

HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT FOR RURAL CULTURAL INDUSTRIES IN THE GUANGDONG-HONG KONG-MACAO GREATER BAY AREA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF NEW QUALITY PRODUCTIVITY FORCES

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Abstract: This study examines the high-quality development of rural cultural industries in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area from the perspective of new-type productive forces. Findings reveal a gradient distribution of cultural resources across the region, challenges to industrial advancement include limited application of new-type productive forces, shortages of talent and capital, inadequate infrastructure, weak technological capabilities, and insufficient cross-border policy coordination. To address these challenges, this paper constructs an analytical framework centered on “new factors-integration models-policy coordination” and empirically proposes three development pathways. These pathways aim to provide theoretical support and practical solutions for achieving urban-rural integration and rural revitalization: First, digital empowerment, involving infrastructure development and the creation of digital cultural and creative products; Second, creative activation, focusing on cultivating design talent and building intellectual property systems; Third, cross-border coordination, aimed at breaking down policy barriers and facilitating project implementation.

Keywords: New quality productivity forces; High-quality development; Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area

1 INTRODUCTION

The 2025 Central Government Document No. 1 explicitly proposes “empowering rural industrial revitalization with new-quality productive forces,” integrating new elements such as digital technology and creative design into the rural economic system, thereby providing strategic guidance for the transformation of rural cultural industries. As one of China's most open and economically dynamic regions, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area possesses triple advantages: Hong Kong region and Macao region's international cultural resources, the Pearl River Delta's manufacturing foundation, and Western Guangdong's ecological and cultural heritage. Resources such as Hong Kong region's cultural and creative design, Shenzhen's digital technology, Jiangmen's watchtower intangible cultural heritage, and Zhaoqing's Duan inkstone culture urgently require synergistic activation through new quality productive forces. However, the region's rural cultural industries currently face three core challenges: First, superficial industrial integration, with most projects confined to “culture + tourism” sightseeing models lacking deep integration with agriculture and services. Second, weak market competitiveness, characterized by severe homogenization of cultural products in peripheral areas and a shortage of digitally empowered premium brands. Third, fragmented policy support, marked by insufficient coordination among the three regions, with Hong Kong region and Macau capital facing institutional barriers like land use and taxation when entering mainland rural cultural industries.

This study introduces the theory of “new-quality productive forces” into rural cultural industry research, expanding its application boundaries in the cultural economy. It constructs an analytical framework of “new factors—integration models—policy coordination” to enrich the theoretical system for high-quality development of rural cultural industries. Based on empirical data from the Greater Bay Area, it distills a development model of “digital empowerment + creative activation + cross-border coordination.” This provides scientific basis for governments to formulate differentiated policies, assists peripheral rural cultural industries in enhancing added value, and promotes common prosperity.

2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The digital transformation of cultural industries represents a defining feature of their leapfrog development in the new era, embodying the fundamental role of new-quality productive forces in empowering high-quality growth. “New-quality productive forces” denote a form of productivity driven by technological innovation, supported by new elements such as digital technology, artificial intelligence, and creative design, and characterized by high technological content and value-added potential—transcending traditional growth pathways [1]. Its core characteristics include: first, factor innovation, where digital technology and creative talent replace traditional factors like land and labor; second, integration and penetration, driving cross-industry convergence through technological empowerment; and third, value multiplication, enhancing product value-added through creative design.

In the digital economy era, new-quality productive forces inject fresh momentum into the high-quality development of rural cultural industries through the enabling mechanisms of technological innovation, institutional reform, and industrial transformation [2]. High-quality development of rural cultural industries must fulfill "three-dimensional value": First, economic value, achieving industrial appreciation and increased farmer income—such as the Jiangmen Diaolou Digital Cultural and Creative Project, which boosted villagers' average annual income by 25%; Second, cultural value, which involves preserving and revitalizing intangible cultural heritage resources. Digital technology creates authentic rural cultural scenes, showcasing vibrant and diverse rural cultural characteristics while establishing a comprehensive digital rural resource repository[3]. Third, social value, which facilitates the flow of urban-rural resources. For instance, Shenzhen Dapeng New District's "Intangible Cultural Heritage Digital Museum" attracted 120 urban designers to engage with rural communities.

