

Research on Issues in Rural Public Cultural Service Provision and Improvement Pathways

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Abstract

Rural public cultural services serve as a vital pillar for rural revitalization. Driven by national policies, China has achieved significant progress in expanding the coverage of rural public cultural facilities, enriching service offerings, and strengthening system development. However, challenges persist, including insufficient overall supply, limited coverage, lagging supporting services, and a lack of innovative delivery models. This paper examines the current state of rural public cultural service provision, analyzes the root causes of these issues, and proposes optimization pathways across three dimensions: government performance, social participation, and technological application. Governments must strengthen planning, financial support, and talent development while ensuring coordinated oversight. Diverse societal sectors should engage in multi-stakeholder collaboration to build a collective force for co-creation. Furthermore, leveraging digital technologies, big data, and artificial intelligence can empower service upgrades. The optimized development of rural public cultural services holds significant practical importance for narrowing the urban-rural cultural gap, safeguarding farmers' cultural rights, advancing comprehensive rural revitalization, and building a culturally strong nation.

Keywords

Cultural Service Provision; Rural Public Cultural Services; Path Optimization.

1. Research Background

Public cultural services serve as the primary means to realize, safeguard, and advance the fundamental cultural rights and interests of the people, embodying the people-centered development philosophy in cultural advancement. Entering the new era, the development of rural public cultural services has become a vital foundational pillar in the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy^[1]. Rural public cultural services provide essential public cultural products and services to rural residents. They serve as a vital force in promoting rural spiritual civilization, meeting farmers' spiritual and cultural needs, and driving socioeconomic development in rural areas.

In recent years, with the comprehensive advancement of the rural revitalization strategy, the central government has placed high importance on the development of rural public cultural services, introducing a series of policy measures to promote the growth of rural public cultural undertakings. Governments at all levels have also increased the supply of rural public cultural services and encouraged social forces to participate. However, overall, rural public cultural services still face issues such as insufficient supply, outdated facilities, and a lack of personnel, falling short of the people's aspirations for a better cultural life. Therefore, further deepening the reform of rural public cultural systems and mechanisms, innovating the supply model of

rural public cultural services, and effectively enhancing the appeal of rural public cultural services are crucial components for achieving comprehensive rural revitalization.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, China has prioritized public demand, actively expanding rural public cultural services at the grassroots level. Key initiatives include promoting the sharing of cultural information resources, ensuring television and radio access in every village and household, establishing rural libraries, and implementing rural film screening programs. According to data from China's 2025 Statistical Yearbook, by the end of 2024, the country had 3,112 county-level cultural centers, 40,109 township (subdistrict) cultural stations, over 570,000 village-level comprehensive cultural service centers, and more than 580,000 rural libraries. Standardization and equitable access to rural public cultural services have been continuously advanced, with the public cultural service system becoming increasingly robust. The vigorous development of rural public cultural services will drive the emergence and growth of rural cultural industries, offering new pathways for addressing agricultural challenges^[2].

2. Research Objectives

Rural areas have long lagged behind in socioeconomic development, resulting in deficiencies in public cultural services. Rural residents face limited access to cultural offerings, constrained knowledge horizons, and difficulty in sharing in the fruits of cultural development alongside their urban counterparts. This inequality hinders the realization of interactive urban-rural development and impedes the cultivation of rural talent as well as the smooth implementation of the rural revitalization strategy.

By examining the current state of rural public cultural services and analyzing existing issues, we can explore new models and pathways for delivering public cultural services in rural areas from both theoretical and practical perspectives, thereby advancing rural cultural development to keep pace with the times. This approach provides a clear direction for cultural institutions to carry out their service activities, helps narrow the urban-rural cultural divide, and safeguards the legitimate cultural rights and interests of rural residents.

3. Current Status of Rural Public Cultural Service Provision

Against the backdrop of rural revitalization, the development of rural public cultural services not only holds significant importance for the positive transformation and advancement of issues concerning agriculture, rural areas, and farmers, but also provides diverse resources—material, cultural, ecological, and human—to realize the rural revitalization strategy. It serves as a crucial lever for vigorously developing rural public cultural services, carrying substantial developmental significance. To further safeguard farmers' fundamental cultural rights, meet their growing cultural demands, and expand diverse cultural activities for them, it is essential to fully leverage the role of rural public cultural services in providing cultural safeguards.

