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Examining local governments' predicament in the restructuring of provincially directly managed counties

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate the difficulties local governments face as a result of the province directly managing county system reform. It reveals the various challenges faced by local governments under the provincial directly managed county reform through a thorough analysis of the history, rationale, and implementation of the reform along with pertinent literature reviews and case studies. It is discovered that the county reform, which is directly governed by the province, has not only significantly altered the functions and organizational structure of local governments, but it has also made their resource allocation, financial strain, and brain drain problems worse. To help local governments deal with the difficulties in the province-directly governed county reform, related remedies, and solutions are finally proposed to handle these issues.

Keywords: county; local government; directly governed; reform; dilemma

1. Introduction

China's reform of having provinces directly oversee counties has started to pay off in recent years, giving local economic and social development a boost and proving the reform's worth (Malik and Yaseen, 2023). But as the reform moves forward, certain issues and conundrums start to surface, posing threats to local government's ability to effectively govern and run their operations. This paper aims to present positive ideas and suggestions for solutions while delving deeply into the issues that local governments are facing as a result of the reform of the province-directly controlled counties (Yangzhou et al., 2023). As evidenced by the quick growth of county economies, the enhanced demonstration effect of counties under direct provincial authority, and the notable improvement in government administrative efficiency, the reform of the system of counties under direct provincial control has shown some initial success (Cheng et al., 2023). China has successfully pushed the reform of province directly managed counties, offering strong support for the creative development of local governments (Martha et al., 2023). The comprehensive electricity distribution plan that outlines the roles, authority, and duties of directly administered counties as well as provincial cities should be developed by provincial governments. To avoid doubts and disagreements while putting this strategy into practice, it should be codified in extensive law or administrative regulations. Provincial governments can ensure efficient governance and reduce the likelihood of conflicts regarding authority and operational duties by instituting a formal framework for power distribution. This has been achieved through actions like bolstering counties and increasing their authority, improving

top-level design, and developing the process for choosing and appointing cadres. However, with the deepening of the reform, several problems have gradually surfaced, which need to be seriously addressed and solved (Sikka, 2022). First of all, when it comes to provinces directly managing county system reform, local governments are confronted with issues of suppression by provincial municipalities, division of authority, and unequal authority distribution (Yaseen et al., 2020). Organize provincial cities and directly administer countries into standardized communication and coordination systems. To resolve conflicts, assign authority, and carry out policies, these procedures ought to have explicit procedures. The ordered and efficient interactions between various governance levels can be ensured by specifying certain procedures, which greatly improve administrative efficiency and transparency. These challenges have severely hampered the sustainable growth of local economies and society and negatively impacted the administrative effectiveness and level of governance of local governments (Ahmed and Basit, 2023). Second, several issues have plagued the reform process, including the absence of clear exit mechanism, the slow progress being made on the reform of the cadre and personnel management system, and the unsatisfactory setup of the Judicial and Prosecutor's Courts (Hafeez et al., 2020). These issues not only impede the reform's easy progress but also cause local governments a great deal of headaches and difficulties. Furthermore, how to further deepen province directly manage counties system reform of counties and rationalize the relationship between cities and counties has become an important problem to be solved in the new era with the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity (Ye et al., 2012). Under these circumstances, conducting a thorough investigation of the situation facing local governments in the wake of the province's direct county supervision reform is crucial both conceptually and practically (Ahmed and Basit, 2023). In addressing these challenges, it is essential that targeted training is conducted for officials and staff in provincial cities and directly governed countries. This training should focus on ensuring that personnel fully understand and can effectively implement the new power distribution and governance structure. It must cover new laws and regulations, administrative processes, and conflict resolution mechanisms to equip local governments with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the Complexities of the reform (Mughal, 2014).

