

Study on Relationships between Government Integrity and Digital Records Management: A Chinese Case

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Abstract: As one of new movements in China, government integrity plays an indispensable role in building a trustworthy government. China's national policy – *Guiding Opinions of the State Council on Strengthening the Government Integrity Construction* stipulated the specific requirements and indicates an obvious tie between records and government integrity. This research aims at exploring the relationship between government integrity and digital records management by analyzing related policies collected from national level and provincial level, with an analytical framework constructed by the Records-Centered Digital Information Management Theory and Mechanisms (DI{R}Mtm). The finding shows that though records are generated, received, transmitted and used in almost every activity in constructing government integrity, records management is absent in supporting its general and specific goals. This research is expected to be informative to policymakers with respect to digital records management in constructing government integrity.

1 INTRODUCTION

Government integrity, with its aim to improve government credibility, has been attached great importance in building an effective and efficient government in China. In December 22nd, 2016, the *Guiding Opinions of the State Council on Strengthening the Government Integrity Construction* (hereafter the Opinions) was issued by the State Council on 22nd December 2016 and came into effect at the same time. As regulated in the Opinions, there are five principles for constructing government integrity. The first is “Administration by law”, which means that business activities conducted by government agencies should be based on the requirements stipulated by laws, regulations or other policies. “Open government” is the second principle which allows public citizens to have access to government information. “Diligence and efficiency” principle requires government agencies to deliver better services by reducing some redundant working processes. “Keeping the promise” principle asks all government agencies and civil servants to be upright and just to fulfill their duties. The last principle is purposely established to punish the dishonest behavior. Thus, integrity for the government means

that government agencies and civil servants should abide credit standards in conducting business and keep promises for society and citizens. Guiding by these principles Government integrity, three key motions are raised to build the overall government integrity, including a comprehensive and effective government integrity supervision system, a management system for government credit, improving insurance measures and plans for strengthening government integrity in key areas (the State Council, 2016).

Considering the unique and representative feature of government integrity as a Chinese government movement, the literature review will focus on materials from China. China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), is a platform that integrates many academic databases, for example, China Academic Network Publishing Database, Chinese Doctoral and Master's Dissertation Database etc., thus is acknowledged as the most comprehensive academic database in China (CNKI, 1999). Literature for review were obtained using advanced search option from CNKI. And for extracting the related literature, “government integrity” was decided to be the key term. Government integrity was a term used by government authorities and appeared in national policies, which gained a widely recognition and

acceptance. We obtained 236 articles within 15 years from 2004 to 2018. Nearly 122 articles, which accounts for 50% of 236 were news from newspapers. In order to select articles with high quality, Chinese Social Science Citation Index (CSSCI) were used to filter articles. CSSCI is a highly recognized index in China. It contains a list of carefully selected scholarly and editorial journals from over 2700 Chinese academic journals of humanities and social science. The journals included in CSSCI are considered of high quality (Institute for Chinese Social Science Research and Assessment, 1999). This filtration resulted in a total of 27 articles for further review. They are 7 masters' and doctoral dissertations and 20 journal articles. Most of them are opinion pieces, for example, Li and Chen claimed four sources of government integrity, including individuals' virtuous pursuits of good quality, professional ethnic standardization of public officials, benefit games in government agencies and bottom line ethics in legal government affair (Li & Chen, 2014). Chen considered deficiency in government integrity as lack of credit in policies, power and political achievements (Chen, 2016).

Though we found no study dwell on records and information management in depth, there are enough evidences in the literature which shows an obvious tie between records and government integrity. Wang indicated to construct government integrity, government information collection and government information disclosure shall be the priority (Wang, 2013). And the Opinions issued by the State council also put emphasis on "establishing and improving records that document government dishonesty" (the State Council, 2016). That is to say, these records are collected from all government agencies and disseminate among agencies for information sharing. Activities aforementioned in process of constructing government integrity are all about records and their management. This observation motivated the present study, which aims at exploring government integrity construction through records and information management lens.