New-type productive forces, crystallizing the continuous enhancement of productive elements' quality, represent a more advanced form of productivity. Its core driving force stems from innovation, with education as its foundational support. Talent serves as the bridge connecting all elements, while industries provide a broad implementation platform[4]. By cultivating high-caliber rural revitalization talent through education, driving industrial convergence via technological innovation, strengthening social service support, and establishing collaborative platforms, new vitality is injected into rural revitalization [5]. This study extends these principles to rural cultural industries: digital technology addresses "resource activation," creative design tackles "product value enhancement," and cross-border capital resolves "funding shortages."

Existing research primarily focuses on: First, regional disparities. Development levels vary significantly among cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, resulting in a "core-periphery" gradient distribution for rural cultural industries within the region. Core areas predominantly feature digital cultural and creative industries, while peripheral areas focus on intangible cultural heritage tourism [6]. Second, industrial integration. In recent years, Guangdong's industrial and regional policies have undergone substantial adjustments, increasingly planning industrial integration between relocating enterprises and receiving areas from perspectives of coordinated planning, complementary advantages, and shared development [7]. Third, policy coordination. The Greater Bay Area emphasizes enterprises as key cultural development actors primarily to diversify cultural leadership. This approach enables enterprises to play a more prominent role in fulfilling their social responsibilities while allowing the market to participate collaboratively in the region's cultural development, thereby leveraging market mechanisms in cultural advancement [8].

3 CURRENT STATUS OF RURAL CULTURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Gradient Distribution of Resource Endowments

Rural cultural resources in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area exhibit a typical pattern of "creative dominance in core areas and resource concentration in peripheral regions," which can be categorized into three tiers:

The core region primarily includes Hong Kong region, Macao region, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen. These cities leverage digital creativity and modern design as their core development resources. For instance, Hong Kong region continuously provides policy support through its "Create Hong Kong" initiative, which invests HK\$200 million annually to support cultural and creative enterprises. Shenzhen, meanwhile, hosts a vast cluster of cultural and creative enterprises, with incomplete statistics indicating the number has reached 150,000.

The secondary zone primarily encompasses Foshan, Dongguan, and Zhongshan. Leveraging their robust manufacturing foundations, these cities actively develop the "culture + manufacturing" integration model, forming distinctive industrial characteristics. Take Xiqiao Town in Foshan as an example: its iconic Xiangyunshan silk industry has achieved an annual output value of 1 billion RMB.

Peripheral regions include Jiangmen, Zhaoqing, and Huizhou. These areas possess exceptionally rich intangible cultural heritage and ecological resources. For instance, Jiangmen's Kaiping Diaolou (watchtower houses), a UNESCO World Heritage site, currently number 1,833 structures. Huizhou's Longmen Folk Paintings, a national intangible cultural heritage, see an average annual production of approximately 2,000 pieces locally. However, the current utilization rate of these abundant resources remains insufficient, generally below 20%.

3.2 Stages of Industry Development

Based on a comprehensive assessment of industrial integration and value-added potential, the development of rural cultural industries in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area can be divided into three progressive stages: At the primary stage, this model is concentrated in peripheral areas, centered on the traditional "culture + tourism" sightseeing approach, with cultural elements appearing rather singularly within tourism products. For instance, cultural product revenue accounts for only 10% of total income at Zhaoqing's Dinghu Mountain scenic area, indicating that the penetration and value conversion of cultural elements within the region's tourism industry chain remain underdeveloped.

Progressing to the intermediate stage, industrial integration deepens, forming preliminary "culture + manufacturing" models in secondary zones. Dongguan's Chashan Town exemplifies this by combining the cultural IP of the "Nanshe Ming-Qing Ancient Village" with creative product development, achieving initial conversion of cultural value into economic value. Related industries now generate an annual output value of 200 million yuan.

At the advanced stage of industrial integration, core areas leverage technological, capital, and talent advantages to pioneer a deep integration model of "culture + digital + finance." Shenzhen's Dapeng New District exemplifies this with its "Intangible Cultural Heritage Digital Museum." By revitalizing intangible cultural heritage resources through digital technology, the project attracts over 2 million annual visitors, significantly boosting income growth by 35% in surrounding industries like homestays.