2. Outstanding outcomes in the restructuring

Anhui, Henan, Hebei, Jiangsu, Hubei, Heilongjiang, Yunnan, and Ningxia are among the eight provinces (autonomous regions) in which the Central Editorial Office designated 30 counties (municipalities) in 2010 to implement experimental county system reforms under direct provincial supervision. These provinces have since released papers outlining their plans to change the system of counties that are directly under their jurisdiction (Miao and Phelps, 2023). Establish a routine assessment system that methodically tracks the reform's advancement at every stage to guarantee its smooth progression. All parties involved in this mechanism beneficiaries, implementers, and policymakers should be involved in ongoing data collecting and feedback analysis. Make use of this input to pinpoint any holes,

difficulties, or areas that need to be adjusted. Utilize these insights to inform the ongoing revision and improvement of the policy measures and implementation instructions, promoting a flexible and adaptable strategy that fits the changing demands of the reform process. Maintaining momentum and supporting effective reform results will be aided by this iterative cycle. Major economic indices, including GDP, industry, investment, consumption, and fiscal revenues, have grown at average yearly rates faster than the province average in the last ten years in the counties directly under provincial authority. The counties that are directly governed by the province have emerged as leaders in the superior growth of county economies and as locations that serve as models for county economic development and reform. All things considered, the institutional reform of counties directly under provincial authority has produced some preliminary outcomes, which are mostly evident in the following areas.

2.1. Quicker development of resource elements

Start with specific pilot locations to test the new rules on a smaller scale to properly implement provincial reform. To offer a thorough grasp of potential difficulties, these pilot regions ought to represent a range of situations. Keep a watchful eye on developments, gather input, and assess the efficiency of the reform during the pilot phase. Utilize this data to make the required enhancements and modifications. Plan for a progressive rollout throughout the province after the pilots show success and any problems are fixed, consider the lessons discovered to ensure a seamless and successful implementation on a provincial scale. Following the execution of province directly managed counties system reform, these counties and cities now have the same jurisdiction as provincial municipalities and are part of the “provincial municipality + directly controlled county” development framework. Directly administered counties have clear advantages over non-reformed counties in terms of policy information availability, competition for beneficial projects, and project declaration. Numerous projects have been implemented one after another with positive outcomes. The province directly managed counties through the Development and Reform Commission during the early stages of comprehensive direct management to compete for tens of billions of dollars in investments from higher levels. Incentive systems should mix monetary support and honor incentives to effectively motivate provincial cities to undertake decentralization reforms. Investments matching for infrastructure improvements, capacity-building money for educating local authorities, performance-based awards tied to reform benchmarks, and tax breaks for corporations who support the initiatives are some examples of financial options. Recognition programs, presenting success stories, providing leadership chances to mentor other cities, and recognizing community participation initiatives are a few examples of honor prizes. By demanding sustainable planning, offering ongoing feedback, and creating cooperative networks for shared learning, these incentives should be created to encourage both instant engagement and long-term commitment. This strategy gradually changes attitudes and behaviors toward more proactive and successful decentralization while also inspiring cities with concrete rewards. As a result, the average provincial financial support for each

county increased by billions of dollars in comparison to the pre-reform period. Furthermore, the financial struggle for different funding from higher levels has reached over 3 billion yuan annually, significantly boosting the counties directly under provincial control's financial resources. In particular, the growth of counties under direct provincial jurisdiction has received great support due to the significant increase in livelihood, infrastructure, and "three rural" initiatives. Start with brief pilot projects in a few province cities to test and improve techniques before implementing effective decentralization. These should be supported by reliable feedback systems and the development of local authorities' capacities. To gain support, local institutions progressively expand these efforts based on trial results and start public awareness campaigns. To achieve sustained success, it is recommended to establish decentralization through all-encompassing policies, consistently assess and enhance procedures, encourage cooperation among regions to exchange optimal approaches, and allocate funds for resources and infrastructure that ensure durability and adaptability. During the period of pilot reform, the province's 30 pilot counties were subject to financial transfers, land use indicators, environmental capacity, and other resource factors. These counties were directly managed by the province and included in transportation, energy, water conservation, and municipal projects. The province's key projects attracted major enterprises and projects like Foxconn, Wanda, Evergrande, Jianye, and others. Counties and cities with relatively weak economic foundations, like Xincui and Lankao counties in Henan Province, Shuyang County in Jiangsu Province, and Xiantao City in Hubei Province, have experienced rapid economic development and their status has been significantly upgraded due to the rapid accumulation of resource elements. Some of these counties and cities have even emerged as significant players in regional development.

