

From Fragmentation to Holism: Path Selection and Mechanism Comparison of Grassroots Public Service Integration in China

Zixu Wang

School of Public Administration, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, P.R. China

Abstract: Public service fragmentation is a structural dilemma left by professional division of labor and New Public Management reforms, to which holistic governance theory provides an integration-oriented theoretical response. Taking holistic governance theory as the analytical framework, this paper systematically sorts out the institutional roots of grassroots public service fragmentation in China, and then summarizes and compares the operational mechanisms, applicable conditions and inherent limitations of three main integration paths: "one-stop integration", "grid-based service integration" and "digital platform integration". The study finds that the three paths correspond to the logical mechanisms of structural integration, functional integration and information integration respectively, but all face constraints from institutional barriers. Holistic governance in the Chinese context must be embedded in the authoritative structure of party-government integration and the technical conditions of digital empowerment to effectively break through the institutional inertia of departmental segmentation. This paper proposes a revised Chinese framework of holistic governance featuring the trinity of "party-government integration—administrative integration—digital empowerment", providing theoretical reference for advancing the integration of grassroots public service systems.

Keywords: Grassroots Governance; Service Integration; Holistic Governance; Fragmentation; Digital Government; Path Comparison

I. Introduction

1.1 Practical Background: The Fragmentation Dilemma of Grassroots Public Services

Since the reform and opening up, China's grassroots public service supply system has undergone a profound transformation from a single planned supply model to a diversified and professionally divided system. While professional reforms have enhanced service depth and professional standards in various fields, they have been accompanied by the increasingly prominent problem of public service "fragmentation". Administrative permits were scattered across multiple functional departments, leading to the once-prevalent phenomenon of people having to "make multiple trips" and "visit multiple offices". The division of responsibilities between vertical line departments and horizontal territorial governments has made service integration difficult. Digital infrastructure construction has proceeded in a "chimney-style" manner, resulting in numerous data silos and difficulties in information sharing. These fragmentation dilemmas not only reduce public service efficiency but also undermine people's sense of gain and satisfaction.

In recent years, the central government has continuously promoted reforms to integrate grassroots public services. In 2017, the General Office of the State Council issued the Guiding Opinions on Promoting the "One Network, One Door, One Time" Reform of Government Services, clarifying the reform direction of online-offline integration. In 2019, the State Council issued the Implementation Opinions on Promoting the Integration of Grassroots Approval, Service and Law Enforcement Forces, requiring the integration of grassroots approval service capabilities. In 2020, the State Council promulgated the Guiding Opinions on Accelerating the Standardization, Normalization and Convenience of Government Services, further promoting the integration of service systems. Most importantly, in January 2024, the State Council issued the Guiding Opinions on Further Optimizing Government Services, Improving Administrative Efficiency, and Promoting "Efficiently Handling One Matter" (Guo Fa [2024] No. 3), elevating government service integration to a national strategic level and clearly stating that by 2027, a ubiquitous, intelligent, convenient, fair and inclusive efficient government service system will be basically formed. The 2026 Government Work Report further emphasized continuing to optimize government services and accelerating digital government construction with

"efficiently handling one matter" as the traction. This series of reform deployments fully demonstrates that public service fragmentation has become a major institutional obstacle to advancing the modernization of the national governance system.

Meanwhile, the rapid development of artificial intelligence technology has injected new variables into public service integration. In August 2025, the State Council issued the Opinions on In-depth Implementation of the "AI+" Action, proposing to accelerate the implementation of the "AI+" governance capability action. New technologies represented by generative AI are reshaping the operational logic of grassroots governance, bringing both the possibility of "technological empowerment" to improve service efficiency and new problems such as "technological burden", "fingertip formalism" and increased digital administrative burden. Against this background of technological change, how to use artificial intelligence to break through the traditional fragmentation dilemma while avoiding new risks brought by technology has become a cutting-edge issue that must be addressed in grassroots public service integration research.