3.3 Current Application of New Quality Productivity in Rural Cultural Industries of the Greater Bay Area

Based on interviews with industry professionals in the Greater Bay Area, the application of new quality productive forces in rural cultural industries exhibits a pattern of "deep penetration in core areas and shallow application in peripheral areas":

Core areas (Hong Kong region, Macao region, Guangzhou, Shenzhen) exhibit a digital technology penetration rate as high as 65%, primarily concentrated in digital exhibitions and e-commerce sales. For instance, Hong Kong region's Yuen Long District revitalizes rural cultural resources through immersive technologies like "VR Farming Experiences," while Shenzhen's Dafen Oil Painting Village leverages live-streaming e-commerce to achieve 40% online sales, significantly enhancing cultural product reach and transaction efficiency. In contrast, peripheral areas exhibit only about 25% digital technology penetration, with relatively basic applications primarily focused on digitizing foundational services. For instance, the Kaiping Diaolou in Jiangmen improved visitor experiences through an online ticketing system, yet overall digital depth and application breadth remain significantly underdeveloped.

Core regions achieve 70% creative design participation, forming a complete chain of "cultural IP cultivation—product innovation—value enhancement." Taking Shenzhen as an example, its annual "Bao'an Cultural and Creative IP Design Competition" attracts numerous design talents, successfully producing 100 original cultural IPs and driving the transformation of traditional symbols into modern cultural and creative products. In contrast, most cultural products in peripheral regions still rely on traditional craftsmanship, with insufficient application of innovative design. For instance, Zhaoqing Duan inkstones, a national intangible cultural heritage, typically undergo product design updates only every five years or more, struggling to adapt to market shifts. Thus, the driving force of creative design for industrial upgrading remains underutilized.

Hong Kong region and Macao region capital participation in rural cultural industries within the Greater Bay Area remains low, accounting for less than 10% of total projects and primarily concentrated in core areas. For instance, Hong Kong region cultural enterprises invested in Shenzhen's Dapeng New District "Marine Cultural Creative Park," leveraging cross-border collaboration to integrate resources. Projects involving Hong Kong region and Macao region capital in peripheral areas account for less than 3% of the total. The core obstacle lies in land policy restrictions—for example, collective construction land in some villages in Jiangmen cannot be directly transferred to Hong Kong region and Macao region enterprises. This results in institutional constraints on cross-border investment during the land acquisition process, hindering the cross-regional flow and integration of resources.

3.4 Core Bottlenecks in New Quality Productivity Application

3.4.1 Factor bottlenecks: shortage of digital talent and creative capital

Talent shortages manifest as severe underprovision of digital technology personnel for rural cultural industries in peripheral areas. For instance, digital technology professionals constitute less than 5% of rural cultural industry workers in these regions. Taking Huizhou Longmen's farmer paintings as an example, only three individuals among numerous local intangible cultural heritage inheritors possess design software operation skills, failing to meet digital creation and operational demands.

Capital constraints are evident in the significant financing gap between peripheral and core regions for cultural projects. Survey data indicates that the average funding for rural cultural projects in peripheral areas is merely 500,000 yuan, whereas comparable projects in core regions secure an average of 5 million yuan. This insufficient capital supply directly hampers the implementation and application of new-quality productive forces in peripheral regions.

3.4.2 Technical bottlenecks: weak digital infrastructure and application capabilities

Lagging infrastructure deprives peripheral areas of hardware support for digital technology adoption. Currently, 5G network coverage in rural peripheral areas stands at only 40%, far below the 90% coverage in core regions. Insufficient network bandwidth and stability fail to meet the technical demands of new productive forces applications such as digital exhibitions and remote collaboration.

Insufficient application capabilities manifest at the enterprise operational level. Most cultural enterprises in peripheral areas lack professional digital operations teams. For instance, the online marketing efforts for the Kaiping Diaolou Scenic Area in Jiangmen are managed by only one part-time staff member. This results in limited and single-dimensional digital promotion methods, hindering the full realization of digital technology's potential to enhance industrial efficiency.