As an illustration, Tongcheng County, Anhui Province, saw an average annual increase in fiscal revenue during the pilot program of 15%, increases in investment in fixed assets of 22.4%, and annual increases in the ratio of new deposits to loans of more than 90%, placing the county's new deposits and loans among the highest among provincial municipalities. After complete direct management, the once comparatively backward Lankao County grew at a rate of 11.1 percent to rank 11th out of 104 counties and cities in Henan Province in terms of GDP in 2018 (Hafeez Aet al., 2023). Similar to this, before the pilot reform of directly governed counties in 2010, Xincui County, a county with extreme poverty on a national scale, ranked first to last among the counties in Zhumadian and second to last among the counties and cities in the province in terms of comprehensive strength and total economic output. Nevertheless, Xincui County's economic total surged to the top of Zhumadian City following complete direct management.

2.2. A notable enhancement of the development environment

Following the complete adoption of the province-directly-managed counties system reform, the carrying capacity and appeal of the cities have greatly increased, a more relaxed development environment has been created, and the party and management authority of the provincial directly administered counties have been

further expanded. Following the restructuring of the system that placed counties under direct provincial administration, counties proactively embraced the new position and engaged in dialogue with provincial departments, using them as a model for future development. While the counties directly under provincial management periodically send pertinent staff to training to enhance their overall quality, they also use on-the-job training to develop their clerical skills through practical application. When it comes to social management, healthcare, taxation, and other sectors related to administration, the counties immediately under provincial the authority has taken the lead in researching and developing models for comparable regions around the nation. Aside from that, the 30 pilot counties in the nation have been instrumental in bringing urban and rural development together and in the comprehensive development of a national garden City, national health city, national eco-county, national dual-support model city, national eco-city, national civilized city, and national pilot county (one of the “six cities”) (Liao et al., 2018).

2.3. Constantly increasing direct managerial power

The directly controlled counties have been granted more autonomy, county governments have been further energized, and administrative efficiency has significantly increased since the reform of the system of counties under direct provincial authority. First, to avoid the potential issue of municipal regrading in the city-county system, the reform has concentrated on the direct distribution of funding between the province and county levels. Using “the same authority for municipalities and counties,” for instance, the Shandong province government designated 50 counties (municipalities) as pilot counties for the thorough reform of provincial authority in 2019 (Xu, 2020). province finance is responsible for overseeing county-level finance directly. This demonstrates how the province’s directly-managed county reform system creates a direct line of communication between county and provincial governments, allowing directly-managed county people to reap the benefits of the reform. Second, the reform has also led to a flattening of the government’s organizational structure, which has mobilized county governments and increased the efficiency of government management by allowing them to react more flexibly to events as they arise.

3. Challenges and issues about the restructuring

3.1. Unfair distribution of actual authority

Departments in directly governed counties have faced barriers to docking because they have been unable to exercise the full range of authority granted to them by provincial departments. Reluctance on the part of some provincial municipalities to transfer authority to directly governed counties has resulted in increased power struggles between municipalities and counties for a variety of reasons. Remaining in charge without giving up authority is what’s become the biggest obstacle to reforming the directly governed county system. Political concerns about losing control, economic worries about resource distribution and regional imbalances, and social skepticism about the capacity of local government are the reasons why

provincial cities oppose decentralizing power. Additional cultural issues at play are historical precedents and anxieties of eroding local identity. Strategies such as capacity building, including local stakeholders, ensuring equitable resource allocation, addressing particular regional needs and concerns, and progressive decentralization should be employed to overcome these obstacles. My study and statistics show that the directly administered counties have roughly 1000 items of economic and social management authority granted by the province government, but only 550–810 items of actual authority have been taken over. In actuality, a great deal of power has not been assigned to counties that are directly administered, including permits, qualification certificates, driver's licenses, coordinated contributions, approvals for investment projects, and public security authority. Major administrative matters, personnel administration, production safety, environmental protection, poverty alleviation, letters and visits, and other licenses of directly managed counties are still handled by provincial municipalities. Furthermore, several provincial municipalities' centralized vertical departments, such as finance, taxation, and telecommunications, have either declined to decentralize for a variety of reasons or have only done so partially and not significantly. For instance, in the field of personnel management, the directly administered counties continue to lack authority over the Human Resources and Social Security Bureau's jurisdiction over civil service registration and approval, recruitment and enrolment, written exams for employment, and the declaration and evaluation of intermediate-level titles. Additionally, civil service cyber-training is still dependent on cyber-training colleges run by the provinces and municipalities' bureaux and commissions.