In recent years, the development of grassroots public cultural services in rural areas has gained significant attention as a vital component of rural social progress. Cultural stations have achieved near-universal coverage across townships, with many regions establishing electronic reading rooms where residents can access cultural knowledge and enhance cultural exchanges. Although public cultural service facilities at the county, township, and village levels have seen notable improvements, gaps in infrastructure persist. Some county-level regions leverage school cultural facilities to provide public services, while relevant departments organize free performances to boost public enthusiasm for cultural engagement. Concurrently, public cultural offerings grow increasingly diverse, with communities initiating distinctive artistic events and cultural festivals. Participation in dance troupes and cultural associations has expanded, and some areas host lantern festivals and Yangko dance performances, preliminarily

meeting residents' cultural needs. Some community cultural activity centers utilize neighborhoods, plazas, and streets as venues where residents can engage in fitness or recreational activities like playing musical instruments or singing, thereby promoting cultural dissemination. Other county-level areas actively conduct art training and book lending programs. With the development of the market economy, participation continues to grow, and the level of grassroots public cultural services in rural areas is steadily improving. Overall, guided by the rural revitalization strategy, cultural development in China's rural areas has entered a new phase. The level of grassroots public cultural services has improved, and residents' participation in cultural development and learning has become increasingly diverse. According to the latest data from the National Bureau of Statistics, by the end of 2024, China had a total of 31,996 township cultural stations, with 108,793 employees. The number of participants in cultural and artistic activities reached 57,868, as detailed in **Figure 1**. All indicators remained stable. Some cities achieved full coverage of comprehensive cultural service centers in all administrative villages under their jurisdiction and actively organized cultural performances benefiting rural residents, providing high-quality public cultural services to farmers.

Indicator	2024	2023	2022	2021
Number of Township Cultural Stations	31996	32243	33932	32524
Number of Employees in Township Cultural Stations	108793	110812	108952	105606
Number of Cultural and Art Activities Organized by Township Cultural Stations (10,000 times)	131.7	125.7	91.8	76.1
Number of Participants in Cultural and Art Activities (10,000 person-times)	57868	48357	28772	25537
Number of Training Courses Held by Township Cultural Stations (10,000 sessions)	48	44	31.4	31
Number of Participants in Training Courses (10,000 person-times)	4855	4414	2725	2368
Number of Exhibitions Held by Township Cultural Stations (10,000)	16	14.4	10.4	10
Number of Visitors to Exhibitions (10,000 person-times)	15182	12091	7338	5595
Number of Computers Owned by Township Cultural Stations	212527	221662	235701	248363
Revenue of Township Cultural Stations (100 million yuan)	125.7	134.3	129.5	123.2
Expenditure of Township Cultural Stations (100 million yuan)	117	140.9	131.9	132.3
Number of Amateur Folk Art Troups Affiliated to Township Cultural Stations (10,000)	26.8	27.4	27.2	27

Figure 1. Statistical Data on Township Cultural Stations

4. Issues in the Provision of Rural Public Cultural Services

4.1. The Overall Supply of Public Cultural Services Remains Insufficient.

Most rural areas across the country have outdated cultural facilities and traditional, monotonous cultural activities that lack diversity and innovation. The number and professional competence of cultural service personnel vary widely, with a shortage of specialized talent in rural cultural sectors. The supply of public cultural products and services fails to meet the growing cultural needs of farmers.

The reasons for this are twofold. First, the proportion of fiscal investment allocated to rural public cultural services is relatively small, and operational funding is insufficient compared to other expenditures, which has to some extent affected the quantity of cultural service products supplied. Second, there has been insufficient exploration of local cultural resources and mobilization of residents to participate in the production of cultural services. The supply of public cultural services relies excessively on external cultural products, failing to fully utilize and develop local cultural industries or transform existing local cultural resources into endogenous cultural services. This has placed rural public cultural services in a passive position regarding quantitative growth. Third, there has been insufficient utilization of social forces to promote the construction of rural public cultural service systems. Currently, rural public cultural services rarely purchase cultural products from the social sector, and some rural areas have yet to establish orderly and standardized systems for purchasing cultural products from

this sector. Consequently, the total volume of cultural products in some rural areas still has room for improvement.

