

A Study on the Role of New-Era Civilization Practice Centers from the Perspective of the “Hundred-Counties, Thousand-Towns, Ten-Thousand-Villages Project”

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Abstract

The construction of New-Era Civilization Practice Centers constitutes a major strategic decision made by the Party Central Committee. It is of great significance for strengthening grassroots ideological-political work, consolidating the Party's governing foundation, and advancing social harmony and stability. In its vigorous development of New-Era Civilization Practice initiatives, the investigated city has accumulated rich practical experience, which has notably improved local social ethos and ecological environment and enhanced public satisfaction with the government. Nevertheless, challenges persist, including insufficient capital investment, inadequate innovation in program content, supply-demand imbalance, and low willingness to participate among rural residents. Drawing on local realities and aligned with the “Hundred-Counties, Thousand-Towns, Ten-Thousand-Villages Project”, this paper puts forward targeted suggestions for further improvement from the perspective of the functions of New-Era Civilization Practice work for reference.

Keywords

Hundred-Counties, Thousand-Towns, Ten-Thousand-Villages Project, New-Era Civilization Practice Center, Functions and Roles

1. Introduction

In September 2018, R county under the investigated city took the lead in launching the construction of New-Era Civilization Practice Centers as one of the country's first pilot sites. With the expansion of the pilot program in October 2019, New-Era Civilization Practice Centers were successively established in other counties

(county-level cities and districts) of the city. In December 2022, in response to unbalanced urban-rural regional development across Guangdong Province, the CPC Guangdong Provincial Committee decided to fully implement the *Hundred-Counties, Thousand-Towns, Ten-Thousand-Villages High-Quality Development Project* (hereinafter referred to as the “Hundred-Counties, Thousand-Towns, Ten-Thousand-Villages Project”) province-wide. To better explore the functions of New-Era Civilization Practice Centers and give full play to their supporting role for the Project, we conducted research in R County, X County, L County, and other counties and cities in S City. After obtaining first-hand information throughs with staff members of the New Era Civilization Practice Centers and interviews with the masses, then based on the annual reports provided by the three counties, this paper summarizes practical experience and existing problems of the Centers in the city and proposes improvement suggestions on their functions for reference.

2. Practical Experience of New-Era Civilization Practice Work in the City under the Perspective of the “Hundred-Counties, Thousand-Towns, Ten-Thousand-Villages Project”

2.1. Strengthening Site Development: Clarifying Where Civilization Practice Activities Are Delivered

All counties (county-level cities and districts) of S city have built a three-tier system of New-Era Civilization Practice Centers at county level, Practice Institutes at township level and Practice Stations at village level in compliance with requirements issued by the Party Central Committee. Site construction is standardized according to superior standards. Meanwhile, relevant county-level government departments are encouraged to set up subsidiary Civilization Practice Stations, striving to achieve full coverage of practice venues. To facilitate activity delivery, counties and districts integrate venue resources at the county level. For instance, R County has built composite practice venues by integrating six public cultural facilities in the county seat, including cultural centers, ethnic museums and youth activity centers, as well as Party-building integrity education bases, popular science demonstration bases and red heritage sites.

2.2. Centering on Public Needs: Identifying for Whom Civilization Practice Work Is Served

Counties (county-level cities and districts) under S City adhere to the principle that civilization practice work serves the public. For example, L County has developed service brands such as *Health Accompanies Me*, *Caring for the Elderly* and *Youth Protection Initiative* targeting vulnerable groups including empty-nest elderly and left-behind children. A volunteer service model has been explored to shift from “government-prepared menus” to “public-ordered menus” so as to meet personalized public demands. In X County, tailored *Six-One Activities* were

launched for primary and secondary school students during summer vacation in response to public feedback. The initiative enhances ideological and moral education for minors and enriches young people's summer life.

