

Symbolic Capital and Institutional Escort: A Governance Path Study on Breaking the 'Culture-Industry' Synergy Dilemma in Qiaoxiang

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Abstract: Qiaoxiang (hometowns of overseas Chinese) in China, represented by Teochew (Chaozhou), possess rich cultural resources such as intangible cultural heritage, architectural complexes, and humanistic spirits. However, in the process of modernization, they universally face a structural dilemma of poor "culture-industry" synergy. Cultural resources habitually stagnate in "static display" and "superficial embellishment," failing to be transformed into modern industrial advantages with "hematopoietic" functions. Based on cultural economics and new institutional economics, this paper proposes that the core to breaking this dilemma lies in achieving a dual governance transformation. First is to promote the dynamic transformation of cultural resources into "symbolic capital," i.e., activating dormant cultural elements into tradable, operable, and value-adding cultural IPs through "curatorial" incubation, digital reconfiguration, and "asset-light" operation. Second is to build a modern governance paradigm that replaces "relational governance" with "institutional escort," i.e., providing a cornerstone of trust and security for the market-oriented operation of "symbolic capital" through rigid intellectual property protection, a predictable business environment, and precise cross-border services. This paper argues that only by building a new dual-driven ecosystem of "symbolic capital" activation and "institutional escort" protection can the "culture-industry" synergy dilemma in Qiaoxiang be truly broken, achieving a level leap from a "hometown of memory" to a "highland of innovation."

Keywords: Qiaoxiang; Culture-Industry Synergy; Symbolic Capital; Institutional Escort; Governance Path; Teochew (Chaozhou).

1. Introduction: The Structural Dilemma of "Culture-Industry" Synergy in Qiaoxiang

Chinese Qiaoxiang, as unique spatial nodes connecting the mainland and the global Chinese diaspora, are not only the "emotional homelands" for tens of millions of overseas Chinese but also "cultural rich mines" bearing deep historical heritage and distinct regional characteristics. Taking Teochew as an example, the form of Qiaoxiang it represents has accumulated a vast system of intangible cultural heritage, including Gongfu Tea, Teochew Opera, Teochew music, Teochew embroidery, woodcarving, and ceramics, as well as tangible and spiritual heritage like the Paifang Street (Memorial Archways Street), ancient city dwellings, and Qiaopi (overseas Chinese remittance letters) culture. These abundant cultural resources should be the core engine for Qiaoxiang to build a differentiated competitive advantage in the new development pattern.

However, a long-standing paradox exists: abundant "cultural resources" have not automatically translated into strong "industrial advantages." In the modernization practices of many Qiaoxiang across the country, the structural dilemma of poor "culture-industry" synergy is widespread. We observe a "dual disconnection" phenomenon: On one hand, culture is "museum-ized," confined to static protection, display, and inheritance, reduced to a "backdrop" and "embellishment" for the tourism economy, its intrinsic economic value difficult to be deeply explored and market-translated. On the other hand, industrial development has failed to deeply couple with local

culture, either resorting to "label-sticking" superficial grafts (like producing crude tourist souvenirs) or, under path dependence, continuing to strengthen labor-intensive and resource-consuming business models. This leads to "culture" and "industry" sliding on parallel tracks, or even constraining each other.

This "culture-industry" synergy dilemma prevents the full play of Qiaoxiang's "diaspora" advantage. Especially when facing the new generation of overseas Chinese, who possess global vision, professional capabilities, and market logic, the traditional "nostalgia card" and "emotional mobilization" models [1] relied upon by Qiaoxiang are increasingly unable to match their modern investment demands for "value co-creation" and "rule reliance." The new generation of overseas Chinese is eager to combine the cultural uniqueness of their homeland with their own professional advantages, but what they often see are "dormant resources" and "vague rules," leading them to fall into a state of "high identification, low investment" wait-and-see hesitation.

Academic research on Qiaoxiang either focuses on the sociological analysis of overseas Chinese history, diaspora affairs policies, and emotional identity, or on the economic statistics of "diaspora capital" introduction [2]. Research on the cultural industry mostly concentrates on macro levels like the creative economy and IP operation [3]. However, few studies place the "cultural resource endowment" and "industrial development model" of Qiaoxiang within the same analytical framework, starting from a "governance" perspective to explore the roots of their synergy failure and construct systematic solutions.