3.2. Difficulty in taking over some of the authority

Even though certain of the powers of provincial municipalities have been decentralized since the reorganization of the system of counties under direct provincial control, directly administered counties continue to encounter several challenges when attempting to use these powers. For instance, the Regulations on Work-related Injury Insurance do not offer legal support, even though directly controlled counties now can evaluate work-related injuries following complete direct administration. Directly governed counties face severe challenges in funding and professional and technical staffing for environmental protection monitoring, in addition to the major issue of aging buildings and equipment. As a result, there is a large disparity between their level of capacity building and that of secondary standards in the country's central region. Certain colleges and universities distribute job reporting cards in more than one way, even though directly managed counties now can obtain them on their own. Because funds for employment and health care have not been coordinated at the provincial level, the standards of care for employees of institutions and agencies in the counties directly under provincial administration are not aligned with those of other directly administered counties, making them less risk-resistant. Some directly governed counties have low intermediate qualifications, which causes a delay in project approvals. In addition, there is a mismatch between administrative approvals and intermediary qualification organizations in directly governed counties. Furthermore, some of the decentralized approving authorities

cannot be handled by directly administered counties due to their limited capacity, which makes it difficult to effectively plan urban development projects, survey and map their area and conduct quality testing. Even in situations where borrowing is used to complete the work, the directly administered counties typically employ outside professionals and technicians, which raises administrative expenses and makes it difficult for work to be coordinated with provincial ministries and bureaus.

3.3. Division over the province directly manages county system reform

Currently, there is a tendency in several provincial municipalities to increase their oversight of the counties directly under their jurisdiction, to erode their authority, and even to become directly involved in their internal affairs. The directly controlled counties' power has become severely fragmented as a result, with some of them going back to the times a decade ago when they were referred to as "expanding counties" and "non-directly governed counties." As a result of some provincial departments' lack of enthusiasm for reforming the system of counties under direct provincial control and their aversion to accountability, provincial governments have been forced to assign authority to provincial municipalities. Certain authorities, like the Provincial Poverty Alleviation Office's authority to reduce poverty, the Provincial Department of Ecology and Environment's authority to inspect for environmental protection, and the Provincial Department of Emergency Management's authority to produce safety measures has already been transferred to provincial municipalities. The provincial municipalities will have less authority and the outcomes can be squandered if other departments and bureaus—the Office of Letters and Visits, the Department of Land and Resources, the Department of Finance, etc.—follow suit.

3.4. Provincial municipalities suppress certain counties

Currently, certain counties that are under direct provincial jurisdiction have to deal with provincial municipalities not only reclaim their authority but also impose various kinds of inspections and restrictions. In actuality, provincial municipalities have imposed restrictions and treated some counties unfairly. Certain provincial municipalities, for instance, mandate that the counties they directly oversee cede much or all of their managerial and financial authority to the provincial municipality. Furthermore, a few provincial municipalities have implemented a liquidation strategy to bring back counties under direct provincial control. In this strategy, the disciplinary and supervisory commissions of the province municipalities organize inspection teams, verification, and surprise visits to examine and correct the pertinent departments and townships of the counties under direct control. Based on the success of the corrections, the commissions then determine whether to proceed with additional in-depth inspections. The incentives for reform have been severely undermined by these initiatives, which have forced provincial directly controlled counties to cope with a range of inspections and supervisions, including in the areas of stability maintenance, environmental protection, poverty alleviation, production safety, and party building.