2.3. Advancing Volunteer Team Building: Defining Who Delivers Civilization Practice Work

Volunteers constitute the primary force for New-Era Civilization Practice. Local practice centers prioritize volunteer team development. Leading cadres of Party organizations at county, township and village (community) levels serve as chief, branch and team leaders of volunteer services. Public-sector employees are encouraged to take the lead in volunteer work, and diverse local talents are mobilized to join volunteer teams. Incentive mechanisms are implemented to draw more residents into volunteer activities. For example, X County has introduced the *Yunji Volunteer Incentive Scheme*, which holds annual selection campaigns for star-rated volunteers, outstanding volunteers and advanced volunteer collectives, greatly fostering a culture of volunteerism.

2.4. Diversifying Practical Activities: Determining What Civilization Practice Work Delivers

Counties (county-level cities and districts) carry out a wide range of activities aligned with the mandates of New-Era Civilization Practice Centers: disseminating Party policies and theories, organizing diverse cultural and recreational events, creating demonstration highlights to support the "Hundred-Counties, Thousand-Towns, Ten-Thousand-Villages Project", advancing customs reform through practice venues, and developing distinctive service brands to deepen work outcomes. Xinfeng County's innovative *Yunji Volunteer Incentive Scheme* has attracted widespread public participation and has been reported twice by *People's Daily*.

3. Problems in the Construction of New-Era Civilization Practice Centers under the Perspective of the "Hundred-Counties, Thousand-Towns, Ten-Thousand-Villages Project"

Through survey visits to the three counties, we found that, after years of exploration, local communities have witnessed improved social ethos, upgraded living environments, higher public satisfaction with the Party and government, and strengthened residents' sense of gain. These outcomes consolidate the Party's governance and mass foundation and facilitate innovation in grassroots ideological-political work and ethical-cultural progress. Even so, every county has to some extent faces some of the following problems.

3.1. Insufficient Funding and Incomplete Staffing

Funding for Civilization Practice Centers mainly comes from fiscal appropriations, with limited social fundraising. A multi-source resource pooling mecha-

nism featuring broad social participation has not yet taken shape. This exists in all three counties. In addition, many sites face incomplete staffing and over-reliance on part-time personnel. It's a bit more serious in X County.

3.2. Weak Practical Workforce and Shortage of Professional Volunteers

Though volunteer registration has increased since the launch of practice initiatives, prominent gaps remain. First, volunteer groups are dominated by middle-aged and elderly residents, with insufficient participation from young and middle-aged people. Second, rural volunteers are scarce and rural residents show low willingness to participate. Third, there is a shortage of professional-skill volunteers. Fourth, systematic training for volunteers is inadequate, constraining the in-depth implementation of activities. This is slightly more serious in X County and L County.

3.3. Room for Improvement in Program Design and Insufficient Integration with the Priority Project

While numerous activities have been held, program design still needs upgrading. Problems include: over-reliance on government-arranged activities with limited public-ordered projects; homogenized programs across townships and insufficient innovation; formalistic activities in some townships with poor targeting; overly theoretical lectures and limited delivery capacity of volunteer lecturers; and inadequate alignment with the “Hundred-Counties, Thousand-Towns, Ten-Thousand-Villages Project”, resulting in limited relevance to actual public demands. This exists in all three counties.

3.4. Uneven Site Quality and Urban-Rural Supply-Demand Imbalance

Three major site-related problems stand out. First, some practice venues suffer substandard construction and incomplete facilities and equipment. This is slightly more serious in X County. Second, certain townships fail to effectively integrate existing public resources, leading to superficial site construction instead of efficient resource utilization. This is slightly more serious in L County. Third, supply of civilization practice activities differs quantitatively and qualitatively between urban and rural areas, creating urban-rural supply-demand imbalance. This exists in all three counties.

4. Suggestions for Improving the Functions of New-Era Civilization Practice Centers under the Perspective of the “Hundred-Counties, Thousand-Towns, Ten-Thousand-Villages Project”

Targeting the above-mentioned constraints and in combination with the “Hundred-Counties, Thousand-Towns, Ten-Thousand-Villages Project”, this section puts forward suggestions to optimize the functions of New-Era Civilization Prac-

tice Centers.