This article attempts to bridge this research gap. Based on

Pierre Bourdieu's "symbolic capital" theory [4] and Douglass North's new institutional economics [5], this paper proposes a core argument: To break the "culture-industry" synergy dilemma in Qiaoxiang, one must transcend the traditional thinking of "resource protection" and "emotional investment promotion." Instead, a dual governance new paradigm must be constructed. First is to realize the dynamic transformation from "cultural resources" to "symbolic capital," where the government acts as a "curator" and "incubator" to activate culture into operable IPs. Second is to realize the paradigm shift from "relational governance" to "institutional escort," where the government acts as a "night watchman" and "escort," providing a cornerstone of trust centered on the rule of law for the market operation of IPs. This study uses Teochew and other Qiaoxiang as observational blueprints, aiming to provide theoretical references and practical paths for governance innovation and high-quality development for all Qiaoxiang in China.

2. Manifestations of the Dilemma: Three Facets of "Culture-Industry" Synergy Failure in Qiaoxiang

The "culture-industry" synergy dilemma in Qiaoxiang is not a singular economic or cultural problem, but a comprehensive manifestation of governance concepts and practice models lagging behind the demands of the times. Its specific manifestations can be summarized into the following three levels:

2.1. "Static Solidification" of Culture and "Superficial Grafting" of Industry

Under the traditional inertial thinking of "protection first," the cultural resources of Qiaoxiang (especially intangible cultural heritage) are often placed on a "shrine," emphasizing their "authenticity" and "sense of history." This leads to their disconnection from modern market demands and lifestyles. Culture is "statically solidified" into museum exhibits, scenic spot performances, and festive rituals. This "statically displayed" culture finds it difficult to generate a continuous economic cash flow.

Correspondingly, the local industry's use of culture remains at a "superficial grafting" level. The most common models are "symbolizing" and "surfacing" cultural elements, such as simply printing intangible heritage patterns on low-value-added souvenirs like T-shirts and mugs, or using ancient cities and houses as "check-in backdrops" to develop a singular ticket economy and catering support. In this model, "culture" is merely the "coat" of the industry, not the "core." The industry also fails to nurture the "activation" and "regeneration" of culture; instead, due to excessive commercialization and homogeneous competition, it may dilute the uniqueness and value of the culture itself.

2.2. "Fragmentation" of Resources and "Small-scale Workshop" Operations

The cultural resources of Qiaoxiang (such as a specific intangible heritage skill, characteristic agricultural product, or folk activity) are often scattered among the populace in a "fragmented" state, carried by numerous small and micro workshops, individual inheritors, or family-style enterprises [6]. For example, Teochew Gongfu Tea, Teochew ceramics, and Teochew woodcarving, although famous, have long been trapped in the dilemma of "having a category, but no brand."

This "small-scale workshop" operational model leads to a "triple deficiency": First, a lack of unified "quality standards," with products of varying quality, making it difficult to form economies of scale. Second, a lack of systematic "brand building," resulting in low market recognition and weak bargaining power. Third, a lack of professional "market operation," as inheritors are often "skilled in craft, but poor at marketing," making it difficult to connect with modern capital and global channels. In this "atomized" industrial ecology, individual "bonsai" may be exquisite, but they can never converge into a contiguous "landscape," and the overall value of cultural resources is greatly underestimated.

2.3. Path Dependence on "Emotional Mobilization" and Insufficient Supply of "Institutional Trust"

A significant feature of Qiaoxiang governance is the long-term reliance on "emotional mobilization" based on geography, kinship, and blood ties [7]. In investment promotion, especially in attracting "diaspora capital," the "sentiment card" and "personal relationships" (renqing guanxi) often play a central role. This "relational governance" model played a huge role in specific historical periods (such as the early days of Reform and Opening-Up), but its drawbacks are increasingly prominent in today's deeply globalized and market-oriented world.

"Personal sentiment" is highly unstable, non-standardized, and unpredictable. It cannot provide the core "institutional trust" required for modern commercial activities. When new-generation overseas Chinese and other modern market entities come to connect with professional business plans and "asset-light" cultural creative projects (whose core is IP), what they care about most is no longer "how much tax is exempted" or "how many banquets are hosted." Instead, it is "What if my design copyright is plagiarized?" "Can the signed cooperation agreement be rigidly enforced?" "Is the government's approval process transparent and fair?" When Qiaoxiang cannot provide a strong response in terms of "institutional supply," such as intellectual property protection and a law-based business environment, the appeal of "emotional mobilization" rapidly fails, leading to "cultural identity" being unable to transform into "economic cooperation."

3. Path 1: The Dynamic Transformation from "Cultural Resources" to "Symbolic Capital"

The primary path to breaking the dilemma is to achieve a transformation in cognition and roles: the government must shift from being a passive "resource guardian" to an active "capital operator." The "capital" here refers to Bourdieu's "symbolic capital"—cultural prestige that is recognized by society, can bring reputation and legitimacy, and can ultimately be converted into economic capital [4]. Cultural resources themselves are not capital. Only after being "empowered," "curated," and "operated" to gain market "recognized" value can they become "symbolic capital."