2 RESEARCH QUESTION

According to the definition of government information in *The Regulation on Opening Government Information of the People's Republic of China* (hereafter the Regulation), and electronic records defined in *Interim Measures for the*

Administration of Electronic Documents, which can be referred to as Order 39, information and electronic records are equally the same in electronic office environments within government agencies. Therefore, the research question was formulated as below:

- Since evidence in the literature and policies shows an obvious tie between government integrity and information, which is electronic records in the same context, what is the relationship between government integrity construction and records management?

3 RESEARCH METHOD

In this research, content analysis was used to analyze words and paragraphs of the selected data synthetically. The start point of data collection is the Opinions issued by the State Council in 2016, and data for analysis in this research are policy documents. Data were collected from two levels, the national and the local level. Data collected from national level are policy documents issued by ministries, the State Council and national legislative authorities such as National People's Congress and its Standing Committee. For the local level, they are policies issued by local legislative authorities like the people's congress and its standing committees, as well as autonomous regions or municipality directly under the Central Government. In China, policies from the national level serve as guidance for local governments to formulate their own policies. In most cases, the main idea of a certain issue in national and local policies are of the same substance despite the fact that local policies sometimes are more detailed.

The Opinions issued in 2016 by the State Council is the only policy in the national level. The Opinions is oriented to 34 local governments except for the 2 special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macao, which include 23 provinces, 5 autonomous regions, 4 municipalities directly under the Central Government. There are 24 provincial-level administration regions issued government integrity policies, including 20 provincial policies, 2 autonomous regions' policies and 2 municipalities' policies. These policies were issued in different titles and can be classified in 3 categories of implementation plans, implementation opinions and implementation measures. Fig.1. provides the process and structure of data collection.

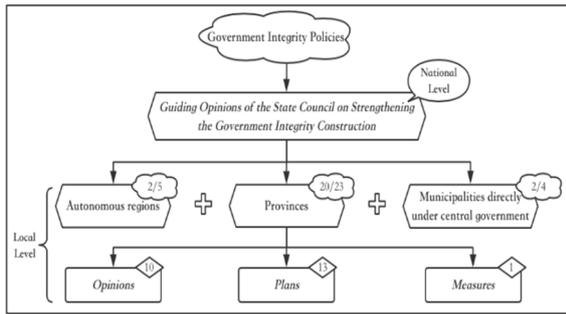


Figure 1: Data collection diagram.

4 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework that guides the analysis of the study is constructed by the Records-Centered Digital Information Management Theory and Mechanisms (DI{R}Mtm), which focuses on information management theory and mechanism in digital environment through records management lens (Xie, 2017). The analysis consists of two layers: the first focuses on the nature of information identified in the collected data and the second focuses on the management of such information. By consolidating a group of definitions of the concepts of information and records, the first layer links government information to digital records, and distills from the definitions the defining keywords as indicators for analysis. According to the Regulation, government information refers to the information produced or acquired and recorded in certain forms by administrative organs in the process of performing their duties (the State Council, 2008), and digital records defined in Order 39 refers to the text, charts, images, audio, video and other information records in various forms created, handled, transmitted and stored via computers and other electronic equipment by organs, groups, enterprises, public institutions and other organizations in the process of the conducting official business (General Office of State Council, 2009). These two definitions show that government information created, received, maintained and preserved in any electronic ways falls within the category of electronic records. In modern office environments, more and more activities rely on electronic equipment to be conducted and finished, and the construction of government integrity is no exception. Thus, information generated during the construction of government integrity are electronic records. It is, therefore, clear that government

information qualifies as digital records in this environment. The indicators in the first layer include, for example, the terms “information asset”, “evidence”, “reference”, “instrument”. Table 1 shows the representative indicators and its sources in first layer analytical framework.

Table 1: The first layer analytical framework.