3.5. The judicial system is not working well

As demonstrated by the judicial system in Henan Province, following the reform of the method of counties straightly under provincial control, the law courts and prosecutors of the counties directly under provincial control are dealing with several challenges, including increased management costs and institutional disarray. In certain of the counties that are directly under provincial authority, there are now six major issues with the judicial system. First, the management is disorganized. Some counties under direct control have not received timely approval for the creation of two branches of the judiciary and procuratorates; these branches are still run by the central courts and procuratorates of the provincial municipalities, leading to issues like loose management and personnel freezes. Second, there has been a rise in the number of interferences, with leaders of directly governed counties and county committees being allotted one level higher. However, more leaders of provincial municipalities and directly governed counties have interfered with the operations of the two courts. Thirdly, there has been a significant decrease in business guidance and training under the two courts and the county law prosecution. This has an impact on the job that is done. Fourthly, there has been an increase in the cost of litigation for the parties involved in the lawsuits because the majority of the directly managed counties are located far from provincial capitals. Lastly, there is a significant waste of information resources. Duplication of building and resource waste results from the courts and prosecutors in the directly-controlled counties having to re-dock their informatization facilities with other courts. Last but not least, the power of the courts has been distributed. The courts in the counties that are directly under the province municipalities' jurisdiction remain such, although they have been "marginalized" in hiring new employees, choosing cadres, and assigning honorific ratings.

3.6. The cadre and personnel management system reform are not keeping up with the times

There are no statutes to be followed in the selection, appointment, rotation, and exchange of cadres and personnel as a result of the organization departments of the provincial committees of the relevant provinces failing to develop the corresponding management methods for cadres in counties directly under their control promptly after the reform of the system of counties straightly under provincial control. The provincial party committee has given the county directly under its control the authority to handle party affairs; however, the organization department of the provincial party committee has not established a special management organization for the work of cadres in the county directly under its control, nor has it clearly defined who is competent to lead the party. Furthermore, the newly established provincial party committee, which is directly under the control of the county office, lacks the authority to swap out or adjust cadres. In the counties directly under provincial control, this leads to glaring inconsistencies in the appointment and selection of cadres as well as in their rotation and exchange. It also makes it difficult to modify and rotate cadres promptly, with few development channels and a significant backlog. The work of the directly governed counties is further complicated by the asymmetry between the departmental organizations and

personnel setups of the directly governed counties and the provincial departments. There is a decrease in the number of organizing cadres, party workers, and secretaries of grassroots party organizations as compared to before the reform, and the education and training of leading cadres at the section level and higher cannot be sufficiently ensured.

4. Reactions and recommendations for strengthening

4.1. Strengthen counties and expand administrative powers

Giving the directly managed counties more autonomy and decentralized authority to promote local development is the main component of the reform of the system of counties under provincial control. To support their development, the first duty is to transfer to the directly managed counties the economic management and administrative approval authority of some provincial municipalities. By somewhat decentralizing their power and aggressively encouraging party members and cadres in directly governed counties to launch their enterprises, provincial municipalities should take notice of and assist directly governed counties. Establish frequent gatherings and forums for the exchange of ideas to improve coordination and communication between the local and provincial governments. This strategy will ensure that reform progress is understood uniformly at all levels of government, promoting coherence and alignment in the application of policies. Frequent interactions will facilitate cooperative problem-solving, offer chances for feedback, and address real-world concerns promptly. Governments can guarantee that changes are efficiently handled, obstacles are quickly resolved, and best practices are exchanged among areas by keeping lines of communication open. This proactive approach will facilitate the smooth implementation of policies, improve overall efficiency, and strengthen governance. Furthermore, there is a need to step up the reform of the administrative examination and approval system, which includes giving directly controlled counties some of the authority previously held by central vertical administrations to increase their involvement in management. In addition to providing operational guidance and establishing a decentralized supervision mechanism for the directly managed counties, the central vertical departments should adhere to the requirements of the reform of the provincial directly managed county system. This includes switching from the previous model of single-line management to management by Party committees and governments of the directly managed counties. The Party and the State should issue applicable laws and regulations as soon as potential to clarify the civil rights and responsibilities of the directly controlled counties so that they can be legally compliant in the exercise of their powers.