4.2. Rural Public Cultural Services Lack Sufficient Coverage.

The most pronounced imbalance in cultural resource allocation manifests in the disparity between urban and rural areas, which directly constrains the effective provision of public cultural services in rural areas^[3]. Many impoverished regions and remote mountainous areas lack essential cultural facilities, making it difficult for farmers to access basic public cultural services equitably. The uneven distribution of cultural resources between urban and rural areas, as well as across regions, has led to a “stratification of cultural services.”

4.3. The Development Level of Supporting Public Services is Relatively Slow.

Rural public cultural services are intertwined and inseparable from other public service sectors. The development status of supporting public services such as rural healthcare, elderly care, and education directly impacts the cultural domain. Since the implementation of the Rural Revitalization Strategy, localities have prioritized enhancing farmers' living standards, leading to significant improvements in healthcare, elderly care, and education. However, due to ongoing urbanization and the phenomenon of “rural hollowing-out,” the development prospects for supporting public services remain constrained, making it difficult to sustainably support public cultural services. The reasons for the slow development of supporting public services are diverse, but they largely converge on the following three aspects. First, insufficient fiscal expenditure has prevented relevant departments from identifying the focal points for public services, resulting in misallocation of financial resources. Second, the exodus of rural populations has reduced both service providers and service recipients, slowing the development of public services. Finally, the accompanying trends of rural population aging and youth decline have further intensified pressures on healthcare, elderly care, and education services, creating significant obstacles to their advancement.

4.4. Rural Public Cultural Service Models Lack Innovation.

Currently, rural cultural services remain relatively monotonous and traditional, lacking contemporary relevance and failing to incorporate internet-based approaches. This makes it difficult to meet the increasingly diverse cultural needs of farmers. Integrating resources from all parties to develop sustainable cultural service models remains a significant challenge.

5. Optimizing Pathways for Rural Public Cultural Service Delivery

5.1. The Role and Responsibilities of Government

First, formulate a scientific development plan. The government plays a pivotal role in promoting and optimizing rural public cultural services. It should develop a scientifically sound and reasonable development plan for rural public cultural services, clearly define work objectives and priorities, and introduce relevant policy measures.

Second, strengthen targeted fiscal support. Governments should increase financial investment in rural public cultural services to ensure the effective provision of public cultural resources. The establishment and subsequent development of rural public cultural services require substantial financial backing. Therefore, it is essential to firmly establish institutional safeguards for dedicated fiscal investments and consistently prioritize rural public cultural services within the scope of general public budget allocations. Increase central and local government funding for rural public cultural services, establish dedicated fiscal subsidies from the central to local levels, refine the details of fiscal investments, confirm the flow of funds, and strengthen the management of the fiscal investment process.

Third, provide cultural talent support. Emphasis should be placed on cultivating professionals for rural public cultural services to enhance the expertise of practitioners. Rural cultural service personnel serve as the primary driving force for achieving high-quality development in rural revitalization. Recognizing the vital role of cultural service personnel, efforts should focus on two levels: external recruitment and local cultivation to provide a steady supply of cultural talent. For external recruitment, central government policies should provide leadership, while local governments should develop tailored initiatives based on local conditions to attract and retain talent. This includes systematically guiding skilled professionals and artisans to serve rural public cultural initiatives. Particular emphasis should be placed on recruiting young individuals with cultural expertise or management skills, deepening cooperation with universities, and implementing specialized programs to attract college graduates. For local cultivation, initiatives focused on public cultural projects and high-quality farmer training programs are promoted. Farmers are encouraged to actively organize and participate in local public cultural services. Vocational education targeting rural public cultural services is vigorously developed to cultivate local cultural talent.

The government should effectively coordinate and integrate various resources to create a synergistic effect. On one hand, it must strengthen interdepartmental coordination to avoid scattered resources and redundant construction. On the other hand, it should actively encourage social forces to participate, fostering a favorable development environment. Furthermore, the government must enhance oversight of rural public cultural services, establish sound laws and regulations, and safeguard the fairness and accessibility of public cultural offerings.

Crucially, the government must prioritize the development trajectory of rural public cultural services by incorporating them into overall socioeconomic development plans. Only by addressing systemic mechanisms and establishing sound working frameworks can rural public cultural services achieve sustainable and healthy growth. The government should further adopt innovative approaches to plan and advance these services, implementing timely and effective measures that integrate new technologies and methods to enhance service delivery. Ultimately, only through the government's diligent fulfillment of its responsibilities can rural public cultural services truly benefit the people.