Points	Representative Indicator	Source
document made received practical activity instrument for action or reference	"A document made or received in the course of a practical activity as an instrument or a by-product of such activity, and set aside for action or references." (InterPARES, 2018)	InterPARES
recorded information instrument for operation	"A record possesses Instrumental Value when it is demanded by an Operational Activity for its conduct." (Sherry L. Xie, 2017)	Records and Information management in the Government of Canada Project
[repeatedly omitted here] a Federal agency's organization functions policies decisions procedures operations other activities information	"The term 'records' includes all recorded information, regardless of form or characteristics, made or received by a Federal agency under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by that agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the United States Government or because of the informational value of data in them." (United States, 1950)	Federal Records Act
[repeatedly omitted here] evidence asset	"Information created, received and maintained as evidence and as an asset by an organization or person, in pursuit of legal obligations or in the transaction of business." (ISO, 2016)	ISO 15489-1:2016
organs, groups, enterprise, public institutions and other organizations; in the process of the handling of official business; via computers and other electronic equipment; various forms; information records	"Electronic documents means the texts, charts, images, audio, video and other information records in various forms formed, handled, transmitted and stored via computers and other electronic equipment by organs, groups, enterprise, public institutions and other organizations in the process of the handling of official business." (General Office of State Council, 2009)	Interim Measures for the Administration of Electronic Documents (Order 39)

Electronic records, also digital records in some context, in theory, are records. And their management should follow the rules and requirements set by records management function. Thus, the second layer analysis focus on records management. By integrating the group of definitions of records management, the second layer distills core functions and indicators for analysis, including records management nature, activities, principles, goals, mechanism. Table 2 provides main points in the second layer analytical framework.

Sources of data analytical framework components included InterPARES, Records and Information management in the Government of Canada Project, the United States Federal Records Act, ISO 15489 Information and Documentation - Records management and Order 39. The main reasons for these sources as components are: first, the InterPARES (International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic System) project has been running consecutively for 18 years with an enduring research interest on the issues and challenges imposed by digital records as to their management (Xie, 2017), and gained a lot of fruitful

products in its every phases, which made this project in-depth and long-lasting in the field of digital records and its management. Second, United States with its advanced records management theory and practice, is the invention of modern records management. The *Federal Records Act*, promulgated in 1950, provided a legal framework for records management activities including creating, maintaining and disposition. It has certain implications for records management in Chinese government. Last but not least, Order 39, issued by the General office of the State Council, plays an important role in guiding electronic records management in Chinese government agencies. However, compared with records management policies in other countries, the provisions are not detailed enough for conducting records management function. Thus, Order 39 can be included in analytical framework together with other components.

Table 2: The second layer analytical framework.

Points		
RM Nature		
Indispensable	Centralized	
Dedicated	Institutional	
Professional		
ERM Principle		
Unified administration	Centralized	
Whole-process administration	management	
Convenience for use	Specifications and standards	
	Security and confidentiality	
RM Activities – High Level		
Planning	Controlling	
Directing	Organizing	
Training	Promoting	
RM Goal		
Efficient	Economic	
Systematic	Evidence	
Asset	Continuity	
Adequate	Proper	
RM Mechanism		
Laws	Standards	Tools
		Policy
		Responsibility
		System

5 FINDINGS

5.1 Records in Government Integrity Development

For analysis in the first layer, the relationships between activities of and records for government integrity construction were explored based on two criteria: whether the activities will generate procedural records or resulting records, and whether there is an explicit or implicit relationship between records and the activities in government integrity construction. Procedural records here are the records that are created or received during the work process in order to achieve the purpose of an activity. Resulting records are the records that are generated as the final products of the activities. For those activities, generating certain records is one of its purposes. In the process of conducting business activities, procedural records may be created or received for the sake of generating resulting records. Therefore, there are cases where resulting records and process records coexist. If the requirements of activities clearly mention records or generate resulting records, we would say that an explicit relationship exists between the two. If the requirements of activities neither mention records explicitly nor generate resulting records, but may create or receive procedural records, we can still infer that there is an implicit relationship between this activity and the records.

