

Embedding and Leveraging: The Implementation Mechanism of Routine-Formalized Central Tasks

-- Based on Observations of the Creation and Consolidation of a National Civilized City in District A

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ABSTRACT

Central tasks and routine tasks together constitute the primary governance affairs of local governments. The process by which central tasks are transformed into routine tasks manifests as a transitional form-the routine-formalized central task. Using the creation and consolidation of a National Civilized City in District A as a case study, this research finds that routine-formalized central tasks retain the characteristics of central tasks while relying on the orderly operation of the bureaucratic system, exhibiting three practical features: flexible organizational structures, contracted responsibility networks, and phased pressure transmission. In terms of implementation strategies, local governments achieve sustainable advancement and legitimization of tasks through two pathways: embedding into the routine system and leveraging momentum from central tasks. The operational logic of this transitional form shifts from "compliance competition" to risk avoidance, and is regulated by periodic review inspections. This approach overcomes the unsustainability of campaign-style governance while avoiding the potential inertia of conventional bureaucracy. This study fills a gap in existing research regarding the transitional form of central-to-routine task transformation, offering a new perspective for understanding the flexibility and effectiveness of local governance in China.

KEYWORDS

Central Tasks; Routine Tasks; Task Transformation; National Civilized City Creation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China stated that the overall goal of further deepening reforms comprehensively is to continue improving and developing the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and to advance the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity. Local governments are key actors in this modernization process, and the advancement of their governance affairs reflects their governance capacity. At the county/district level, central tasks and routine tasks constitute the primary governance affairs of local governments. Particularly in today's context, where local governance models have shifted from a single-center to a multi-center approach, the coordinated advancement of central tasks and departmental routine work has largely achieved effective grassroots governance^[1].

Central tasks and routine tasks have distinct boundaries in their attributes, differing significantly in leadership attention, resource utilization, and assessment methods. Central tasks are political tasks, often holistic in nature, requiring coordination across various departments, with tight timelines and

"one-vote veto" characteristics in evaluation. The main leaders of local Party committees serve as primary responsible persons, needing to devote full effort to completing central tasks. Routine tasks, by contrast, are daily administrative tasks set according to the administrative scope of functional departments, operating under bureaucratic procedures^[2]. To achieve specific goals, local governments can transform central and routine tasks into each other through certain pathways^[3]. Current scholarship has devoted considerable attention to the pathways and implementation mechanisms by which routine tasks are elevated to central tasks-such as research on the river chief system^[4], pandemic prevention and control^[5], and rural forest tenure reform^[6]-but has paid less attention to how phased central tasks are advanced after being transformed into routine tasks.

Once formalized, central tasks are handed over to the competent authorities for routine advancement, with leadership attention and governance resources diminishing, yet they may still retain traces of central task operations. This paper takes the process of creating and consolidating a National Civilized City in District A, S City, H Province as its observation subject, analyzing the advancement of routine-formalized central tasks and attempting to answer two questions: First, how are routine-formalized central tasks defined, and what patterns do their practical configurations exhibit? Second, how are routine-formalized central tasks advanced?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

2.1 Motivations for Advancing and Transforming Governance Tasks

From an organizational incentive perspective, the most fundamental motivations driving local governments to advance governance tasks include fiscal incentives and promotion incentives. Zhou argues that with the implementation of the tax-sharing system, the conditions for local governments to pursue fiscal retention under the fiscal contracting system no longer exist. Instead, they seek extra-budgetary revenue through "urban management" to obtain land transfer fees, forming a "land-finance-banking" trinity development model^[7]. The most representative theory of promotion incentives is "political tournament model"^[8], which describes competition among government officials at the same level seeking political promotion, with the winning criteria determined by higher-level authorities, potentially including GDP, number of projects, and other indicators. The isomorphic structure of responsibilities across different government levels in China allows political tournaments to proceed simultaneously at multiple levels, with departmental officials more likely to push task completion under such incentives.

Scholarly research on the motivations for transforming between the two types of governance tasks has primarily focused on the process of routine tasks being elevated to central tasks. Local governments promote such transformation for several reasons: first, to obtain authority, as "vertical" departments require "horizontal" coordination at the same level to cooperate with departmental work-for instance, county-level departments elevating routine tasks to the county Party committee's central tasks, thereby transforming them into political tasks that township governments cannot ignore^[9]; second, to streamline inter-departmental relations and promote inter-departmental collaboration to achieve organizational goals, such as forming command-and-control structures across departments through central task leadership bodies^[10]; third, under governance path dependency, to ride the coattails of central tasks to achieve routine task objectives, such as embedding business environment optimization into the creation of a civilized city, leveraging momentum for empowerment^[11]; and fourth, to undertake and implement central intentions, cooperating with the central government's political mobilization objectives-as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, when local governments switched from normal bureaucratic operations to a political mobilization model of "concentrating resources for major undertakings"^[12].