4.1. Improving Institutional Arrangements to Provide Policy Support for the Project

1) Improve the funding guarantee mechanism. County-level governments shall fully implement fiscal funding obligations, coordinate superior and local fiscal allocations, and build a solid funding guarantee system. Meanwhile, enterprises, philanthropic individuals, social organizations and local virtuous rural elites shall be encouraged to contribute funds. County- and township-level volunteer service funding pools shall be established to form a funding model dominated by fiscal appropriations and supplemented by social donations. Sound fund management and supervision systems shall be put in place.

2) Implement staffing guarantee mechanisms. Relevant regulations shall be enacted to ensure full staffing for county-level Civilization Practice Centers, dedicated staff for township-level Practice Institutes and assigned personnel for village-level Practice Stations. Staffing compliance shall be incorporated into local government performance assessment indicators to ensure smooth operation of civilization practice activities.

3) Strengthen institutional development. Robust institutions serve as the cornerstone for achieving the objectives of Civilization Practice Centers. Coordination mechanisms shall be refined to enforce Party committee leadership and departmental implementation, clarify the leading role of publicity departments and operational responsibilities of practice centers, and define coordination rules for the three-tier organizational system of Civilization Practice work.

4) Establish performance management mechanisms. First, introduce third-party evaluation whereby independent evaluators formulate differentiated assessment frameworks tailored to local conditions. Second, build a public supplementary evaluation channel via online platforms for residents to rate service satisfaction. Third, link evaluation outcomes to annual awards, honors and performance incentives, so as to mitigate formalism and program homogenization.

4.2. Expanding Volunteer Workforce to Build Human Capital for the Project

A reliable volunteer team underpins effective operation of New-Era Civilization Practice Centers. Volunteers constitute the core implementers of practice activities and key contributors to the “Hundred-Counties, Thousand-Towns, Ten-Thousand-Villages Project”. Their dedication fosters positive social ethos and mobilizes the public to jointly advance the Project.

1) Enhance proactive service awareness among cadres to lead the Project. New-Era Civilization Practice represents a new form for the Party and government to deliver grassroots ethical-cultural work. Cadres shall transform their work mindset and mode: performing duties as volunteers rather than issuing administrative orders, so as to improve work effectiveness and public affinity. Party and government employees, especially those from agriculture-related, publicity, education,

culture and tourism departments, shall be encouraged to participate in rural volunteer services during holidays.

2) Expand rural and social volunteer teams to support the Project. Rural Party members, local cultural talents and primary- and secondary-school teachers in townships shall be mobilized to join volunteer teams and play principal roles. Attention shall be paid to engaging virtuous rural elites and the “Five-Olds” (veteran cadres, veteran Party members, veteran experts, veteran teachers and veteran models), especially virtuous elites with resources and influence outside their hometowns, as trusted local volunteer forces. Social organizations shall leverage their influence to recruit more participants, including university researchers and experts, bringing high-level talents to rural areas and forming joint forces for New-Era Civilization Practice. Foster social organizations, encourage various volunteer and charitable entities to engage actively in civilization practice activities, and facilitate their volunteer services with support and guidance (Tan, 2020).

3) Recruit college student volunteers to assist the Project. Contemporary youth are thoughtful, knowledgeable and passionate. They represent a vital force for both Civilization Practice and the “Hundred-Counties, Thousand-Towns, Ten-Thousand-Villages Project”. Leveraging the provincial “Hundred-Universities Linking Hundred-Counties” policy, local authorities shall cooperate with provincial universities to encourage college students to participate in volunteer services during vacations, and inspire local college students to contribute to hometown development.

4) Strengthen professional volunteer training to serve the Project. Volunteer service training institutes shall be set up with diverse experienced practitioners as instructors. Three-tier county-township-village volunteer training systems shall be deepened, specifying training hours and content. Mentorship mechanisms shall be adopted leveraging outstanding local volunteers. Skill-oriented volunteer teams shall be cultivated. Training shall respond to public demands, combining theoretical lectures and technical guidance, channeling high-quality resources toward rural areas and alleviating grassroots talent shortages (Qin, 2021).