The study finds that the two fundamental transactions in constructing government integrity, that is, building a comprehensive and effective government integrity supervision system and establishing the management system for the government credit, are closely related to records. Every specific activity in the two transactions will generate procedural records or resulting records, which means there is an explicit relationship between activities and records in the two transactions. For example, in order to raise public officials' government integrity awareness, manuals and handbooks are delivered to public servants on how to comply with integrity requirements set in the policies. Integrity Files for public officials is another instrument to document their deeds in terms of integrity. The files serve as important sources in performance evaluation of those public officials. Government dishonesty records generated from local to national government agencies will be available on the website CREDITCHINA.GOV.CN, a platform

for sharing of government credit information. In building government integrity supervision system, three kinds of supervision mechanisms are established, and they are: special supervision mechanism, horizontal supervision system and social supervision and third-party institution assessment mechanism. All mechanisms and systems are established based on creating, receiving and using various records. Procedural records will be instruments in the process of supervision, and resulting records like notifications of evaluation results and performance spreadsheets will be generated as evidence of supervision. In addition, the Opinions and local policies put forward to establishing assurance measurements and strengthening government integrity in key areas, like procurement, tendering and bidding, investment, etc. Activities subjected to these two transactions are related to records. Some specific activities have explicit relationships with records, for example, credit information on tendering and bidding will be created, collected and analyzed to formulate the credit report. Other activities have implicit relationships with records. For example, activities like building management system for government integrity and establishing, formulating standards, mechanisms and institutions for constructing government integrity, do not mention records in their requirements. But records will be used as instruments in process of conducting these activities and will be produced in form of rules, policies and regulations for widely disseminating and convenient use. Therefore, though records are not explicitly mentioned in several activities in constructing government integrity, the implicit relationships between these activities and records can still be defined by analyzing their working processes.

Though the relationships between activities and records are different, records are closely related to the activities in constructing government integrity and play a supporting role in specific activities. The relationships between records and activities of government integrity construction can be summarized as follows: firstly, several activities would create records directly, such as establishing integrity files for public officials, formulating government integrity manuals or handbook, etc. Secondly, some operations of activities rely on transmitting and receiving records, like disclosure of government credit information and other records that compromise the commitments, principles and rules. Departments who are responsible for information

disclosure may not be the creators of these records, but should collect and receive these records in order to execute their duties. In addition, there are many activities that may not directly generate records, but rely on external records to be conducted and finished. For public officials who have records of discredit or dishonesty, the government will cancel their qualification or limit their eligibility in participation of several evaluation activities. Thus, records of discredit or dishonesty may be instrumentals in performance evaluation activities. To sum up, the general relationship between activities and records exists in government integrity construction, which mainly reflected in the fact that records will be generated, received or transmitted in every specific activities of government integrity construction. In addition, “records” and its similar term “information” in context of government integrity construction appeared 26 times in the Opinions, the guiding policy for constructing government integrity at national level. As in local policies, several terms related to records like archives, database, information systems also appear frequently. Altogether, records are indispensable in government integrity construction: activities in constructing government integrity create, receive and use records, and the activities start with and proceed on generating and transmitting records. For an agency, records and information should be considered as resources and needs to be managed in an effective, efficient way. In most cases, where records and information are available, records and information management are needed.

5.2 Records Management in Government Integrity Development

The relationships, explicit or implicit, between activities in government integrity construction and records management were analyzed in the second layer. Explicit relationships occur when the activities clearly refer to records management. Implicit relationships occur when records management are not explicitly referred in the arrangement of activities, but records management may be helpful or indispensable in achieving their goals after analyzing the work process.