2.2 Reasons for the Formalization of Central Tasks

While elevating routine tasks to central tasks can consolidate departmental resources, mobilize leadership attention, and improve task efficiency, central tasks are typically advanced through campaign-style governance, which inevitably turns routine governance toward campaign-style grassroots governance. Campaign-style governance, with its "crude and simplistic" operational methods, produces certain "aftereffects," leading many researchers to adopt a reflective and critical stance toward this form of governance^[13]. Nevertheless, campaign-style governance has a degree of rationality. It represents a rational choice under conditions of limited governance resources and urgent tasks^[14], capable of rapidly generating performance. Structurally, China's bureaucracy is political rather than rationalized, rooted in the charismatic legitimacy concept upheld by the revolutionary-civilizing polity. Governance based on such organizational foundations inevitably generates "campaign-style" genes^[15]. However, the leadership attention and mobilized resources invested in advancing central tasks through campaign-style governance are unsustainable; the governance structure may dissolve due to leadership changes and increasing complexity of governance affairs. Its most significant problem lies in formal irrationality, facing legitimacy crises.

For these reasons, promoting the transformation of central tasks into routine tasks is a necessary condition for long-term effective governance, and the formalization of central tasks represents an inevitable trend. Some scholars argue that deviation from routine governance due to political mobilization is temporary; political mobilization will ultimately return to routine governance^[16], and routine governance is an irresistible trend^[15].

2.3 Research Framework

Drawing on scholarly conclusions regarding the motivations for government task advancement and transformation, this paper defines the transitional form between central tasks and routine tasks as the routine-formalized central task, which serves as the analytical object of this study. Normalized central tasks are the result of both economic and political promotion factors and the practical need for governance to move toward normalization.

Local governments are the implementing subjects of routine-formalized central tasks. The structure and operational mechanisms of the internal government system determine the practical manifestations of work tasks. The organizational structure dimension and the pressure transmission mechanism dimension can effectively characterize internal government operations. In terms of organizational structure, the shift from "central" to "routine" is a transition from a mobilized state to a normal state. In terms of pressure mechanisms, the shift from "central" to "routine" is a transition from compliance pressure to risk avoidance.

The three perspectives of function, platform, and value can effectively reflect the routine work of local governments. Functions are routine work content determined by departments based on their "three determinations" (functional configuration) plans; platforms are carrier systems formed through long-term departmental operations that undertake work; values are the orientation and pursuits guiding departmental work. Governance objectives, governance resources, and public recognition together constitute the boundaries of the governance field, corresponding respectively to the premises, motivation, and outcomes of action.

3. CASE INTRODUCTION AND TASK PRACTICE CONFIGURATION

3.1 Case Overview

The National Civilized City is the highest comprehensive honorary title reflecting a city's overall civilization level, awarded by the Central Spiritual Civilization Development Steering Commission

(hereinafter referred to as the "Central Civilization Office"). It is evaluated every three years, representing that the city has achieved a national benchmark level in the coordinated development of material, spiritual, and ecological civilization. As one of the most valuable city brands, its creation process receives high attention from local governments at all levels.

S City, located in H Province, initiated its National Civilized City creation campaign in 2017, was twice nominated as a candidate city in 2018 and 2021, and successfully created a National Civilized City in May 2025. District A, as the seat of the S City municipal Party committee and municipal government, had the most evaluation sites during the city's civilized city creation process, making the task particularly challenging. The Propaganda Department serves as the competent authority for the creation and consolidation of the National Civilized City, representing an important window for observing the creation and consolidation process. Based on these two considerations, the author entered the field from July to August 2025, participating in document processing and material drafting at the Propaganda Department of District A, building a comprehensive understanding of its work, and obtaining the necessary research materials on civilized city creation and consolidation through participatory observation and interviews.