4.2. Bolster the high-level plan and fervently advocate

Apart from the internal reasons for the province directly managing county system reform, the current poor progress in reforming the provincial directly managed county system in some areas can also be attributed to the lack of a clear support document from the central government. It is common knowledge that the

central policy plays a pivotal role in driving the reform of the counties under a direct provincial control system. Therefore, to make clear the goals, contents, procedures, and techniques of the province directly managing county system reform, the central government must take the initiative in conducting the necessary research and crafting appropriate laws or administrative regulations at the appropriate time. Simultaneously, it ought to elucidate the roles and authority of counties and municipalities as well as the connection between them. As the reform's driving force, the provincial government ought to think more coherently, fully use the newly created Provincial Directly Administered Office, and support the change wholeheartedly. To ensure the smooth implementation of the reform, the Organisation Department of the regional Party Committee and the regional Commission for Discipline Assessment should form a joint inspection team and deal sternly with the uptake and division of authority of the directly governed counties. Of course, provincial directly managed counties should also actively accept the leadership and supervision of provincial municipalities and exercise their authority within the framework of laws and regulations.

4.3. The judicial and prosecutorial chambers reformed

Studies comparing reform experiences in various locations have shown that institutional inertia, centralized control, resource limits, political opposition, and dispersed authority are common elements that contribute to resistance. For example, communist central authorities were unwilling to give up authority and local opposition hampered the Soviet Union's post-World War II reforms, while Chinese provinces that recently implemented reforms encountered resistance from municipalities reticent to give up control. At the local level, state governments opposed India's Panchayati Raj System change, and there were insufficient resources. Robust monitoring, stakeholder involvement, capacity building, gradual implementation, clear legal frameworks, and supportive policies are all necessary to address these problems. Effective tactics, such as comprehensive aid, legislative adaptations, and support for local governance, are demonstrated by examples such as Brazil's federal reform and Germany's reunification reforms. These strategies are intended to overcome resistance and guarantee the successful execution of reforms. Bringing new ideas to the procuratorate and court institutional structures to create a more efficient interface of judicial powers. In line with the Party's stance on judicial system reform, the provincial party committee and provincial government can take into granting the courts and procuratorates in the counties that are directly administered jurisdiction over cases spanning administrative districts. To cut costs and maintain judicial independence, courts, and procuratorates in Tianmen City, Hubei Province, for instance, can assign cases to the branch and intermediate courts of the closest off-site provincial municipality (like Xiaogan City or Jingmen City), even though this would mean crossing administrative boundaries. The recently established intermediate courts and branch courts can also step up their efforts to hold trial circuits and hearings, among other things, and increase the frequency of their case tours to the courts and procuratorates in the counties directly under their jurisdiction to lower the cost of litigation for the general public.

4.4. Novel provincially managed directly county cadre selection, rotation, and exchange mechanisms in a nutshell

Provincial governments should prioritize the ratio of cadre resources and bolster exchanges by carefully assigning top cadres to counties under their direct authority. The deployment of senior cadres, particularly prime leaders, in counties directly under the province's jurisdiction ought to be given careful thought by the provincial party committee and the provincial government. To achieve this, the Provincial Party Committee's Organisation Department will prioritize allocating a fair share of cadre resources to provincial municipalities and directly governed counties. It will also enhance communication between cadres in provincial departments and directly governed counties. Directly managed counties, provincial municipalities, and provincial departments can trade division-level cadres for jobs. In contrast, a system of competitive postings and rotational exchanges should apply to cadres at the section and unit levels. Several exceptional young cadres should be chosen to occupy different positions in the counties that are directly administered, allowing them to get training and advancement.

4.5. Putting in place a system

That would allow counties that are directly under provincial authority to leave and give provincial municipalities back sovereignty over those counties. Certain counties have undergone maladaptation during the process of pushing for the reform of the county system of provincial direct administration, leading to less than ideal economic and social development. For instance, Gongyi City in Henan Province lost some of its preferred policies and was taken out of Zhengzhou's jurisdiction following the introduction of complete direct control. While the overall GDP has been the highest in recent years, the growth rate has been declining annually, and the ranking is comparatively behind due to a lack of development impetus. These specific instances, however, do not point to the reform of the counties' direct provincial control structure failing. Communities can classify and handle issues based on the circumstances; if they are found to be unfit to be directly controlled by counties, they should put in place an exit strategy and return to the control of provincial municipalities. For instance, if Gongyi City is brought back under Zhengzhou the city's authority will be able to benefit from Zhengzhou City's radiation, which will promote its growth. Therefore, Gongyi City can be reintegrated into Zhengzhou Municipality's authority and the expanded county's administration can be put into place, provided that it maintains its status as a directly controlled county. For instance, Changyuan County, which was incorporated into the province immediately after it, was unable to comply with Henan Province's "Zheng Xin Luo" national development policy. As a result, Xinxiang City should once again be in charge of the provincial administration of Henan Province. To put it briefly, to fully change the system of counties under direct provincial authority, an escape mechanism should be built case-by-case, adhering to the idea of one case at a time and according to local circumstances (Chien et al., 2022).