3.4.3 Institutional bottlenecks: insufficient cross-border policy coordination

Policy discrepancies increase the institutional costs for Hong Kong region and Macao region capital entering mainland rural cultural industries. When undertaking rural cultural projects in the mainland, Hong Kong region and Macao region investors must undergo additional procedures like "foreign investment filing," with approval cycles lasting up to three months. The complexity of these policy processes slows project implementation.

Lack of unified standards hinders the efficient flow of cultural resources across the three regions. Differences in cultural product quality standards and intellectual property protection rules—such as Hong Kong region cultural and creative products requiring re-inspection upon entering the mainland market—increase transaction costs for cross-regional cooperation, constraining the cross-border integration and optimal allocation of new productive forces.

4 PATHWAYS FOR HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Digital Empowerment Pathway: Building a Digital Ecosystem for Rural Cultural Industries

Leveraging digital technology as the core driver, promote the digital transformation of rural cultural industries by enhancing infrastructure, cultivating operational capabilities, and developing cultural and creative products.

Enhance digital infrastructure: Adopt a "core-area radiation + peripheral-area gap-filling" model to extend 5G network coverage from core areas like Shenzhen and Guangzhou to peripheral regions such as Huizhou and Jiangmen, aiming to increase 5G coverage in rural peripheral areas to 80% by 2025–2027. Simultaneously deploy AR guide devices and digital display screens at key cultural sites like watchtower villages and folk painting villages. For instance, the Jiangmen Watchtower Scenic Area plans to install 100 pairs of AR guide glasses to enhance visitor interaction experiences.

Cultivating Digital Operational Capabilities: Through coordinated efforts of "government training + corporate collaboration + talent deployment," annually organize the "Greater Bay Area Rural Cultural Industry Digital Operations Training Program" to cultivate 100 professionals. Facilitate partnerships between core-area digital enterprises like Tencent and the Jiangmen Watchtower Scenic Area to co-develop WeChat mini-programs. Implement the "Digital Talent Rural Deployment Plan," encouraging technical personnel from core areas to serve in peripheral-area enterprises for 1–2 years while retaining original employer benefits plus special subsidies.

Developing Digital Cultural Products: Guided by "traditional culture + digital technology + modern aesthetics," transform intangible cultural heritage resources like Longmen Peasant Paintings and Duan inkstones into digital collectibles, targeting ¥5 million in sales for peasant painting digital collectibles by 2024. Establish the Zhaoqing Duan Inkstone Metaverse Experience Hall, offering immersive tours of traditional craftsmanship. Design hardware products like Jiangmen Diaolou-themed smart speakers, with projected sales of 100,000 units by 2025, integrating cultural IP with consumer electronics.

4.2 Creative Activation Pathway: Building a Creative Ecosystem for Rural Cultural Industries

Using creative design as the core link, enhance the innovative vitality of rural cultural industries by cultivating local talent, introducing external resources, and building IP systems.

Cultivating Local Creative Talent: Establishing a three-dimensional system integrating "school education + social training + master studios," Jiangmen Polytechnic has launched a "Watchtower Cultural and Creative Design" program. The Shenzhen Graphic Design Association trains 50 designers annually from marginal areas. Hong Kong region designer Alan Chan collaborates with Zhaoqing Duan inkstone artisans to establish a studio, integrating traditional craftsmanship with modern design. This initiative has boosted artisans' monthly income from 3,000 to 12,000 RMB.

Introducing External Creative Resources: Hosting the "Greater Bay Area Rural Cultural Creative Design Competition" with a 1 million RMB prize pool to attract proposals from core areas and Hong Kong region/Macao region; signing 10 creative projects totaling 500 million RMB in investment at a Shenzhen investment conference; providing free design consultations for peripheral enterprises through Macao region's cultural and creative platforms, serving 20 projects in 2024 to elevate product design standards.

Establishing a Creative IP System: Systematically cataloging cultural symbols like watchtowers and peasant paintings to develop IPs such as "Watchtower Guardians" and "Peasant Painting Babies"; establishing the "Peripheral Rural Cultural IP Operations Center" to manage IP licensing and commercial development; creating stationery, toys, and other derivatives around core IPs, with projected 2025 sales reaching 100 million yuan to build sustainable IP monetization capacity.