1.2 Theoretical Background: The Rise of Holistic Governance and Its Explanatory Limitations

In the late 1990s, starting with the "Joined-Up Government" reform of the Blair administration in the UK, Western administrative academia developed a post-New Public Management theoretical system centered on "holistic governance". Scholars such as Perri 6 systematically criticized the governance fragmentation caused by the New Public Management movement and advocated rebuilding the systematic nature of public service provision through coordination, integration and trust mechanisms. Perri 6 first systematically elaborated the critical framework of decentralized governance in his 1997 book *Holistic Government*, and then constructed a more complete theoretical system in the 2002 co-authored book *Towards Holistic Governance*, proposing three major mechanism dimensions: coordination, integration and trust. The emergence of this theory marked a profound reflection on the NPM paradigm in Western public administration academia and is regarded as one of the most influential governance theories in the "post-New Public Management" era.

Domestic academia began to introduce holistic governance theory on a large scale around 2008. Zhu Qianwei (2008) took the lead in systematically introducing holistic governance in China and analyzed the theoretical turning logic from New Public Management to holistic governance. Hu Xiangming and Tang Boyong (2010) demonstrated the theoretical connotation of holistic governance from the perspective of a new public management paradigm and sorted out three core elements: network structure, coordination mechanism and trust relationship. Zhou Zhiren and Jiang Minjuan (2010) focused on the policy coordination dimension and compared the collaborative practices of developed countries at the macro-strategic and meso-decision levels. Hu Jia (2009) explicitly connected holistic governance with China's local public service reforms and proposed the local applicable conditions of holistic strategies.

However, existing studies have three obvious shortcomings. First, there is more theoretical introduction than localized construction. Most studies stay at introducing Western theoretical frameworks and lack systematic empirical induction and theoretical refinement of China's grassroots public service integration practices. Second, there is more path description than mechanism comparison. Scattered studies on various integration paths such as "one-door", "grid-based" and "digital" have failed to form a systematic comparative framework, making it difficult to reveal the mechanism differences and complementary relationships between different paths. Third, there is more static analysis than dynamic cutting-edge follow-up. Faced with the latest practices such as the "efficiently handling one matter" reform and AI-empowered governance, existing studies lack theoretical responses to these cutting-edge trends.

Current public management research presents a general trend of "policy-driven precision, deep technology integration, and focused academic consensus". "Intelligent holistic governance"—the integration of holistic governance and digital governance—has become one of the core frontiers of bureaucracy and government behavior research. In their 2025 article *Bringing the Government Back: New Tasks of Chinese Public Administration Research in the New Era*, Yang Lihua et al. called on Chinese public administration research to return to the government itself and respond to real governance practices in the construction of an independent knowledge system. This means that the discussion of holistic governance theory urgently needs to move from introduction to localized construction and from static description to dynamic mechanism interpretation.

Based on the above practical and theoretical backgrounds, this paper proposes the following core research questions: What are the institutional roots of grassroots public service fragmentation in China? What mechanism logics do the existing integration paths follow respectively? How can holistic governance theory be localized and revised in the Chinese context?

These are specifically refined into three sub-questions: First, what are the institutional causes of grassroots public service fragmentation in China? Second, what are the operational mechanisms and inherent limitations of the three main existing integration paths? Third, faced with cutting-edge practices such as the "efficiently handling one matter" reform and AI-empowered governance, how can holistic governance theory be revised and reconstructed in the Chinese context?

II. Literature Review

2.1 Research Foundation of New Public Management

Public service fragmentation is not unique to China but a structural consequence of Western New Public Management (NPM) reforms in the 1980s and 1990s. Hood (1991) summarized NPM as a government reform paradigm characterized by marketization, professionalization and decentralization, whose core idea is to introduce competition mechanisms into public service provision and improve efficiency through departmental specialization. After systematically comparing the government reform experiences of OECD countries, Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) pointed out that while NPM reforms improved service efficiency locally, they also led to structural problems such as highly dispersed government functions, difficult inter-departmental coordination and fragmented citizen demand responses. Dunleavy (2006) went further to declare that "New Public Management is dead", arguing that the governance logic of the digital age requires re-integrating government functions, and proposed the theoretical framework of "Digital-Era Governance", emphasizing three core propositions: re-integration, needs-based integration and digital transformation.

In the Chinese context, administrative decentralization reforms and professionalization have also brought about the problem of fragmented service provision. Through a critical analysis of the "isomorphism of responsibilities" phenomenon, Zhu Guanglei and Zhang Zhihong (2005) revealed the institutional roots of vertical-horizontal segmentation and functional overlap in China's intergovernmental relations. The highly corresponding vertical institutional setup between governments at all levels and the lack of differentiation in horizontal functional division have led to a continuous tension between the "vertical" intervention of superior line departments in grassroots governments and the autonomy of territorial "horizontal" management. This research provides an important institutional analysis starting point for understanding public service fragmentation in China.