4.3. Upgrading Program Quality to Provide Practical Support for the Project

New-Era Civilization Practice Centers aim to satisfy residents’ aspirations for a better life and serve rural revitalization strategies, which align closely with the goals of the “Hundred-Counties, Thousand-Towns, Ten-Thousand-Villages Project”. Practice programs shall prioritize public needs and rural revitalization to deliver tangible benefits for residents and fuel the Project.

1) Design services responsive to public demands to reflect the people-centered orientation of the Project. “Responding to public needs” is key to attracting public engagement. Civilization Practice work shall precisely identify public concerns and achieve targeted volunteer services. Volunteers shall conduct household surveys in rural communities to understand residents’ aspirations and win public

support. The traditional government-assigned-task model shall gradually give way to the mechanism of “public submitting requests, centers assigning tasks, and volunteers undertaking tasks”, so as to encourage broader rural participation in the Project.

2) Innovate programs centered on livable and harmonious villages to advance the strategic orientation of the Project. Rural revitalization, a major strategy proposed of the Chinese Government in 2017, constitutes one objective of the “Hundred-Counties, Thousand-Towns, Ten-Thousand-Villages Project”. Local red heritage and folk cultural resources can be tapped to build civilization practice demonstration belts and boost rural tourism. Social organizations and professional volunteers can provide technical training for local farmers to develop characteristic industries and support entrepreneurship and income growth.

3) Build rural governance communities to realize the governance-oriented goals of the Project. The Project advocates a rural governance system featuring Party-led integration of self-governance, rule of law and rule of virtue, and the construction of co-constructed, co-governed and shared rural governance communities. This is also a core function of Civilization Practice work. Leveraging village cadres and the “Five-Olds” volunteers, full play shall be given to villagers’ autonomous organizations including villager councils, moral evaluation councils, wedding-and-funeral customs councils and anti-drug and anti-gambling councils. Moral model selection campaigns shall be widely organized to guide residents to internalize core socialist values in daily life and continuously advance customs reform.

4.4. Adopting Multi-Pronged Measures to Contribute to the Project

1) Integrate grassroots resources and build platform venues for the Project. In accordance with the *Guiding Opinions on Piloting the Construction of New-Era Civilization Practice Centers* (2018), existing grassroots public service resources shall be further consolidated to build interconnected platforms for theoretical outreach, education services, cultural services, science-popularization services, and sports-and-fitness services. These platforms shall operate collaboratively to deliver civilization practice activities and satisfy development needs of the Project.

2) Strengthen rural outreach to advance the strategic objectives of the Project. New-Era Civilization Practice Centers aim to build volunteer teams accessible to residents and deliver regular, face-to-face activities popular among rural residents. Rooted in rural areas, they serve rural revitalization and urban-rural coordinated development. Therefore, rural publicity shall be intensified, and locally appropriate activities favored by farmers shall be organized to mobilize rural residents to participate in the “Hundred-Counties, Thousand-Towns, Ten-Thousand-Villages Project” and deliver its strategic goals.

3) Develop distinctive brand projects and optimize the implementation environment for the Project. Locally-tailored volunteer service brands promote standardized, regular and professional volunteer work and attract public participation. Comprehensive project management shall be implemented following the work-

flow: project formulation, volunteer recruitment, project implementation, project evaluation and project optimization (Zhang 2020). Feedback mechanisms shall be established to continuously refine project content and delivery approaches and develop high-quality local brand initiatives.

5. Conclusion

The construction of New-Era Civilization Practice Centers is a major strategic decision of the Party Central Committee. Through disseminating Party policies, fostering mainstream values and enriching cultural life, the Centers serve grassroots communities, consolidate the Party's governing foundation and promote social harmony. Both New-Era Civilization Practice Centers and the "Hundred-Counties, Thousand-Towns, Ten-Thousand-Villages Project" target rural revitalization and seek to advance rural economic, social, cultural and ecological development. Both play pivotal roles in advancing rural revitalization and socialist modernization. It is essential to explore effective integration points between Civilization Practice work and the Project, strengthen grassroots ideological-publicity work, raise residents' ideological awareness, moral standards and civility, and satisfy people's aspirations for a better life.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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