4.6. Putting into effect the “separation of cities and counties” theory

A complex interaction of social, political, and economic elements affects the transformation of directly governed counties at the provincial level. As far as politics are concerned, it strikes a balance between central authority and local autonomy, simplifying government and cutting down on corruption to achieve administrative stability and strength. The objective is to establish a sustainable growth environment using fiscal discipline, promoting regional development, and optimizing resource allocation. In terms of social justice, the reform targets underprivileged communities, enhances the delivery of public services, and addresses urbanization trends. These reforms, which are crucial for modernizing local administration and boosting competitiveness in a global setting, are shaped by historical governance models, regional features, and global developments like globalization and technological inventions. There is an urgent need to achieve the unified management of counties directly under provincial control and of provincial municipalities by the provincial government to further deepen the reform of the system of counties directly under provincial control. This involves gradually reducing the interference of provincial municipalities in county-level administration. To streamline the administrative hierarchy and expedite the exercise of public power, provincial municipalities can be gradually eliminated as circumstances allow, therefore implementing the three-tiered administrative system of provinces, counties, and townships that is required by the constitution. Provincial municipalities had to be established in the past due to issues like poor information dissemination technology and difficult-to-use transit. But as Internet technology has advanced quickly, knowledge has spread much more quickly, and the national governing structure has opened up new avenues for growth. Provincial municipalities’ role as the provinces and counties’ intermediate management level has been severely undermined, to the point where it is now burdening administrative processes. The government should expedite the development of e-government and recognize the interconnection of information between the province government and counties under direct administration with the replacement of provincial municipalities by counties under direct administration. Directly administered counties have the opportunity to directly serve the people by fully using the advantages of their jurisdiction to create an information platform that encompasses a range of government services, including project declaration, administrative approval, and public feedback. The paper must advocate the implementation of regular assessments of the efficacy and progress of the reform to develop a continuous feedback mechanism. To determine whether any areas need to be adjusted and to assess the impact of the changes, this system should involve regular reviews and stakeholder consultations. The reform can keep moving forward and respond to unforeseen obstacles by utilizing data-driven improvements based on actual conditions and real-time input. This strategy prevents stagnation and fosters dynamic improvement by ensuring long-term advancement and mitigating initial opposition. To address these issues effectively, a continuous support and feedback system should be created to allow local governments to report problems encountered and receive timely guidance from higher authorities. To accomplish tasks like big data sharing and online oversight of the governmental process, provincial and county

direct network office platforms have been built concurrently. Currently, the “separation of cities and counties” and “equalization of powers between cities and counties” changes can be attempted by provinces (autonomous areas and municipalities). The “separation of cities and counties” refers to the process by which provincial municipalities focus on creating their municipalities rather than maintaining control over county-level administrative entities. The reform has made local government operations simpler and freed up more funds for the delivery of excellent public services, the encouragement of urban development, and the development of public utilities. Alternatively, county and township administrations might work directly with farmers and concentrate on creating and enhancing endogenous mechanisms to support rural economic development. The federal and provincial governments can continue to encourage the development of rural areas in counties that are under their direct administration while also creating workable rules for the growth of cities and counties. On the other hand, “equal authority for cities and counties” refers to the fact that county-level administrative districts have the same rights and obligations as provincial municipalities and are directly and fully under the control of the province. The five-tiered administrative hierarchy’s shortcomings are essentially resolved by the “separation of cities and counties” and “equalization of powers between cities and counties,” which are intended to increase administrative efficiency, lower administrative costs, and create a truly independent state for the directly administered counties from provincial municipalities.

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