In recent years, holistic governance research has shown a new trend of deep integration with digital technology. In their 2024 article "Efficiently Handling One Matter": The Model Transformation of Holistic Services in the Digital Age, Li Zhe, Zhai Yun and Qin Kun examined "efficiently handling one matter" within the theoretical paradigm of post-New Public Management, analyzed its value attribute from efficiency to value, technical attribute from traditional to digital, and collaborative attribute from fragmentation to integration, arguing that "efficiently handling one matter" marks the transformation of China's government services from "fragmented provision" to "holistic service". Based on a configurational comparative analysis of 49 cities in China's urban agglomerations, Li Yanzhong and Li Quanwei (2024) explored the action paths for the equalization of basic public services from the perspective of holistic governance.

"Intelligent holistic governance", that is, the deep integration of holistic governance and digital governance, has become a cutting-edge core concept in the discipline of public administration. The research focus has shifted from traditional organizational coordination mechanisms to data-driven "AI-embedded evidence-based decision-making" and human-machine collaborative governance mechanisms. Research progress in the field of artificial intelligence and public governance shows that government large models are reshaping the policy process, algorithmic black boxes and bias risks pose new challenges to administrative ethics, and the definition of informed consent rights in the digital age also urgently needs exploration.

2.2 Practical Research on Grassroots Public Service Integration in China

Represented by the "one-door, one-network" reform in Chancheng District, Foshan City, Guangdong Province, this path integrates approval items scattered across multiple departments into a unified window through physical space concentration and item consolidation. Academic research on this path focuses on key links such as the definition of integration scope, business process reengineering and power delegation and authorization. It is generally believed that the one-door reform has achieved remarkable results in improving approval efficiency, but also faces the deep challenge that "physical concentration" does not equal "chemical integration".

As an important innovation in urban grassroots governance, grid-based management has formed a service integration mechanism with "comprehensive grid workers" as the carrier in the field of public services. Relevant studies have revealed the functional superposition and information aggregation characteristics of grid-based services, while also pointing out structural dilemmas such as grid workers' role overload, ambiguous definition of powers and responsibilities, and insufficient professional guarantee.

Digital reform innovations such as "Internet + Government Services", "one-network access" and "run at most once" represent the service integration path driven by information integration. With the in-depth advancement of the "efficiently handling one matter" reform, digital platform integration is evolving from simple online processing to "deep online-offline integration". However, problems such as the digital divide, data security and privacy protection, and grassroots "digital trace" burden have become increasingly prominent.

2.3 Research Entry Point

Synthesizing the above literature, the main contributions of existing studies lie in establishing the theoretical foundation of holistic governance, providing empirical cases of various integration paths, and

revealing the institutional roots of public service fragmentation. However, the following three shortcomings leave space for this research:

First, there is a lack of a systematic comparative framework for the three types of integration paths. Most existing studies are empirical descriptions or policy interpretations of a single path, failing to incorporate one-door integration, grid-based integration and digital platform integration into a unified comparative analysis framework, making it difficult to reveal the mechanism differences and complementary relationships between the three paths.

Second, the mechanism analysis of holistic governance stays at element enumeration. Existing analyses of the three mechanisms of coordination, integration and trust are mostly static element lists, failing to reveal the operational logic and conditional dependence of different mechanisms in China's specific institutional environment.

Third, the Chinese contextual theoretical construction of holistic governance is insufficient. China-specific variables such as the party-government integration institutional structure, the mobilization mechanism of the pressure-type system, and the technical conditions of digital technology empowerment have not been systematically incorporated into the holistic governance framework, and the level of theoretical localization needs to be improved.

Based on the above three shortcomings, this paper strives to propose a Chinese contextual revision framework of holistic governance theory on the basis of systematically comparing the mechanism differences of the three types of integration paths.

III. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Core Elements and Concept Definition

According to the systematic exposition of scholars such as Perri 6 and the sorting out by domestic scholars, holistic governance includes three core analytical dimensions: Coordination, that is, strategic consistency and goal alignment across organizations, levels and departments; Integration, that is, the systematic fusion of service processes, information systems and resources; Trust, that is, the sustainability and normative guarantee of inter-departmental collaborative relationships.