Explicit relationships exist in local policies guiding government integrity construction, and can be summarized as follows: firstly, some clauses in local policies mentioned archives management. Most local policies put forward to establishing integrity or

credit files, but not all of them claimed their management. Among them, only two provinces, Anhui and Jiangsu, propose the construction of integrity files management system and credit files management (Anhui Province, 2017; Jiangsu Province, 2018). Secondly, records and information management are referred in several clauses of local policies. For example, Guizhou province proposes “strengthening standardized records management and establishing long-term mechanism for clearing government policies and regulatory documents” (Guizhou Province, 2017). Sichuan province proposes “improve institutions and standards related to collecting, sharing, disclosing, managing and using credit information of public officials” (Sichuan Province, 2018). In addition, information systems appear in some policies when discussing government integrity construction. For example, Jiangsu province puts forward to building a credit information system for government agencies and civil servants (Jiangsu, 2018). Guangdong province proposes to collect dishonesty records in provincial credit information system (Guangdong Province, 2017). Xinjiang proposes to improve infrastructure for existing information system (XinJiang Autonomous Region, 2018). Despite references to records management in the policies above, none of these clauses in policies provide relevant explanation of how those files and records shall be managed, which records or archives management institutions are responsible and how the information in different information systems shall be managed by giving other reference policies.

Although there are few clauses in policies clearly referred to records, the implicit relationship still can be found in analysis of the goals and work process of those activities. In other words, records management could play a supporting role in constructing government integrity. The majority of activities of government integrity construction are related to records management, and records management may assist agencies in achieving such goals in the government integrity construction as improving government efficiency and building a trustworthy government, which are in consistence with the goals of records management itself. On the one hand, records management can help agencies reduce cost and increase efficiency. On the other hand, a trustworthy government requires government to be transparent and accountable. Records are evidence of government business activities and its effectiveness and proper management can help government with its accountability and transparency, thus to build a

trustworthy government. Specifically, activities in constructing government integrity may needs help from records management function. Records management with its centralized and professional features, have authority in planning and controlling its activities at high level. In government integrity construction, government dishonesty records should be collected from credit information systems of local to national agencies and shared between agencies. It will be easier for agencies with centralized and professional records management function to collect information from multiple sources. And for government dishonesty and credit records disclosure activities, records management is a basic and indispensable function in supporting it. Efficient and effective information disclosure is premised on proper control and management of records. Information disclosure without records management may hinder the ultimate achievements of government integrity construction. Most local policies propose to establish credit files for civil servants, and management of these files needs records management. In addition, a dedicated department is appointed to be responsible for creating government credit records in several local policies. For example, Guizhou province appoints Information Center as the leading department (Guizhou Province, 2017), which indicates dedicated characteristic of records management. In most policies of government integrity construction, performance information like credit records and dishonesty records of government are required to be accurate and authentic. Records under proper records management are considered to be accurate, authentic and of integrity, thus records management can help agency with proper, adequate records in compliance with these requirements set by government integrity construction policies. Therefore, for both general goals and specific activities, records management plays a supporting role in constructing government integrity.

5.3 Information Technology in Government Integrity Development

The influence of information technology can be seen everywhere in government integrity development. Credit records and dishonest files will be collected, maintained and shared on online national information sharing platform. Local credit records are created, received and maintained in local information system. And the platform will integrate several local

information systems to collect and share credit records nationwide. Besides, Qinghai province proposes to apply cloud computing and big data in government integrity development, and Sichuan province encourages the third-party to assessing and ranking government integrity using information technology like cloud computing and big data. Therefore, information system and technology will be the assistance in government integrity development and may be supportive to specific activities in constructing government integrity.

6 CONCLUSION

In digital context, it is not surprising to see that information technology is much emphasized in government integrity development. As shown in the findings, records are indispensable in every activity of government integrity construction. Government agencies will create, receive, transmit and use records in conducting various activities. The relationships between records and government integrity are rather explicit in government policies. Records, as evidence of activities and assets of agencies, should be properly managed to support effective and efficient operation. However, in this case, the consideration of records and records management in government integrity construction appears as a sharp contrast: though records are everywhere in constructing government integrity, records management functions are barely referred in government policies. As records management is an indispensable function that will help the government in achieving its goals to build trustworthiness, it should be taken into consideration for government integrity construction in the process of policy making.

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