During the creation period, the civilized city work was advanced as a central task for S City and District A, primarily evidenced by: First, in terms of leadership attention, since the creation work began, S City's annual promotion meetings for National Civilized City creation were attended by the municipal Party secretary in person, with the mayor presiding. Key leaders at both municipal and district levels conducted multiple unannounced inspections and supervision of the creation work, promoting task completion through high-level political mobilization. Second, in terms of institutional and staffing arrangements, S City established a creation work leading group with the municipal Party secretary as group leader and the mayor as first deputy group leader, and formed a S City National Civilized City Creation Work Headquarters. Each district's Propaganda Department established a Creation Office to coordinate efforts. Third, in terms of assessment methods, District A's Organization Department included creation work in the comprehensive assessment scoring table for townships and subdistricts, with provisions such as: "If issues such as slippage or regression in urban civilization construction work cause adverse effects or negative public opinion, 0.3-0.5 points may be deducted as deemed appropriate."

This case was selected as the observation subject because the creation work was initially advanced as a central task. After successful creation, S City issued the "S City Three-Year Action Plan for Consolidating and Enhancing National Civilized City Creation Achievements (2025-2027)," focusing on the "second half" of consolidation work and striving to achieve normalization of civilized city construction, gradually transitioning central tasks toward routine tasks. Studying the practice configuration and advancement strategies of routine-formalized central tasks has unique value and practical reference significance, contributing academic value to understanding the transformation and embedding of tasks with different attributes-"central" and "routine."

3.2 Practice Configuration of Routine-Formalized Central Tasks

Routine-formalized central tasks represent a window for understanding grassroots local government operations, and are an increasingly common task form under the multi-center task processing model. Compared to central tasks, routine-formalized central tasks rely more on the orderly operation of bureaucratic structures, with the political assessment pressure of "one-vote veto" weakened. Compared to routine tasks, they retain the characteristics of central tasks, with the task division structure that breaks through compartmentalization being preserved, and periodic unannounced inspections and receptions giving this task advancement phased mobilization attributes. Overall, routine-formalized central tasks exhibit the following three practice configurations:

3.2.1 Task-Driven: Flexible Organizational Structures

Organizational structure serves as the carrier for advancing governance tasks. The Propaganda Department is the business responsibility unit for the creation work. During the creation period, S City formed an organizational work mechanism of "municipal-level leadership coordination, district-level implementation." During the central task advancement period, the Propaganda Department of District A established a Creation Office to coordinate with the municipal Creation Headquarters. At its peak, this temporary institution had over ten staff members, of whom only three were officially established civil servants from the Propaganda Department, with the rest being borrowed personnel and temporary workers.

After the creation work succeeded, the District Creation Office was renamed the District Consolidation Office. Consolidation work was advanced as a routine-formalized central task. In terms of staffing, the Consolidation Office retained only three staff members for daily operations, including one official civil servant from the Propaganda Department, one borrowed staff member from the District Education Bureau, and one contract temporary worker. For daily affairs, the institution's functions were limited to routine inspections, information transmission, and basic maintenance. The Consolidation Office operated according to typical routine bureaucratic mechanisms, with grassroots guidance being part of the department's work. As a Consolidation Office staff member stated, "I visit the subdistrict offices and townships below almost every week, mainly to guide and inspect the production of consolidation materials and problem rectification work." During superior unannounced inspection periods, this organizational structure could rapidly activate the original central task command system, with leadership attention quickly injected in the short term and temporary resources rapidly assembled, with the Propaganda Department reassigning personnel to support the Consolidation Office's work. The governance structure could switch from "normal state" to "mobilized state." Thus, task attributes drive the organization's operational state, while flexible organizational structures enable seamless switching between routine and mobilized modes.

3.2.2 Focused Concentration: Contracted Responsibility Grids

Grassroots subdistrict offices and townships often face shortages of personnel and resources when responding to creation work. District A broke through compartmentalization through the joint-point co-construction mechanism, requiring district-level units and some secondary units to connect with all 14 subdistricts (townships) and some key communities (villages) to achieve vertical resource sinking and horizontal integration. District units' responsibility for their connected areas was further strengthened in assessments. Creation work was included in district units' annual assessments for consecutive years, with provisions such as: "If connected areas experience slippage or regression in urban civilization construction work, causing adverse effects or negative public opinion, 0.1-0.2 points may be deducted from the district unit as deemed appropriate."