In the context of this paper, the following core concepts also need to be defined:

"Fragmented" public services refer to the fragmented state of public service provision at the structural, functional and information levels caused by line segmentation, departmental barriers and disconnected information systems, manifested as fragmented service items, dispersed service subjects, incoherent service processes and unshared service information.

"Integration paths" refer to institutional reform measures taken to overcome public service fragmentation. This paper focuses on three main paths: "one-door/one-stop", "grid-based" and "digital platform", which correspond to the logical mechanisms of structural integration, functional integration and information integration respectively.

"Chinese contextualization of holistic governance" refers to revising and expanding Western holistic governance theory by incorporating China-specific variables such as the party-government integration structure, pressure-type system and digital technology empowerment conditions while retaining the core analytical elements (coordination, integration, trust) of holistic governance.

3.2 Construction of the Analytical Framework

This paper constructs a four-dimensional analytical framework of "fragmentation roots—integration paths—mechanism logics—applicable boundaries". First, it diagnoses the institutional roots of fragmentation from three dimensions: vertical line segmentation, horizontal departmental interest solidification and information silos. Second, it systematically sorts out the basic models and operational mechanisms of the three types of integration paths. Third, it compares the differences between the three paths in terms of integration type, integration level, driving force, applicable scenarios and inherent limitations. Finally, based on the analysis of the particularity of the Chinese context, it proposes a localized revision framework of holistic governance theory.

Compared with the institutional presuppositions of Western holistic governance, the institutional environment for grassroots public service integration in China contains three key special variables:

First, the party-government integration structure. The unified leadership of the Party over administrative organs provides integration authority that transcends bureaucratic coordination. The overall coordination authority of sub-district Party working committees over the dispatched agencies of various functional departments stationed in the area is an institutional resource that cannot be covered by the horizontal negotiation mechanism presupposed by Western holistic governance theory.

Second, the mobilization effect of the pressure-type system. The pressure-type system described by Rong Jingben et al. plays a dual role in integration reforms: on the one hand, it achieves rapid short-term integration through political mobilization; on the other hand, it leads to formalistic integration due to the goal

substitution effect—"fingertip formalism" is a typical manifestation of this mechanism in recent practices.

Third, the state-guided nature of digital technology. China's digital government construction is highly state-guided, and the nationally unified data sharing platform provides strong infrastructure support for information integration. The implementation of the "efficiently handling one matter" reform in 2024 and the "AI+" action in 2025 has further strengthened the driving role of digital technology in public service integration.

IV. Analysis of the Institutional Roots of Grassroots Public Service Fragmentation in China

4.1 Vertical Line Segmentation: The Governance Cost of Professional Division of Labor

China's administrative system takes "vertical lines" (functional departments) and "horizontal blocks" (territorial governments) as the basic organizational principles. The formation of the line segmentation pattern has its historical logic: the administrative functional department system divided by professional fields established during the planned economy period was continuously strengthened with the deepening of professionalization construction after the reform and opening up. Systems such as civil affairs, human resources and social security, health, education, housing and urban-rural development have each formed relatively closed approval processes, information systems and resource allocation mechanisms. While this "strong lines, weak blocks" supply pattern has improved service depth in various professional fields, it has led to the dilemma of people having to "visit multiple offices" when handling cross-field matters.

The deep institutional root of line segmentation lies in the "isomorphism of responsibilities" system. The highly corresponding vertical institutional setup between governments at all levels gives superior line departments extremely strong intervention capabilities in grassroots governments, while grassroots governments (especially at the sub-district level) have relatively weak overall coordination authority. In the field of public services, this is manifested in the fact that the service standards, information systems and assessment requirements of each line department are independent of each other, making it difficult for grassroots governments to achieve effective integration within their territorial scope.

4.2 Horizontal Coordination Failure: The Solidification of Departmental Interests

Departmentalism is the core obstacle to public service integration. Various functional departments have formed relatively independent systems of personnel establishment, funding budgets and information resources during long-term operation. This structural interest constitutes a powerful institutional inertia that hinders cross-departmental integration reforms. The more integration is emphasized in reforms, the more likely they are to encounter defensive responses from departments, which resist power transfer and resource sharing on the grounds of "professional barriers", "data security" and "regulatory restrictions".

