governance pattern, with the focus of social governance gradually downgrading to grassroots governance. Meanwhile, the purpose of serving the people has been further implemented,

thus realizing the benign interaction between government governance and residents' autonomy and the win-win pattern of governance efficiency and people's satisfaction.

Vertical and Horizontal Structure: Communication from Up to Bottom, Horizontal Linkage, and Stereo Interaction

As for the party, government, military, civilians, and education everywhere, the party leads everything. Sub-district offices have Party Service Centers at the community territorial level, which mainly undertake regional party building, party building in emerging fields, education and management of floating party members, etc., giving full play to the leading role of party organizations in taking care of the overall situation and coordinating all parties. Grassroots party organizations have wide coverage and contact with party members and the masses. Under the guidance of party building and the coordination between the party and government, the urban and rural grassroots governance system as well as the all-sided organizational system will be further improved, transmitting the party's strength and ideas to every stakeholder's heart. At the same time, we should promote grassroots governance to be characteristic, orderly, powerful, and effective. With holistic governance as the main idea, we should respond to the "large department system" reform and build "flattening" governance. Departmental functions of sub-district offices should be changed together with streamlining internal institutions. Some staff and social resources can be delegated to the community. Besides, the enthusiasm of various social subjects should be improved to participate in public life, so as to realize the downward movement of governance centers and the coupling among various subjects, creating a benign interaction between pluralistic governance and coordinated development.

From both vertical and horizontal perspectives, sub-district offices can realize political interaction with grassroots social governance subjects by the virtue of the party organizations' power, so as to realize social interaction with grassroots social governance subjects through the transformation of functions. After the reform, the structure of horizontal departments was reorganized, and their functions were optimized. Thus, the responsibilities and relationships of vertical departments were clear, the instructions issued by the Party Committee were unimpeded, and the feedback from grassroots units was timely and effective. The leadership of grassroots party organizations promoted the realization of the overall governance network, forming a new pattern of "communication from top to bottom, horizontal linkage, stereo interaction, and collaborative governance".

CONCLUSION

Holistic governance constructs an integrated structure. Grassroots governance must play a crucial role in the Party's leadership based on safeguarding the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people. Moreover, it needs to encourage and support the participation of all social sectors, systematically govern and make overall plans for development, in order to realize the benign interaction between government

governance, social self-regulation, and residents' autonomy. From the perspective of holistic governance, the reform of the sub-district office system pays attention to its leading role in sub-district office and community Party organizations. The redundant work functions and cumbersome work processes are abolished. Thanks to rationalizing the "stripe-block relationship", strengthening regional party building, implementing institutional guarantee, promoting horizontal institutional integration, and vertical shift emphases, the administrative execution ability, serviceability for the people, deliberation and consultation ability, emergency management ability, and peace-building ability of sub-district offices are effectively improved.

The reform experience of the Bijiaoshan Sub-district Office provides empirical materials for the holistic governance theory, which builds a practical basis and guidance for comprehensively deepening the reform at present. Besides, it offers suggestions for the innovation of grassroots governance system and the improvement of governance capacity, effectively promoting the realization of the general requirements that propose to "perfect and develop the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and promote the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity".

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