4.3 Cross-Border Collaboration Pathway: Building a Cross-Border Collaborative Ecosystem for Rural Cultural Industries

Leveraging Hong Kong region and Macao region resources as key pillars, promote deep integration of rural cultural industries across the three regions through policy coordination, factor mobility, and project collaboration.

Establish a cross-border policy coordination mechanism: Develop the "Greater Bay Area Rural Cultural Industry Cross-Border Cooperation Negative List" to clarify prohibited and restricted projects; create a "cross-border approval green channel" to reduce the approval cycle for Hong Kong region and Macao region capital projects from 3 months to 7 working days; establish a tri-regional product standards committee to unify quality specifications and intellectual property protection rules, eliminating trade barriers.

Develop a cross-border factor mobility platform: Launch the "Greater Bay Area Rural Cultural Industry Cross-Border Creative Platform" to integrate creative talent, capital, and market resources across the three regions; establish a factor exchange center offering cross-border talent, technology, and copyright transaction services; provide free exhibition

booths for enterprises from peripheral areas at the Hong Kong International Cultural and Creative Expo, with 15 enterprises securing over US\$20 million in overseas orders by 2024.

Launch cross-border cooperation projects: Construct the "Hong Kong-Macao Cultural and Creative Industrial Park" in Kaiping, Jiangmen, targeting 50 enterprises by 2025; develop the "Hong Kong Yuen Long-Shenzhen Dapeng-Jiangmen Diaolou" cross-border tourism route to connect cultural resources across the three regions; jointly create "Greater Bay Area Rural Cultural IPs," with plans to launch 10 collaborative IPs by 2025 and promote them internationally through cross-border channels.

4.4 Policy Support Pathway: Establishing a Policy Framework for Rural Cultural Industries

Leverage fiscal, land, and talent policies as pillars to provide full-cycle support for the development of new quality productive forces.

Fiscal Support Policies: Establish the "Greater Bay Area Rural Cultural Industry New Quality Productivity Special Fund," investing 500 million yuan annually to support infrastructure and creative projects in peripheral areas; implement a "three-year exemption, two-year reduction" tax incentive for enterprises in peripheral areas (exempting corporate income tax for the first three years, then halving it for the next two); encourage financial institutions to develop "Digital Cultural and Creative Loans" with a maximum limit of 10 million yuan, prioritizing support for technology application and IP development.

Land Support Policy: Pilot the "spot land supply" model, such as the Huizhou Longmen Farmers' Painting Project, which allocated only 5 mu of land while preserving 95 mu of ecological green space; permit direct transfer of collective construction land in peripheral areas to Hong Kong region and Macao region enterprises, such as the Kaiping pilot in Jiangmen where Hong Kong region and Macao region enterprises acquired usage rights through land transfers; establish an urban-rural construction land quota trading platform to ensure land supply for key projects.

Talent Support Policy: Provide monthly living subsidies of 5,000 yuan for digital and creative talents deployed to peripheral areas, with a maximum duration of three years; construct "Rural Cultural Talent Apartments" offering move-in-ready accommodations; enable children of core-area talents to attend key schools in peripheral areas—e.g., Shenzhen-deployed talents' children may enroll in Jiangmen's top institutions—eliminating concerns about talent mobility.

5 CONCLUSION

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to reveal the practical challenges and breakthrough pathways for high-quality development of rural cultural industries in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Research indicates that new-quality productive forces are key to resolving current industry problems—digital technology addresses resource activation, creative design enhances product value-added, and cross-border capital compensates for funding shortages. Establishing a three-dimensional pathway system of "digital empowerment + creative activation + cross-border collaboration," supported by complementary policies, can effectively propel the transformation of the Bay Area's rural cultural industries from "resource dependency" to "innovation-driven" models, achieving integrated urban-rural development and shared prosperity. Future efforts should further strengthen policy coordination among the three regions and improve mechanisms for factor mobility, providing more robust institutional safeguards for empowering rural revitalization through new quality productive forces.

COMPETING INTERESTS

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