The solidification of departmental interests is also reflected in the level of information asymmetry. Service data held by various line departments are often regarded as "departmental assets" and are unwilling to be actively shared. Without strong integration authority to promote it, information barriers between departments are difficult to break through spontaneous coordination mechanisms. This is why the digital platform integration path, although technically feasible, faces huge institutional resistance in actual implementation.

4.3 Information System Silos: The Paradox of Digitalization

The independent construction of information systems by various departments has led to inconsistent data standards and incompatible interfaces, forming "information chimneys". This phenomenon reveals a deep paradox of digital reform: informatization construction not only cannot naturally achieve integration in the initial stage, but may instead exacerbate fragmentation. Information systems independently developed by each department have solidified existing business processes and power structures, forming new digital barriers.

More noteworthy is that the introduction of digital tools has not only failed to reduce the grassroots burden but has instead spawned pressure for "multi-dimensional digital trace" and "fingertip formalism". In August 2025, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council issued the Several Provisions on Rectifying Formalism to Reduce the Burden on Grassroots Units, making institutional arrangements for grassroots burden reduction in the form of inner-party regulations, which precisely reflects the negative effects that digital tools may produce in grassroots governance. The information silo problem is therefore not only a technical problem of data interoperability but also an institutional problem of power reconstruction and interest redistribution.

4.4 Comprehensive Explanation of Institutional Fragmentation

Synthesizing the above analysis, grassroots public service fragmentation in China is the product of the superposition of three forces: vertical line segmentation (structural factor), horizontal departmental interest solidification (motivational factor) and information system silos (technical factor). There is a mutually reinforcing logical relationship between the three: line segmentation provides the organizational basis for the solidification of departmental interests, the solidification of departmental interests hinders the interoperability of information systems, and information silos in turn strengthen the existing pattern of line segmentation. This "self-reinforcing mechanism of fragmentation" means that intervention in a single factor is difficult to achieve systematic integration, and a multi-dimensional collaborative reform path must be adopted.

V. Mechanism Comparison of the Three Types of Integration Paths

5.1 Path One: One-Door/One-Stop Integration—Structural Integration Mechanism

5.1.1 Basic Model

Represented by the "one-door, one-network" reform in Chancheng District, Foshan City, Guangdong Province, the "run at most once" reform in Zhejiang Province, and the "efficiently handling one matter" reform promoted by the State Council, this path achieves "structural integration" through the concentration of administrative approval items, physical integration of service halls, and authorization and entrustment. Its core logic is to merge approval items scattered across multiple departments into a unified physical space or online entrance, replacing the traditional departmental decentralized processing model with the operational model of "front desk comprehensive acceptance, back desk classified approval, unified window delivery".

5.1.2 Operational Mechanism

Centralized authorization mechanism. County-level governments concentrate the approval powers scattered in various functional departments into the administrative service center, forming a unified authorization chain through power of attorney and engraving special approval seals. This mechanism is driven by administrative authority and centered on power decentralization, which is the institutional basis for the advancement of integration.

Process reengineering mechanism. Based on the principle of "one matter, one process", service processes are restructured by breaking departmental boundaries. Taking the "efficiently handling one matter" reform as an example, multiple affairs that previously required sequential handling across multiple departments are integrated into "one matter", replacing item-based services with scenario-based services, realizing the fundamental transformation from "people running to departments" to "departments collaborating to handle".

Window integration mechanism. Comprehensive acceptance windows replace professional windows, and staff transform from "only understanding one field" to "generalist services". Window integration not only reduces the information search cost for people to handle affairs but also forces the collaborative transformation of back-end approval processes.

One-door integration is applicable to public service fields with high item standardization, standardized approval processes and a clear number of involved departments. This path requires strong authorization support and continuous political promotion from superior governments, and therefore often achieves remarkable results in the early stage of reform.

5.1.3 Inherent Limitations

First, "physical concentration" does not equal "functional integration". The physical integration of windows is relatively easy to achieve, but the substantive transfer of departmental powers faces deep institutional obstacles. The core of approval power remains in the hands of back-end departments, and front desk windows only play the role of "mail rooms". Second, it is highly dependent on the sustainability of political will. Once political impetus weakens, reforms are prone to "fever reduction", with phenomena such as "apparent progress but actual stagnation" and "nominal concentration but actual dispersion". Third, for complex services requiring professional judgment, the professional capacity of comprehensive acceptance windows is insufficient, which may affect service quality.