3.1. Curatorial Incubation: From "Managing Heritage" to "Operating IP"

The first step in transformation is to stop viewing culture as unchanging "antiques" and instead treat it as a "matrix" (IP) that can be developed. The government should play the role of "chief curator."

First is "selection." Systematically sort through the fragmented cultural resources in the region and select the core symbols with the most uniqueness, recognizability, and market potential (e.g., the "21 steps" of Teochew Gongfu Tea, the "padding embroidery" technique of Teochew embroidery, the "Five-Elements" gables of Teochew houses).

Second is "translation." Collaborate with top design forces, professional research institutions, and market planning teams to conduct "modern translation" and "standardized reconfiguration" of these core symbols. For example, "translate" complex intangible heritage skills into a "design element library" that can be absorbed by modern products (like fashion, home furnishings, digital art); "translate" cumbersome Gongfu tea etiquette into a "standard process" that can be experienced in modern consumption scenarios (like business, travel).

Finally is "empowerment." The government solidifies these "translated" achievements into legally defined "public IPs" by unifying trademarks, applying for patents, and defining copyrights, and establishes a clear authorization and value assessment system. This process achieves the key leap from "managing heritage" to "operating IP."

3.2. Digital Reconfiguration: From "On-site Experience" to "Cross-Time-Space Scenarios"

The value of "symbolic capital" lies in its "circulability." In the digital age, breaking the time-space limitations of "on-site experience" of culture is the core means of enhancing its circulability.

On one hand, it is to achieve "cultural presence" through digital technology [8]. Use VR/AR, digital twin, and other technologies to build a "Cloud Qiaoxiang." For example, create a "Metaverse Ancestral Hall" to allow the new generation of Teochew diaspora around the world to cross physical barriers for virtual ancestor worship and family narrative; develop a "Digital Intangible Heritage Museum" to allow users to immersively experience the needlework of Teochew embroidery or the making of a hand-pulled teapot.

On the other hand, it is to create "new types of assets" through digital technology. Combine selected cultural IPs (like classic facial makeup from Teochew Opera, unique patterns from Teochew woodcarving) with blockchain technology to develop unique "digital collectibles" (NFTs). This not only opens up brand new cultural consumption scenarios but, more importantly, it directly transforms "symbolic capital" into "digital assets" that can be traded on the global market, opening up new financing and profit channels for the Qiaoxiang cultural industry.

3.3. Asset-Light Operation: From "Heavy-Asset Investment Promotion" to "Attracting Professional Talent"

The traditional "heavy-asset investment promotion" model (e.g., attracting factories, land development) is no longer suitable for the operation of "symbolic capital." Qiaoxiang should shift to an "asset-light" platform-based operation model.

The government's core role is "platform building" and "authorization." The government builds a "Cultural IP Authorization Center" and an "Industrial Incubation Platform," holding the ownership of the "symbolic capital" (i.e., public IPs). Then, it faces the world (especially the new

generation of overseas Chinese with professional skills) to "attract talent" rather than "attract capital." The government no longer "allocates land and money," but provides "IP authorization + policy support."

For example, the government can license the "Teochew Gongfu Tea" public IP to a new-generation diaspora team with an international vision and internet marketing capabilities. This team does not need to build its own tea mountains or factories. Instead, as the "brand owner," it integrates upstream "small-scale workshops" (unifying standards, OEM production) and connects with downstream global channels (like cross-border e-commerce, overseas tea houses). The government then obtains revenue through "IP licensing fees" and "tax sharing." This "government-holds-IP, private-sector-strong-operation" asset-light model [9] not only lowers the investment threshold but also activates private-sector professional forces, maximizing the operational efficiency of "symbolic capital."

4. Path 2: The Paradigm Shift from "Relational Governance" to "Institutional Escort"

If the transformation of "symbolic capital" is the "hematopoietic" mechanism, then "institutional escort" is the "blood transfusion" and "circulation" guarantee system. As North stated, reducing transaction costs and protecting property rights are key to economic growth [5]. "Symbolic capital," as an intangible asset, has extremely high transaction costs and is heavily dependent on "trust." The second path of Qiaoxiang governance is the mandatory shift from traditional governance that relies on "relational trust" to a modern governance paradigm that provides "institutional trust."

