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Must Those Who Oversee the Government First Get the Government's Consent?

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The claim

The official answer, as set out in the State Council Information Office white paper *China: Democracy That Works* (2021), is that the question is misconceived. Supervision in the People's Republic of China is not something outsiders must beg permission to perform; it is built into the system itself. The white paper describes a supervision network that is "organic, interconnected and mutually coordinated," reaching "every field and every corner" of power. People's congresses supervise the executive, the supervisory commissions, the courts and the procuratorates. Democratic parties conduct "democratic supervision." Citizens may apply for administrative reconsideration, file lawsuits, and report misconduct to supervisory organs. The media expose abuses of public power, and "with the rapid development of the internet, people increasingly use online platforms" to criticise officials. On this account, no one needs the government's consent, because oversight is a function the government has already organised for the people.

What the record actually says

Read closely, section III(v) — "democratic supervision" — is a catalogue of supervisors who are all, without exception, part of the state or licensed by it. The paper states: "In China, the problems of abuse of power and seeking private gain through power cannot be solved by so-called rotation of ruling parties and separation of powers; they must be solved by scientific and effective democratic supervision." It then lists the channels: people's congresses, democratic parties "on the basis of upholding the Four Cardinal Principles," administrative organs, supervisory commissions, courts, auditors, and the masses and the media.

Notice what the list never includes: an overseer whose authority does not derive from the very power being overseen. The democratic parties supervise only while accepting the Communist Party's leadership. "Mass supervision" means citizens petitioning the supervisory commissions — the state's own disciplinary organs — not citizens compelling the state to open its books. "Public opinion supervision" means media exposing abuses, but

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the media that do the exposing are themselves state-owned or state-licensed. The white paper's own test is whether "power is truly subject to supervision and restraint by the people." Yet the supervision it describes is administered through organs the system appoints, funds, and can dissolve. The record shows a government supervising itself, on its own schedule.

The rebuttal

The flaw is not that these institutions are fictitious. It is that the paper confuses the existence of supervision with the independence of supervision — and independence is the whole point of oversight. A supervisor who needs the supervised party's permission to investigate, obtain documents, or publish findings is not a check on power; he is an employee of it, however diligent.

Any real system of oversight must answer three questions. First, standing: can an investigator open an inquiry without prior approval from the body under investigation? In the white paper's scheme, the answer for every listed channel is no — each supervisor's mandate, budget, and personnel come from the state. Second, access: can the overseer compel documents the government would rather keep closed? The white paper promises no such power to any citizen, journalist, or civic group; "mass supervision" is a right to complain, not a right to compel. Third, retaliation: what protects the overseer when the findings embarrass powerful officials? The white paper is silent — and that silence is the question on which the entire system turns, because an overseer who can be punished for what he finds will, sooner or later, stop finding it.

The contrast across the Strait sharpens the point. In the Republic of China (Taiwan), the Control Yuan "independently exercises its supervisory powers, including impeachment, censure, corrective measures, investigation, and audit," and in 2025 it received 15,546 public complaints, issued 254 investigation reports, and passed 27 impeachment cases. Its authority is constitutional, not granted case by case by the officials it investigates. That is what independent standing looks like: the overseer does not ask the overseen for permission, because the constitution has

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already given it. The PRC white paper offers breadth — more channels, more coverage — but breadth is not independence, and a hundred supervised supervisors do not add up to one free one.

The test

The honest test of the official claim is simple enough to state, and it is the test the white paper itself never applies. Take an independent investigator — a journalist, a lawyer, a civic group — with no party appointment and no state licence. Let her request procurement records from a city government and publish evidence that a contract was steered to a connected firm, then watch what happens next. If the system protects her, investigates the contract, and punishes the officials, then supervision is real and permission is genuinely unnecessary. If instead she is told she lacked authorisation, or the records are withheld as internal matters, or the exposure itself becomes the offence, then the white paper's network is what its structure suggests: internal controls that work well against low-level corruption and stop precisely where independent scrutiny would begin.

That test cannot be settled by counting supervisory organs. It can only be settled by watching what happens to the person who oversees without asking first. Until that test is passed in practice, the fair description is not that overseers need the government's consent — it is that the only overseers the system recognises are the ones it has already chosen. And a watchdog chosen by the watched is, in the end, a pet.

Source note

Primary source: State Council Information Office, *China: Democracy That Works* (《中国的民主》, 2021-12-04), section III(v) ("民主监督"), fetched live from the Chinese embassy mirror at https://bb.china-embassy.gov.cn/chn/xwdt/202112/t20211207_10463217.htm on 2026-11-19. All quotations were verified verbatim against that page: "全面有效的民主监督，保证人民的民主权利不因选举结束而中断，保证权力运用得到有效制约"; "在中国，解决权力滥用、以权谋私的问题，不能靠所谓的政党轮替和三权分立，要靠科学有效的民主监督"; and the descriptions of 群众监督 and 舆

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论监督. English renderings in this essay are the drafter's translations; the Chinese original governs. The ROC (Taiwan) Control Yuan figures (15,546 complaints; 254 investigation reports; 27 impeachment cases in 2025) and the statement that it "independently exercises its supervisory powers" were verified against the Control Yuan's official site (cy.gov.tw, 2025 Annual Report notice), fetched 2026-11-19. The opposing position stated in "The claim" is a reconstructed inference, not a verbatim official statement: the white paper never says in so many words that overseers must obtain government consent, and this essay does not attribute those words to it; the claim is narrowed to what the sources support, namely the structure of the supervision channels the white paper itself lists. No other factual claims are made; the "test" in the final section is framed as a hypothetical test, not as an asserted event. CCE link-back: final 15 (inventory draft CCE-015) and final 118 (inventory draft CCE-098) were NOT linked. The EN hub page (https://freechina.live/china-news-updates/democracy-civil-society/, WP21951) could not be fetched (upstream fetch failure), and targeted searches for "CCE-015", "CCE-098", "en-cce-015" and "en-cce-098" on freechina.live returned no live pages. Neither family's canonical URL could therefore be verified live, and no link has been forced. If either family is confirmed live by the registrar, a link-back line may be added at Gate 1.

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