5.2 Path Two: Grid-Based Service Integration—Functional Integration Mechanism

5.2.1 Basic Model

Based on urban comprehensive grid management, public service items are sunk to grids, and comprehensive grid workers undertake functions such as service investigation, demand discovery and preliminary handling, forming "functional integration". The core logic of grid-based management is to take spatial units (grids) as governance carriers and follow the principle of "one grid, one worker" to integrate service functions originally scattered in multiple systems such as civil affairs, public security, urban management and social security into unified grid workers.

5.2.2 Operational Mechanism

Functional superposition mechanism. The grassroots service functions of multiple line departments are integrated into comprehensive grid workers, realizing "one person with multiple posts and one specialist with multiple abilities". Grid workers simultaneously undertake multiple functions such as information collection, conflict mediation, people's livelihood services and policy publicity, serving as the "unified exit" for line services at the grassroots level.

Demand discovery mechanism. Different from the traditional "passive acceptance" model, grid-based management realizes the transformation from "waiting for people to come to the door" to "actively going down to discover" through daily inspections and visits. This demand discovery mechanism is particularly effective in communities with a high degree of aging and concentrated vulnerable groups.

Information aggregation mechanism. As grassroots information collection nodes, grid workers aggregate various types of service demands into a unified grid-based information platform, providing "base number" data support for superior departments in grassroots governance.

Grid-based integration is applicable to grassroots community public service scenarios with diverse demands, geographical dispersion and strong active service attributes, and is more effective in old communities with high aging degrees, concentrated floating populations and complex social contradictions.

5.2.3 Inherent Limitations

First, grid workers suffer from role overload. When line departments such as civil affairs, social security, urban management and comprehensive governance all delegate functions to grids, the workload of grid workers increases sharply, making it difficult to guarantee the quality of professional services. Second, the definition of powers and responsibilities between the grid system and line departments is ambiguous. Grid workers only have the right to report information but not the right to handle matters, and the response efficiency of line departments to problems reported by grids varies, easily creating a governance vacuum where "grids cannot discover and lines cannot manage properly". Third, in resource-poor rural and remote areas, grid-based integration faces dual constraints of human and financial resources, making it difficult to replicate the urban model.

5.3 Path Three: Digital Platform Integration—Information Integration Mechanism

5.3.1 Basic Model

Represented by "one-network access", "government service APPs", "digital government" and the online platform for "efficiently handling one matter", this path achieves "informational integration" through data sharing, system docking and a unified front-end entrance. The "Digital-Era Governance" theory provides theoretical support for this path, emphasizing the possibility of digital technology overcoming fragmented governance through "re-integration".

With the in-depth advancement of the "efficiently handling one matter" reform in 2024, digital platform integration is evolving from simple online processing to "deep online-offline integration". The reform requires integrating online services previously scattered in multiple departments into a unified entrance, realizing "one login, all-network access".

5.3.2 Operational Mechanism

Data sharing mechanism. Break down departmental data barriers to realize mutual recognition and interoperability of cross-departmental data. The 2024 reform clearly proposed to improve the government data sharing coordination mechanism and data security management system, promoting "more data running and less people running".

Single sign-on mechanism. A unified identity authentication system replaces decentralized verification, reducing service acquisition costs through "one-code access".

Scenario-based integration mechanism. Oriented by user needs, related matters involving multiple departments are integrated into "one matter". For high-frequency scenarios such as newborn birth, enterprise establishment and flexible employment, "one-time completion" is realized through data sharing and process reengineering.

Digital platform integration is applicable to service scenarios with strong information verification needs, high item standardization and complete digital infrastructure, and is more effective among urban populations with high education levels and high network usage rates.

5.3.3 Inherent Limitations

First, there are institutional risks of data security and privacy protection. While inter-departmental data sharing improves efficiency, it also brings risks of data leakage and abuse. Second, the digital divide makes it difficult for the elderly, low-education groups and rural residents to fully benefit. Third, the problem of "technological burden" cannot be ignored. The widespread use of digital tools at the grassroots level has spawned "fingertip formalism", and the pressure of multi-dimensional "digital trace" has increased the administrative burden of grassroots staff. Fourth, the technical cost of digital platform integration is high, and the requirements for back-end data governance capabilities are extremely high, while grassroots governments often lack corresponding technical talents and financial support.