4.1. Rigid Escort: "Zero Tolerance" Protection of Intellectual Property

For "symbolic capital" centered on IP, intellectual property protection is its "lifeline." "Relational governance" is completely ineffective in this regard because "personal sentiment" cannot deter systemic "plagiarism" and "piracy." The Qiaoxiang government must demonstrate a "zero tolerance" rigid stance.

This requires establishing "specialized" and "rapid" protection mechanisms. First, set up a "Cultural Intellectual Property Court" or "special circuit court" to achieve specialized trials. Second, establish an "infringement rapid response mechanism" to efficiently investigate and impose maximum penalties on counterfeit and pirated goods in the market. Third, provide a "cross-border IP rights protection green channel" for overseas Chinese, so that their creative investments in the homeland can receive "trustworthy" legal protection. This rigid "institutional escort" is the "strongest sentiment card" for Qiaoxiang to attract the new generation for "value co-creation," and its signal effect far outweighs any tax incentives.

4.2. Flexible Escort: The "Predictability" of the Business Environment

"Institutional escort" is not only reflected in the rigidity of "punishment" but also in the flexibility of "service." What new-generation market entities pursue is not a "policy depression" (low-cost) but a "service highland," the core of which is "predictability" [10].

First is "policy transparency." Abolish the "relational"

operational space of "one case, one discussion" and "different treatment for different people." Make all support policies for the cultural industry and overseas Chinese investment (such as approval processes, subsidy standards, talent identification) "list-based," "standardized," and public.

Second is "process efficiency." Break down departmental barriers and establish a "full life-cycle service system" for cultural industry projects (especially diaspora-funded projects). For example, set up a "Diaspora Investment Service Center" to provide "one-stop" butler services from project landing, cross-border financial settlement, tax and legal consultation, to talent recruitment. This efficient, transparent, and predictable institutional environment is what can truly reduce the institutional transaction costs for "symbolic capital" to land.

4.3. Precise Escort: "Seamless" Docking of Cross-Border Services

The "diaspora" attribute of Qiaoxiang determines that its "institutional escort" must have "cross-border" characteristics. The operation of "symbolic capital" is inherently transnational (e.g., global licensing of IPs, cross-border e-commerce of products).

The government should precisely meet this demand. First, build a "Cross-Border Legal and Financial Service Platform," introducing professional service institutions that understand both Chinese law and overseas (e.g., Southeast Asia, Europe, America) commercial law and financial rules, to help diaspora investors avoid legal and exchange risks in cross-border transactions. Second, establish an "Overseas Talent and Market Information Database," utilizing global Teochew diaspora associations and other networks to dynamically collect information on overseas market demand for Teochew cultural products, as well as information on overseas Teochew professional talent (design, marketing, management), to achieve precise transnational matching of "capital, talent, and market."

5. Conclusion: Building a New Qiaoxiang Governance Ecosystem Driven by the Dual Wheels of "Symbol" and "Institution"

This study shows that the "culture-industry" synergy dilemma faced by Qiaoxiang (like Teochew) is, on the surface, a contradiction between economic structure and cultural protection. Its root cause, however, is the lag in governance concepts and models. To break this dilemma, one can neither rely on the "static protection" of cultural resources nor on the "emotional mobilization" of "diaspora sentiment."

The fundamental way out lies in building a new Qiaoxiang governance ecosystem driven by the dual wheels of "symbol" and "institution."

First is the activation wheel of "symbolic capital." The Qiaoxiang government must complete the dynamic transformation from "resource guardian" to "IP operator." By "curatorial" IP incubation, "digital" scene reconfiguration, and "asset-light" model innovation, dormant cultural resources must be transformed into circulating, value-adding "symbolic capital." This is the "value core" for building industrial synergy.

Second is the guarantee wheel of "institutional escort." The Qiaoxiang government must complete the paradigm shift from "relational governor" to "rule maintainer." Through

"rigid" intellectual property protection, "flexible" business environment optimization, and "precise" cross-border service docking, a solid "institutional trust" must be provided for the market-oriented operation of "symbolic capital." This is the "safety chassis" to ensure the "long-term operation" of industrial synergy.

"Symbolic capital" is the engine; "institutional escort" is the road network. With both wheels turning, they can drive the Qiaoxiang train, fully loaded with cultural heritage, off the old tracks of "path dependence," attract global talents represented by the new generation of overseas Chinese to "get on board," and ride together towards a new future of "value co-creation." The construction of this new governance ecosystem will promote Qiaoxiang's level leap from an "emotional homeland of memory for overseas Chinese" to an "innovative highland for global elites," thereby fundamentally achieving the synergistic progress of cultural prosperity and industrial strength.

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(2) The Guangdong Provincial Philosophy and Social Science Planning Project (GD24XTY02)

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