After successful creation, the responsibility network formed through the joint-point co-construction mechanism was retained, but its form and functions had changed. First, the number of participating units and subdistricts (townships) was significantly reduced, with only 8 district units maintaining connections with a corresponding number of key subdistricts, while units for other subdistricts and townships were withdrawn. Second, the function of the joint-point co-construction mechanism had degraded compared to the creation period. Subdistricts (townships) could often rely on their own resources to complete consolidation work independently. Only during inspection receptions would connected district units arrange funds and personnel to station at subdistricts to assist with consolidating civilized city achievements. Governance resources shifted from large-scale mobilization during the creation period to precise targeted investment during the consolidation period, completing tasks with lower governance costs.

3.2.3 Phased Input: Predictable Pressure Transmission

China's government has constructed a series of governance mechanisms to achieve top-down control, including but not limited to the pressure-based system^[17] and target responsibility system^[18]. S City advanced the civilized city creation work with high pressure, requiring creation offices at both municipal and county levels to strengthen supervision, strictly enforce accountability, and transmit pressure and responsibility to the governance front line. In District A, in addition to annual assessment requirements for subdistricts (townships) and district units regarding creation work, standardized assessment teams were established at the municipal level to conduct high-frequency inspections of creation sites against National Civilized City quantitative standards, providing real-time feedback on identified issues to the district creation office, subdistricts (townships), and connected units, requiring rectification within specified timeframes.

After obtaining the National Civilized City title, S City continued promoting consolidation work. Compared to the creation period, the pressure faced by District A's Consolidation Office was significantly alleviated, with fewer directives and inspections regarding civilized city creation and consolidation, and pressure input shifting from "normal high pressure" to "periodic high pressure." Since consolidation builds upon the creation foundation to further solidify achievements, its work serves the goal of preventing regression and ensuring the passing of re-evaluations. This objective determines that the system's operational behavior tends toward conservatism and risk avoidance, with stability becoming the primary criterion for measuring organizational effectiveness. "The current work mainly focuses on organizing daily materials and transmitting consolidation-related documents, with basically no overtime. Only when superiors come for inspections do we need to prepare relevant materials, which makes work pressure relatively higher." Since inspections and follow-up visits from superiors are predictable, the Consolidation Office can prepare in advance, and the pressure faced by the organization exhibits phased characteristics.

4 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES FOR ROUTINE-FORMALIZED CENTRAL TASKS

4.1 Finding Footholds: Embedding into the Routine System

The transition from central task to routine task is essentially the transformation from political task to administrative responsibility. After successful creation, consolidation work needed to rely on normalized bureaucratic working mechanisms to address sustainability and legitimacy issues. The transformation from central task to routine task is not instantaneous but rather a lengthy adjustment process, during which the task form can be viewed as a routine-formalized central task. This research finds that embedding into the routine system is primarily achieved through functional embedding, platform embedding, and value embedding.

Functional Embedding. District A's Consolidation Office, when advancing consolidation work, decomposed part of the tasks and embedded them into the routine work systems of its own department and district units, striving to achieve normalized implementation of routine-formalized central tasks. The Propaganda Department of District A, where the Consolidation Office is located, incorporated the practices and experiences from the civilized city creation into the routine task of "ideological and spiritual civilization construction" for the entire district, specifying concrete requirements for consolidating civilized achievements in annual work plans and performance assessment indicators, making it a long-term responsibility from which the department could not shirk. Policy "grasping points" can leverage the whole through key points, attracting more leadership attention to enhance policy implementation effectiveness^[19]. Relevant functional units such as the District Urban Management Bureau and District Traffic Police Detachment used the consolidation of the civilized city as a grasp, retaining the tasks they undertook during the creation period, continuously carrying out small advertisement cleanup and traffic order rectification actions, making these their

departmental focus and incorporating them into normalized work lists. Creation-related work tasks were formally incorporated into the routine responsibilities of relevant departments through responsibility adjustments, receiving a relatively high degree of attention. This institutional absorption process gave temporary tasks arising from creation work a stable organizational identity, with their survival no longer dependent on the attention of individual leaders but becoming part of the department's legally mandated functions.