5.4 Systematic Comparison of the Three Types of Paths

Comparison Dimension	One-Door Integration	Grid-Based Integration	Digital Platform Integration
Integration Type	Structural Integration	Functional Integration	Information Integration
Integration Level	Institutional Level	Personnel Level	Data Level
Driving Force	Administrative Authority	Organizational Reengineering	Technological Promotion
Applicable Scenarios	Standardized Approval	Personalized Community Services	Information-Intensive Services

Core Advantage	Improving Efficiency	Approval	Proactively Discovering Demands	Breaking Time and Space Constraints
Core Limitation	Difficulty in Substantive Transfer	Power	Insufficient Professional Capacity	Digital Divide and Technological Burden
Sustainability	Dependent on Will	Political	Dependent on Personnel Incentives	Dependent on Technological Investment
Holistic Governance Dimension	Mainly Coordination Dimension		Mainly Integration Dimension	Both Coordination and Integration

The three types of paths have their own advantages and disadvantages, and no single path can independently achieve the goal of holistic governance. Effective integration practices in reality are often a combination of the three paths. One-door reform provides physical space and process support, the grid system provides demand discovery and terminal reach capabilities, and the digital platform serves as the underlying information infrastructure to improve overall collaborative efficiency. Among them, digital platform integration is the key enabler to enhance the collaborative efficiency of the other two types of paths, but it is also most prone to the "technological burden" effect and must be promoted in coordination with other institutional reforms.

VI. Discussion

The theoretical contributions of this paper are reflected in two levels. At the supplementary level, it introduces China-specific variables of party-government integration and pressure-type system into the holistic governance analysis framework, enriching the institutional background theory of holistic governance. At the revision level, it reveals the limitations of the three major presuppositions of Western holistic governance (horizontal negotiation, decentralized political authority, civil society-driven) in the Chinese context, and proposes "authority-driven integration" as an alternative explanatory mechanism, providing boundary condition explanations for the cross-context application of the theory.

The "three types of paths × multi-dimensional comparison" framework constructed in this paper provides a systematic analytical tool for grassroots public service integration research. This framework can not only explain existing reform practices but also provide reference for the selection and optimization of future integration paths. In particular, the revelation of the complementarity and dependency relationships between the three types of paths helps transcend the thinking limitation of "single path worship" and promote integration strategies to move from "single-point breakthrough" to "systematic collaboration". This paper responds to the first shortcoming at the theoretical level by proposing a Chinese contextual revision framework of holistic governance, and responds to the second shortcoming at the methodological level by constructing a systematic analysis chain from fragmentation root diagnosis to integration path comparison and then to theoretical framework revision.

This paper is mainly based on literature review and secondary data analysis, and lacks original data support for the actual performance evaluation of each integration path. The differences in integration path selection and effectiveness between different regions (urban/rural, eastern/central and western) need further verification through subsequent field research. In addition, AI-empowered governance is still in a period of rapid development, and its technological iteration speed is very fast, so the analysis of its effects in this paper may have certain timeliness limitations.

VII. Conclusion and Discussion

7.1 Main Conclusions

First, the roots of grassroots public service fragmentation in China are the superposition of three mechanisms: line segmentation (vertical structural factor), departmental interest solidification (horizontal motivational factor) and information system silos (technical factor). There is a self-reinforcing logical relationship between the three, and intervention in a single factor is difficult to achieve systematic integration.

Second, the three existing integration paths (one-door/grid-based/digital platform) respectively represent the three mechanism logics of structural integration, functional integration and information integration, each with its own applicable conditions and inherent limitations. No single path can independently achieve the goal of holistic governance. Effective integration must be a systematic combination of the three paths, among which digital platform integration is the key enabler to improve overall collaborative efficiency.

Third, holistic governance theory in the Chinese context must introduce three local variables:

party-government integration authority, pressure-type system mobilization and the two-way effects of digital technology. The trinity framework of "party-government integration—administrative integration—digital empowerment" proposed in this paper provides a new analytical tool for understanding the practical logic of grassroots service integration in China.

Fourth, the latest practices represented by the "efficiently handling one matter" reform mark the transformation of China's public service integration from "decentralized provision" to "scenario-based holistic service". This transformation provides rich empirical materials for the Sinicization of holistic governance theory.