5.2. Participation by Social Forces

In recent years, the gradual transformation of government functions, coupled with the coordinated efforts of various service providers, has led to the diversification of rural public cultural service delivery models in China^[4]. Therefore, the optimization and enhancement of rural public cultural services increasingly rely on the broad participation and support from all sectors of society. While the government plays a leading role in rural public cultural development, government efforts alone are far from sufficient. It requires the concerted cooperation of individuals and organizations from all walks of life.

Encourage and support non-governmental public welfare cultural organizations to carry out public welfare cultural activities in rural areas. These organizations can leverage their professional strengths to develop diverse cultural service projects tailored to the actual needs of rural communities, such as hosting art exhibitions, reading activities, and intangible cultural heritage workshops, thereby enriching rural cultural life. At the same time, these organizations can serve as bridges and connectors, linking urban and rural cultural resources to promote cultural exchange and mutual learning between urban and rural areas.

Guide enterprises to fulfill their social responsibilities. Encourage businesses to contribute to rural public cultural initiatives through various means such as financial sponsorship, material donations, and volunteer services, thereby supporting the development of cultural infrastructure and activities in rural areas. Additionally, enterprises can leverage their

professional expertise to provide guidance on cultural industries, fostering the growth of rural cultural sectors.

Leverage the expertise of specialized institutions such as universities and research institutes. These institutions possess abundant human and intellectual resources and can contribute their professional capabilities to rural public cultural services through practical teaching programs and research collaborations. For instance, art colleges can organize student groups to conduct cultural outreach activities in rural areas, while sociology departments can mobilize faculty and students to conduct field research in rural communities, providing policy recommendations for rural cultural development.

The public actively participates. We can widely mobilize urban and rural residents to engage in rural cultural development, such as organizing amateur groups for arts enthusiasts and facilitating cultural exchange activities between urban and rural areas. At the same time, we must also leverage the role of emerging forces like new media to stimulate public enthusiasm, mobilize social resources, and channel positive social energy to jointly advance the development of rural public cultural services.

5.3. Application of Technical Measures

The application of technology in rural public cultural services is becoming increasingly widespread, offering new opportunities to enhance the quality and efficiency of such services. The widespread adoption of internet and mobile communication technologies has enabled the efficient dissemination of information resources, allowing rural residents to access abundant cultural resources online. Empowering rural public cultural services through technology represents an effective approach to innovating cultural service content and driving the creative transformation and innovative development of cultural resources^[5]. The government can leverage online platforms to integrate rural cultural resource information, providing rural residents with convenient access to cultural service inquiries and online usage.

The application of digital technology can enrich the forms and content of rural cultural services. Through digital means, rural cultural heritage can be systematically collected, preserved, and displayed. It can also be used to organize rural cultural activities, such as hybrid online-offline cultural lectures and exhibitions.

Big data and artificial intelligence technologies hold vast application potential in rural cultural services. By analyzing big data on user behavior and preference patterns, personalized cultural resource recommendations can be provided to rural residents. Artificial intelligence can be leveraged for intelligent question-answering systems, online translation, and other applications to enhance the level of intelligence in cultural services. Concurrently, emerging technologies can be utilized in the construction of rural cultural infrastructure. For instance, IoT and sensor technologies can enable intelligent management of facilities such as rural libraries and cultural plazas; while technologies like 3D printing can facilitate the rapid construction of temporary cultural exhibition spaces.

Technology serves as a vital force in advancing the modernization of rural public cultural services. Relevant practitioners should align with technological trends, innovate application models, and organically integrate modern technology with rural cultural services to provide rural residents with higher-quality, more efficient cultural offerings.

6. Conclusion

As the rural revitalization strategy continues to advance, rural public cultural services will encounter both greater opportunities and challenges. Through the concerted efforts of the government, society, and the public, a high-quality and efficient rural public cultural service system will gradually take shape. This will inject powerful cultural momentum into achieving

comprehensive rural revitalization and propel the development of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics to new heights. Strengthening rural public cultural services not only addresses the practical need to promote social equity and justice while improving people's well-being, but also reflects the nation's high priority on preserving and developing China's outstanding cultural traditions. This holds significant practical importance for advancing comprehensive rural revitalization and building a culturally strong nation.

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