Platform Embedding. The selection of policy tools is strongly influenced by existing implementation paths. Path dependency means that consolidation work often relies on the platform foundations and brand projects within the existing bureaucratic system, decomposing and integrating consolidation tasks to achieve intensive resource use and improved governance effectiveness. District A established New Era Civilization Practice Centers as primary positions for guiding new social trends, widely carrying out civilization practice activities. The District Consolidation Office embedded the indicators involved in consolidating civilized city achievements into civilization practice activities conducted through these platforms, such as theoretical propaganda, civic education, and cultural and sports activities, leveraging the extensive coverage of civilization practice stations (centers) to weave a dense consolidation task network. Additionally, the Consolidation Office further expanded the volunteer organization network through District A's "A Red" series of volunteer service brands, activating volunteer forces during inspection periods to go deep into streets and alleys to respond to various unannounced inspections for civilized city consolidation, achieving work objectives through existing organizational structures and personnel. By leveraging existing platform working mechanisms, the government significantly reduced coordination and implementation costs while improving the applicability and effectiveness of consolidation governance tools.

Value Embedding. Value embedding represents the deepest embedding strategy, connecting modern civilized city concepts with local historical and cultural traditions and shared values, achieving the transformation of external norms into internal identification. Typical selection activities have the characteristics of county-level integrated governance, aiming to promote the values of spiritual civilization construction and shape value consensus and pursuit^[20]. The Propaganda Department of District A integrated consolidation work with the district's spiritual civilization construction, deeply implementing the civic morality construction project, using typical selection activities as the primary grasp for spiritual civilization construction, participating in and carrying out selection activities such as "S City Good People" and "S City People's Satisfaction Advanced Individuals." These selection activities received attention from departmental leaders, with layered selection from bottom to top followed by rigorous assessment, creating a social landscape of whole-process, full-participation spiritual civilization construction, promoting civilized trends and guiding citizens' daily behavior, making civilized concepts manifest in action. The District Consolidation Office also urged municipal and district consolidation co-construction units to carry out publicity work at connected communities through symposiums, courtyard meetings, and village meetings regarding the "S City Civilized Behavior Promotion Regulations" and consolidation knowledge, achieving comprehensive value embedding from point to surface. When civilized standards are incorporated into citizens' value identification, they generate powerful self-implementing capacity. Through discourse construction and ceremonial construction, the government makes civilized norms an important component of the citizen community, ultimately achieving internalized governance.

4.2 Drawing Energy: Leveraging Momentum from Central Tasks

Beyond embedding into the routine system, leveraging momentum from other central tasks is usually also an implementation strategy for routine-formalized central tasks. If embedding into the routine system serves to reduce task implementation costs and quickly resolve legitimacy issues through existing functional systems and working mechanisms, then leveraging momentum from central tasks serves to obtain authority, efficiently achieving the governance objectives of routine-formalized

central tasks through the political momentum and vast resources of central tasks. In District A, the civilized city consolidation work used S City's urban renewal as the leveraging object.

The prerequisite for leveraging momentum from central tasks is the coupling of governance objectives. As urban development models gradually shift from expansionary to connotative improvement, urban renewal has increasingly been placed on the agenda of local governments at all levels. In May 2025, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued the "Opinions on Continuing to Promote Urban Renewal Action," providing guidance for nationwide urban renewal, followed by the Central Urban Work Conference in July, which required urban renewal as a key focus. The S City Party Secretary and Mayor conducted several special research visits on urban renewal work, making it a central task for the local government. District A's Consolidation Office actively explored the convergence points between consolidating the civilized city and implementing urban renewal, leveraging urban renewal momentum to support consolidation work. For example, civilized city standards require building a harmonious and livable living environment and creating a clean urban appearance, which aligns with urban renewal's goal of improving residents' living environments. The Propaganda Department of District A coordinated with the District Housing and Urban-Rural Development Bureau on community renewal plans, incorporating civilized city standards into urban renewal schemes for consideration, and integrating civilized city display and promotional elements during implementation.

The motivation for leveraging momentum from central tasks is to utilize resource input. Urban development is currently transitioning from large-scale incremental expansion to stock upgrading, with urban renewal projects receiving strong central government support. In 2024, S City successfully applied for 14 underground pipeline corridor projects totaling 700 million yuan in central fiscal support. Urban renewal projects have also been included in the scope of local government special bonds available for project capital. In 2025, S City was included in the national urban physical examination sample cities, which met S City's urgent urban renewal needs and provided priority support in renewal project applications and urban construction gap-filling. Compared to independently applying for projects related to civilized city consolidation, leveraging urban renewal projects could enjoy more central policy and financial support. More importantly, it could bypass debt pressure to issue local special bonds for urban renewal, solving the funding difficulties faced after task formalization. District A primarily leveraged momentum through two approaches: First, budget integration—consolidating funds needed for consolidation-related facility construction and environmental improvement into the overall budget of urban renewal projects, ensuring stable and sufficient funding. Second, packaging consolidation-related projects such as civilization publicity and volunteer services into urban renewal community development and humanistic environment improvement projects, thereby securing special funds from development and reform, housing and urban-rural development, and other systems. Urban renewal engineering projects thus became the carriers for implementing consolidation work, achieving sustainable resource input.