7.2 Theoretical Contributions

This paper proposes a "Chinese contextual revision framework" of holistic governance (party-government integration—administrative integration—digital empowerment), constructs a systematic comparative analysis framework of the three types of integration paths, and incorporates cutting-edge practices such as the "efficiently handling one matter" reform and AI-empowered governance into the theoretical vision of holistic governance, providing a Chinese case reference for cross-national comparative research on holistic governance theory.

7.3 Policy Recommendations

First, promote the institutionalization of integration. Incorporate cross-departmental service integration into laws and regulations, establish a normalized coordination mechanism and power and responsibility list, reduce dependence on political mobilization, and prevent integration reforms from "fever reduction".

Second, adopt differentiated path selection. Select matching integration paths according to service attributes (standardization degree, professionalization degree, digital adaptability) and regional characteristics (urban-rural differences, resource endowments), avoiding "one-size-fits-all". For approval services with high standardization, prioritize promoting one-door and digital platform integration; for community services with strong personalized demands, strengthen the function of grid-based integration.

Third, attach importance to the balance between digital empowerment and digital burden reduction. While promoting digital platform integration, strictly rectify formalism to reduce the burden on grassroots units. In the process of AI empowering grassroots governance, establish algorithmic ethics review and data security management systems to ensure that technological applications serve grassroots burden reduction rather than increasing burdens.

Fourth, give play to the leading function of Party building. Under the current institutional conditions, give full play to the overall coordination authority of sub-district Party working committees over stationed departments, use Party building leadership to break through the institutional obstacles of vertical-horizontal segmentation, and form the institutional advantage of Party building leading service integration.

Fifth, construct a new integration paradigm for the artificial intelligence era. Based on the experience of the "efficiently handling one matter" reform, explore a new model of "artificial intelligence + holistic governance"—use government large models to realize intelligent analysis and accurate push of cross-departmental data, use natural language processing technology to lower the threshold for people to access services, and at the same time establish ethical boundaries and accountability systems for AI participation.

References

1. Dunleavy P, Margetts H, Bastow S, et al. New Public Management Is Dead—Long Live Digital-Era Governance[J]. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 2006, 16(3): 467-494.
2. Hood C. A Public Management for All Seasons?[J]. *Public Administration*, 1991, 69(1): 3-19.
3. Perri 6. *Holistic Government*[M]. London: Demos, 1997.
4. Perri 6, Leat D, Seltzer K, et al. *Towards Holistic Governance: The New Reform Agenda*[M]. New York: Palgrave, 2002.
5. Pollitt C, Bouckaert G. *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis*[M]. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
6. Hu J. Holistic Governance: A New Trend in Local Public Service Reform[J]. *Journal of National Academy of Administration*, 2009(6): 106-109.
7. Hu X M, Tang B Y. Holistic Governance: A New Paradigm of Public Management[J]. *Journal of Central China Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, 2010(1).
8. Li Y Z, Li Q W. Action Paths for the Equalization of Basic Public Services from the Perspective of Holistic Governance—Based on a Configurational Comparative Analysis of 49 Cities in China's Three Major Urban Agglomerations[J]. *Contemporary Economic Research*, 2024.
9. Li Z, Zhai Y, Qin K. "Efficiently Handling One Matter": The Model Transformation of Holistic Services in the Digital Age[J]. *E-Government*, 2024(10): 112-124.
10. Rong J B, et al. *Transformation from a Pressure-Type System to a Democratic Cooperative System*[M]. Beijing: Central Compilation & Translation Press, 1998.

11. Yang L H, Wu K B, Tang L B. Bringing the Government Back: New Tasks of Chinese Public Administration Research in the New Era[J]. Public Administration Review, 2025(1): 1-25.
12. Zhou Z R, Jiang M J. Policy Coordination under Whole-of-Government: Theory and Contemporary Practices in Developed Countries[J]. Journal of National Academy of Administration, 2010(6).
13. Zhu G L, Zhang Z H. A Critique of "Isomorphism of Responsibilities"[J]. Journal of Peking University (Philosophy and Social Sciences), 2005(1).
14. Zhu Q W. From New Public Management to Holistic Governance[J]. Chinese Public Administration, 2008(10): 52-58.