The result of leveraging momentum from central tasks is shaping public recognition. Leveraging momentum from central tasks resolved the resource shortage after task formalization, allowing consolidation work to proceed effectively and transforming abstract behavioral norms into concrete infrastructure projects within urban renewal. One suburban community, a typical cluster of older residential areas, had buildings constructed in relatively early periods, with some units not equipped with private bathrooms, leaving residents highly dependent on public toilets on the ground floor for their needs. This community actively applied for old residential area renovation projects using the urban renewal opportunity and successfully secured funding for public toilet renovation. During preliminary research, the community identified gaps in barrier-free facility construction according to consolidation standards and reported this issue to the Consolidation Office. District A's Consolidation Office then proactively coordinated with the District Housing and Urban-Rural Development Bureau and other functional departments, incorporating accessible public restroom design into the construction plan, which was ultimately completed, resolving restroom access difficulties for elderly

residents and people with disabilities within the community. Through leveraging momentum, consolidation work anchored its value in practical livelihood matters, effectively shedding potential negative labels such as formalism and "going through the motions to cope with inspections," reshaping public recognition.

5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The routine-formalized central task represents a transitional state in the transformation from central task to routine operation. It retains the characteristics of central task operation, such as establishing temporary institutions and adopting joint-point mechanisms that break through bureaucratic operations, while also attempting to transition toward routine operation by embedding into functional departments to establish legitimacy. Between routine tasks and central tasks, routine-formalized central tasks exhibit the integration of "routine" and "central" characteristics, enabling their operation to leverage the advantages of both task attributes while avoiding their respective shortcomings, constituting a distinctive Chinese characteristic of local governance and achieving flexible and effective national governance.

This paper takes routine-formalized central tasks as an entry point, depicting the transformation process, practice configurations, and implementation strategies of central tasks transitioning to routine tasks. Using the creation and consolidation of a National Civilized City as an example, routine-formalized central tasks, as a transitional form, exhibit two behavioral logic characteristics in their advancement:

Firstly, the logic shifts from "compliance competition" to "avoiding mishaps." Compared to the economic field's tournament logic, the National Civilized City creation, as a typical compliance competition, differs significantly in objective setting and competition rules from economic field tournaments. Meeting standards is a prerequisite for obtaining the National Civilized City title. Because the evaluation indicator system is standardized and normalized, local governments only need to conduct political mobilization against the indicators and fill gaps to achieve their objectives. After successful creation moves toward normalized governance, local government operations are governed by assessment requirements determined by functional work, maintaining routine operations. To respond to re-evaluations and inspections for the civilized city, consolidating achievements and avoiding revocation of the title become the core objectives of consolidation work.

Secondly, the phased nature of re-evaluations plays a core regulatory role in timing. After the civilized city construction task transitions from central task to routine task, re-evaluations and unannounced inspections from higher levels constitute the primary source of pressure. The National Civilized City evaluation standards stipulate a three-year cycle for re-evaluating cities that have obtained the title, with cities failing the evaluation subject to sanctions or even revocation of the title. Periodic, predictable re-evaluations and possible unannounced inspections can overcome the inertia of routine bureaucracy in a periodic manner, ensuring that tasks continue to receive leadership attention and resource allocation even after task transformation. Organizational behavioral path dependency allows mobilization mechanisms to be quickly reactivated. The phased nature of re-evaluations profoundly affects the behavioral patterns of local governments in advancing such tasks.

By examining the routine-formalized central task—a governance task practice with distinctive Chinese characteristics—this study fills a gap in research on the transformation process from central task to routine task and the implementation strategies of this transitional form. From a broader national governance perspective, this paper does not intend to compare or discuss the relative merits of central task and routine task implementation mechanisms. Both are unified in the practical form of governance tasks, and leveraging the comparative advantages of different task attributes to serve national governance effectiveness enhancement is the path to good governance. Of course, the boundaries and limits of central-to-routine task transformation require further clarification, and the

specific transformation mechanisms and pathways warrant deeper exploration. This article merely provides a transitional form research approach.

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